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**Academics and athletics: a phenomenological study of self-advocacy and student involvement in Black student-athletes with disabilities**

Trené L. Turner

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ACADEMICS AND ATHLETICS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELF-  
ADVOCACY AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN BLACK STUDENT-ATHLETES WITH  
DISABILITIES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Trené L. Turner

October, 2023

Martine Jago, Ph.D. - Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

*The Lord is great and greatly to be praised. Grateful to God for all the blessings and grace bestowed in my life.*

*To my grandfather, Leon Whaley Sr., the pioneer of our family and our heavenly angel who paved the way for my mother and I to follow in his footsteps at Pepperdine University.*

*To my children, Simone & Isiah, thank you for your constant prayers, love and support. No matter what, you all lifted my spirits and encouraged me to press on. Since you were born, you have always been part of my “why.”*

*To My mother, Helen Booker, my role model, my constant cheerleader and my rock, I love you and thank you.*

*To the father of my children, Anthony Turner, thank you for your love and prayers.*

*To my brother Tony L. Booker Jr., my step-father Tony L. Booker Sr., and my niece, Braelyn Booker, thank you for your support.*

*To the Black Student Athletes with Hidden Disabilities. Those who I have had the pleasure to work with and have allowed me to be part of your lives and those who I intend to support in the future. May your voice continue to be heard and recognized to ignite change.*

*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14 (NLT)*

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## ABSTRACT

Studies on Black male athletes and their educational experiences have been conducted for quite some time, whereas research on Black female athletes, despite its emergence, remains limited. Recent research on student-athletes focuses on the rise in socioeconomic status in relation to their name, image, and likeness (NIL). Hence, the focus on education while it continues to exist, NIL deals and its impact on the NCAA have become a topic of interest. The tenets of critical race theory will be examined to comprehend the relationship between these principles and the impact of NCAA and college policies on Black student athletes, and how they support students in navigating the student-athlete experience, particularly those who have been recognized as having learning disabilities. Limited research has been conducted on the factors associated with Black student-athletes with disabilities, such as specific learning disability (SLD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Due to the paucity of research on this population, there is a lack of understanding of the difficulties associated with being Black, having a disability, and being an athlete. This phenomenological research aimed to better understand how Black student-athletes with disabilities could employ self-advocacy, balance their athletic and academic commitments, and cope with racial implications all while achieving full engagement in college life. Eight former student-athletes with SLD and/or ADHD were interviewed using open-ended and semi-structured questions around self-advocacy, racism, and student involvement. Inferences from the research, implications of the findings, and conclusions will highlight the theoretical framework and supporting theories. This study will contribute to the research and best practices when working Black student-athletes with disabilities.

*Keywords:* Black student-athletes, ADHD, SLD, critical race theory, CRT, NIL, hidden disabilities, self-advocacy theory, theory of student involvement

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides historical context of Black student-athletes with either a specific learning disability (SLD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Before delving into this population however, background information is provided, such as the perception of what some refer to as the accomplished Black athlete with a disability. This chapter investigates the relationship between the NCAA and this population and provides an overview of the historical data pertaining to these individuals achieving their academic, personal, and/or professional objectives. Theories are discussed, as well as the principles needed to establish the foundation of this phenomenological investigation.

### **Background of the Study**

Athletes of African descent have been praised for their superior athleticism, physical tenacity, and ability to compete and succeed at a higher level than athletes of other racial groups. Despite their skill and dominating professional basketball and football, their access to power is limited because most owners are White (Rhoden, 2006). Particularly during the Civil Rights Movement, the Black athlete's voice has not always been heard and has even been resolutely suppressed. In the past, many individuals have referred to Black athletes who have spoken out against social, racial, and economic inequality as draft dodgers, despite not evading the draft. Muhammad Ali opposed the Vietnam war (Mullen, 2016), and they have been instructed to shut up and dribble (Sullivan, 2018). Despite others viewing them as radicals, they are agents of change. Muhammad Ali and Simone Biles, were among the Black athletes who defied societal expectations (Maher, 2018; Yeheyeyes, 2018). Black athletes, such as Simone Biles, have shared their perspectives on mental health, behavioral disorders, and civil rights. These pioneers of advocacy for societal and personal goals illustrate the potential for an athlete to become a

champion and advocate for their rights and goals. They serve as examples for today's collegiate athletes. They advocate putting oneself first, whether that involves finishing school, pursuing a professional career, or missing a crucial game to return to their alma mater and earn a degree. In a system that was not necessarily designed for their academic success, the Black athlete has encountered obstacles. However, as individuals continue to recognize their worth, they are learning to make their voices heard, despite many continuing to struggle.

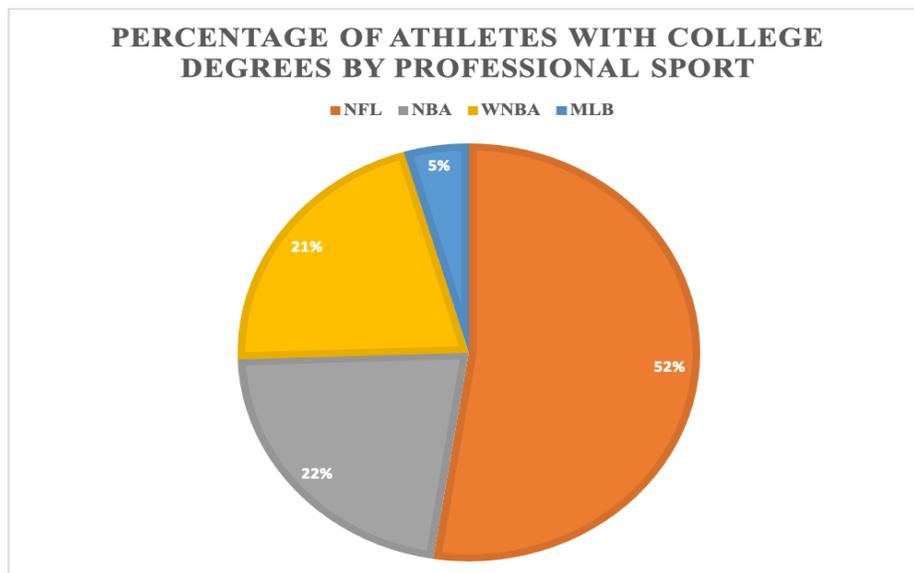
Annually, the NCAA releases a report analyzing changes in graduation success rate (GSR). According to the NCAA GSR report (NCAA, 2020), GSR is determined by adding incoming students from other colleges or universities, mid-year enrollees, and in some cases non-scholarship students to the sample of initial student-athletes enrolled at an institution. Student-athletes who graduate in good academic standing prior to their sport's eligibility expiration are removed from their original cohort. A cohort, as defined by the NCAA, is a group of concurrently enrolled and educated college students (NCAA, 2020). This formula is a more accurate representation of actual student-athlete success as it incorporates the academic outcomes of the entire Division I athletics participant population (NCAA, 2020). In their research report, the NCAA provided comparisons between select groups. In 2019, the GSR of White student-athletes was compared to those of Black and Latino student-athletes. The GSR of every Division I student-athlete was 89%. White student-athletes' GSR was 93% of this 89%, whereas the Black students were 79% and the Latinos were 88% (NCAA, 2020).

While the NCAA is making progress toward its goal of graduating Division I athletes, fewer male students are pursuing professional careers. The National Football League (NFL) reports that approximately 50% of its players, or 928 of 1,856 players, have earned degrees (Hickman, 2011). Twenty-one percent of current National Basketball Association (NBA)

players, or approximately 94 of 450 players, have college degrees, whereas only 4.3% of Major League Baseball (MLB) players graduate with college degrees (Hickman, 2011). A player in baseball has the option of pursuing a professional career at any level. The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has rules for its aspiring athletes, even though some female student-athletes leave college early. Players must be at least 22 years old, have completed their college eligibility, graduated from a four-year institution, or be at least four years removed from high school (Edelman & Harrison, 2008) to join the WNBA. Figure 1 shows the percentages of athletes with college degrees by professional sport.

**Figure 1**

*Athletes with College Degrees by Sport*



Male and female student-athletes can embark on this recruitment journey as early as their 10<sup>th</sup>-grade year. The courtship process for these exceptionally talented athletes begins in high school (NCSA College Recruiting, 2022). After graduating from high school, NCAA eligibility requirements and prerequisites must be met to be deemed eligible. The determination of an athlete's eligibility can begin as early as their freshman year of high school. According to the

NCAA website, all players are required to complete 16 NCAA-approved courses to meet minimum requirements. Division I and II athletes are required to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.30 and 2.20, respectively, in addition to passing standardized tests (NCAA, 2021b).

Once a student has selected an institution, they must sign and consent to the National Letter of Intent (NLI), which states that they will adhere to the terms of admission in exchange for their skill. The NCAA acknowledges the NLI, which functions as notification on behalf of the student-athlete's intent to attend a particular university. The financial aid agreement specifies the amount and distribution breakdown of the athletic scholarship upon enrollment at the university. (Donnor, 2005). The administration of athletic scholarships, however, is governed by NCAA statutes. Depending on the university's policy, the NCAA's bylaws restrict this athletic award on an annual or term-by-term basis. As academic scholarships demand a specific GPA per term, athletic scholarships cannot be automatically renewed and cannot exceed one academic year (Donnor, 2005). The NLI and the athletic scholarship are customized for each student-athlete in accordance with their sport. In addition to following the rules of the NLI and the terms of the athletic scholarship, the student-athlete must also adhere to the university's academic standards. In contrast to their peers who do not receive athletic scholarships, student-athletes are legally bound and contractually obligated, which may create an unspoken obligation to complete college.

Gary Payton, Jr., of the Golden State Warriors once said, “Just because you learn a different way than everybody else doesn’t mean you don’t learn...you’ve still got to fight through it. Once you find your way to learn it, it becomes more clear and more positive” (McCauley, 2022). Black student-athletes' ability to advocate for their goals may be hindered

significantly by an educational eligibility of SLD and/or ADHD. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 300.8 (c) (10), defines SLD as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest as the inability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical operations. The disorder may include conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*' definition of ADHD is "a behavior disorder characterized by inattention, impulsivity, and in some cases, hyperactivity. Inattention to details, difficulty organizing tasks and activities, excessive talking, fidgeting, and inability to remain seated in appropriate situations are examples of these behaviors" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013b).

"Colleges and universities across the country have identified and diagnosed 2% of the total United States undergraduate population, or 394,500 students, with ADHD" (Vickers, 2010, p. 1). Before students enroll in a university, even as prospective student-athletes, the NCAA requires documentation. A confirmation of the student's diagnosis (including test results) which is compiled in the Education-Impacting disability form, if deemed necessary, a recommendation from the student's treating physician, and the Federal Buckley Amendment Release form which permits individuals other than him/herself to examine his/her education-related disability information and speak on his/her behalf with NCAA personnel (NCAA, 2014a). Many student-athletes are required to attend two practices per day in addition to three classes, eat meals, and complete homework. In addition to implicit gender and cultural biases, managing a student-level athlete's dedication can be difficult (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Socioeconomic pressures (scholarship funds are insufficient for actual daily living), the absence of normalcy in an unfamiliar environment, and an educational diagnosis of SLD and/or ADHD can all affect a

student-athlete's ability to balance academics and athletics. A person's ability to advocate for themselves may also be hindered by the public or self-imposed stigma associated with having a disability (Skiba et al., 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Currently, student-athletes with disabilities who are pursuing a college education face a significant number of obstacles. They must balance their academic and athletic responsibilities while facilitating and advocating for their actual learning styles, which impacts their academic success (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). Despite having access to tutoring, learning specialists, unique assessment schedules, and fully covered tuition, these students are in the difficult position of advocating for special accommodations due to their disability. Some may question why these students, who have access to the best the university has to offer (especially if their sport generates significant revenue), would need to develop advocacy skills or act as proponents of their education if they already have these resources. Even if resources are provided, the athlete's voice must be heard. At the age of 16, a student with an individualized education program (IEP) is eligible to participate in the individual transition plan (ITP). The Individuals with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requires that the student be present and actively involved in the implementation of this plan. The ITP process is predicated on educating the student about their learning disability and what is required for success (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2017a). According to Foster and Huml (2017), minority student-athletes who attend a NCAA Division 1 university tend to participate in a less rigorous academic schedule and graduate at a lower rate than their non-athletic peers. Therefore, if Black student-athletes do not fully comprehend the ITP process and there is an exclusive focus on athletics, these students do not receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in its entirety. While there are investigations

on the graduation achievement rates of minority student-athletes, more studies are needed to examine the impact of an SLD and/or ADHD educational eligibility on a Black student-athlete's ability to graduate college and achieve personal goals.

### **Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological study examined the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to participate fully in the college experience while exercising self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones. This study collected and analyzed data on the educational careers of Black student-athletes with disabilities and the lack of self-advocacy that hinders the pursuit of their goals. The study examined themes pertaining to family advocacy, as well as self-involvement and internal issues relating to their learning and/or behavioral disability. It investigated their ability to navigate the university system as well as whether they accomplished their overall objectives.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to shed light on the Black student-athlete who struggles academically and acquires knowledge in a distinctive manner. The purpose of this study was to inform those who work with this population that awareness of the student's specific learning styles may lead to self-advocacy skills that simultaneously enhance innate leadership abilities. This knowledge may make them better athletes and more well-rounded student-athletes. Students with disabilities who are admitted to universities, meet the requirements of their university's center for disabilities, and provide documentation of their diagnosis are eligible to receive the appropriate disability-related or mode of learning-related accommodations (Disability Rights California, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to provide universities and athletic departments with empirical data to gain insight into how they can support Black student-athletes diagnosed with

SLD and/or ADHD. Once those who work with these students are aware of their needs and desires, they can assist these student-athletes in self-advocacy and in acquiring the leadership skills necessary to foster and pursue their goals.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):*

A mental disorder of the neurodevelopmental type. It is characterized by difficulty paying attention, excessive activity, and acting without regards to consequences, which are otherwise not appropriate for a person's age. Some individuals with ADHD also display difficulty regulating emotions. For a diagnosis, the symptoms should appear before a person is twelve years old, be present for more than six months, and cause problems in at least two settings (such as school, home, or recreational activities). (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a, p. 1)

- *Black:*

A person with African ancestral origins. “Black” is often interchanged with “African American.” In some circumstances, usually in politics or power struggles, the term Black signifies all non-White minority populations. For the purposes of this study, the term Black refers to the former. (Neal, 2021, p. 26)

- *Federal Buckley Amendment:*

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) or the Buckley Amendment): is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students." (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b, paras. 1–2)

- *Hidden disabilities:*

Hidden disabilities are defined as disabilities that “affect learning and social interaction with subtle, or few physical or visible, characteristics such as ADHD, SLDs, emotional behavioral disorders, or Asperger’s Syndrome.” (Reh fuss & Quillin, 2005, p. 1)

- *Individualized Education Plan (IEP):*

A written statement that describes a child's present levels of performance, learning goals, school placement, and services [34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Sec. 300.320.] (U.S. Department of Education, 2017c, para. 1)

- *Individual transition plan (ITP):*

A section of the IEP that outlines transition goals and services for a student with a disability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all students must have an ITP by the age of 16. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). The ITP is described as a template for mapping out short-term and long-term adult outcomes from which annual goals and objectives are defined (California State University, 2021). The ITP is a section of the IEP that outlines transition goals and services for a student with a disability. The ITP consists of two aspects as it relates to facilitating a student's educational goals in order for the student to achieve independent adult living after leaving school. The areas included in adult living are independent living skills, employment, post-secondary education, and self-determination skills. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a, para. 1).

- *NCAA definition of a learning disability:*

The NCAA defines an education-impacting disability (EID) as a current impairment that has a significant educational impact on a student's academic performance and necessitates accommodation. Learning disabilities or disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mental health disorders, medical conditions, deafness or hard of hearing, and autism spectrum disorder are among the most prevalent EIDs. (NCAA, 2014a, para. 1)

- *Self-advocacy:*

“Self-advocacy includes getting what one needs in an educational setting, as well as understanding one's diagnosis, knowing the legislation surrounding individuals with learning disabilities, requesting appropriate accommodations, providing documentation, and knowing how to take effective action if difficulties arise” (D'Alessio & Osterhott, 2018, para. 4).

- *Specific learning disability (SLD):* A specific learning disability, as defined in Section 1401(30) of Title 20 of the United States Code, means:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. The term *specific learning disability* includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. That term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disabilities,

of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 1)

- *Student Involvement:*

“Student involvement is the amount of physical and mental energy that a student devotes to the academic experience.” (Astin, 1984, p. 1).

## **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this qualitative study was: What part, if at all, does self-advocacy play in the capacity of Black student-athletes with disabilities to balance athletics and academics?

The following subquestions emerged from the main research question:

- SQ1: How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?
- SQ2: How do the tenets of critical race theory pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voice of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?
- SQ3: How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?
- SQ4: How does exposure to the advocacy skills of family members affect the ability of Black student-athletes to independently advocate for their academic and/or athletic wellbeing in high school and college?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The origins of critical race theory (CRT) as noted by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) date back to the 1970s when there appeared to be a cessation in the civil rights movements, leading to

the establishment of legally grounded theories. Derrick Bell, who is referred to as the movement's intellectual father, along with other scholars compiled a collection of scholarly writing on the practice of questioning the role of race and racism in society, which began in the legal field and has since spread to other fields of study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). “Although it is not diversity and inclusion training, but a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society that emerged in the legal academy and spread to other fields of scholarship.

Crenshaw—who coined the term “CRT”—notes that CRT is not a noun, but a verb.” (George, 2021 p. 1). It is viewed as an evolving and mutable practice as opposed to something that can be defined in a fixed and limited manner (George, 2021). It investigates how systematic racism and the social construction of race perpetuate a racial caste system that keeps people of color in the lower rungs. In addition, CRT recognizes the relationships between race and other identities, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and others (George, 2021). It suggests that social institutions are deeply rooted in racist assumptions, values, and beliefs that perpetuate a racial hierarchy between White and Black individuals (Cooper et al., 2017). Within the educational framework, there are CRT tenets that constitute the central components of this theoretical perspective: (a) racism is normal, not aberrant, (b) interest convergence; (c) race as a social construction; (d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and (e) voice or counternarrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). These tenets were explored in the context of Black student-athletes with disabilities, considering (a) how implicit and explicit biases surface for these student-athletes while matriculating, (b) how their talents are used to benefit a major university, and (c) how they simultaneously exercise self-advocacy skills. The examination of these tenets sheds light on a population that is indirectly subjugated on account of both race and disability. This study examined how race, sociocultural history, and educational history can

influence the ability of young student-athletes to advocate for themselves, which may lead to the development of leadership qualities.

### **Limitations**

As a Black K–12 school psychologist with more than 25 years of experience, I have witnessed the difficulty Black student-athletes face when advocating for themselves in a high school setting. These students have a great deal of mental balancing to do, whether it is competing to play on one side of the ball, navigating relationships with instructors, or balancing college preparatory courses while attempting to comprehend their unique learning styles and practices. They frequently remain silent and do not express their needs. The societal stigma attached to struggling to learn either basic or advanced academic skills is another nuance that is often disregarded. These students must perform a great deal of mental balancing, whether it's deciding whether to play defense or offense in football, navigating relationships with instructors, or balancing college preparatory courses while attempting to comprehend their unique learning styles and practices. They frequently keep quiet and do not communicate about their needs. Often overlooked is the cultural stigma associated with having trouble acquiring basic or complex academic skill sets. In addition, this dilemma extends to the student-athletes' interactions with learning specialists, coaches, and professors, as well as time management, course rigor, and academic and athletic goals.

Unless they witnessed a family member, advocacy service, or instructor advocating for them, Black student-athletes with learning disabilities and/or ADHD who had IEPs in high school are frequently unaware of the federal guidelines and policies that exist at the college level (Greene, 2018). Many of these students, particularly those enrolled in universities, do not have

access to advocates who can speak on their behalf. Students may feel unprepared or incapable of communicating their desires (Knight, 2016).

Rhoden (2006) wrote, "Black athletes attend some of the nation's most prestigious universities, but many are unaware of the significance and depth of their athletic roots. Many of their coaches lack historical knowledge as well" (p. 3). These student-athletes, especially those who have been diagnosed with ADHD and/or learning disabilities, attend predominantly White universities where they are not taken seriously as scholars, despite having participated on the team and contributed significantly to the university's reputation (Donner, 2005). There is an abundance of research on student-athletes of color, but less on Black athletes diagnosed with SLDs and/or ADHD. These students frequently go unnoticed because they lack practical skills or have a different learning style from other students. Despite what may appear to be a greater emphasis on their respective sports, their approach to education and training is typically overlooked.

The absence of Black female athletes with an educational eligibility of a learning disability or ADHD is a significant limitation of this study. There is limited research on the academic experiences of Black female athletes despite their existence. Black female athletes have been characterized as loud and obnoxious, while their intelligence and learning styles have received less attention than their personalities and physical appearance (Douglas, 2002). However, some female athletes struggle with their learning or conduct. A growing number of African American female professional athletes, such as Simone Biles and Kristen Hayden, have discussed their learning difficulties and how they impact their success in gymnastics and diving, respectively. According to Appelbaum (2019), Biles has been forthcoming about her ADHD diagnosis, and Hayden has discussed the impact of her central auditory processing disorder on

her academic performance. She persevered, however, and ultimately won the national championship in diving (Dey, 2021). This study addressed the dearth of research on Black female athletes with learning and behavioral difficulties and provides an alternative perspective to that which already exists.

### **Bias and Judgment**

The concept of self-advocacy and student involvement for Black student-athletes with an SLD and/or ADHD served as the major focus of this study. The research approach and methodology targeted collegiate experiences of Black student-athletes who have been diagnosed with an SLD and/or ADHD. To determine the extent of generalization and association of those skill sets at the collegiate level, the research provided an impartial investigation into the tools and training offered to the participants via the IEP/ITP process to ascertain the extent of generalization and association of those skill sets at the collegiate level.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants were Black male and female athletes who were diagnosed with ADHD and/or an SLD prior to entering college. These students have had IEPs and participated in a program or plan for individual transition. These students graduated from a college/university or pursued professional sports after adhering to the NCAA's athletic guideline of completing at least one year of collegiate-level coursework.

### **Stress Level of Participants**

The participants' responses may be affected by reliving mistreatment they believed they endured during their collegiate-athletic experience due to the topic's nature, the stigmatism affiliated with having a learning disability or ADHD (Skiba et al., 2016), and being subjected to implicit bias associated with their race. This mistreatment might have taken place because of

comments that were made by coaches, actions taken by instructors, or even discriminatory behavior displayed by peers. Participants were assured that their responses would be held completely confidential.

### **Interviews**

I constructed parameters for asking questions that are pertinent to the context of the actual research questions. The interviews were conducted individually via video conference. Using the selected video conferencing equipment, responses were collected through a recorded device and transcribed. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, which provided the opportunity to elucidate responses and ask follow-up questions to completely grasp what the interviewee was sharing.

### **Demographic Considerations**

The demographic consideration of this study included male and female Black student-athletes diagnosed with a learning disability and/or ADHD who attended college in the United States. Of these former student-athletes, a few did not complete college and do not hold a college degree. However, some had earned a college degree. There are participants in this study who are playing their respective sports either overseas or professionally in the United States. Their ages range from early 20s to late 30s, their incomes range from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars, and some of the participants are married while a few are single.

### **Assumptions**

Some Black student-athletes' collegiate experience may have been the most formative of their life, while for others it may have been a painful turning point. Some Black student-athletes may not remember or have a different perspective on the impact their former experiences had on where they are now. This study cannot presume that some of the participants' experiences are

less meaningful due to their accomplishments than those who did not pursue or have the opportunity to perform professionally in their respective sports. For this reason, each interviewee's experience was respected and taken into account when evaluating all responses.

### **Positionality**

When I look at high school student-athletes through the professional lens of a school psychologist, I see a pattern of dependency on the part of their support systems, which may include their parents, friends, and even coaches, as they pursue a high school diploma and a scholarship to play at the NCAA Division I level. My experience working with Black student-athletes with disabilities has shown me that many of them are succumbing to the pressures of not speaking out for their own academic requirements or aspirations. Having worked with these individuals from kindergarten through high school and conducting multiple psycho-educational evaluations for these students, I intend to displace my inherent biases as a school psychologist by honing in on the individualized experiences of each athlete that is interviewed and not inferring judgment on how I view the collegiate athletic advisement system as working. As a school psychologist, I have seen instances of enabling student-athletes with learning problems or ADHD, such as a lack of academic rigor or the availability of specific privileges. This practice sometimes persists throughout the tertiary education system. However, many may not understand that they are being used for the university's benefit and that their futures outside of athletics are not being taken into account. I have observed that students with disabilities who do not have advocates (parents, guardians, or access to agencies) do not receive the same benefits as those who have access to those particular resources. Having worked with female and male Black student athletes with disabilities, minimization of my personal opinions, biases and assessment of

collegiate and university practices is necessary in addressing my personal and professional biases.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the historical depiction of the Black athlete's inability to use their innate skills and talents to act as a self-advocate and a leader. This chapter highlighted the challenges faced by Black student-athletes who have been diagnosed with an SLD and/or ADHD, including a lack of involvement as seen by their limited engagement in the collegiate experience and an inability to display self-advocacy abilities. The theoretical framework of CRT will serve as the basis for examining the barriers to this population's achieving their academic, athletic, and personal objectives.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on the concepts of self-advocacy and the Theory of Student Involvement and how these theories align with the theoretical components associated with CRT and its implications for Black student-athletes with disabilities. I examined existing literature to investigate the historical disparity in education that exists within the collegiate athletic setting, as well as the significance of limited self-involvement, which contributes to the lack of self-advocacy skills among Black student-athletes with disabilities. The extant undertone of microaggressions regarding race is heightened as Black students ascend each level of education (Solorzano & Huber, 2020). The overrepresentation of Black children with disabilities within society has set the tone for this group while dealing with the complexities of higher education and the attendant stigma associated with their potential to succeed at that level. As a result of overprotection, lack of knowledge, and implicit racial bias, these Black student-athletes with disabilities to aggrandize their athletic and academic strengths to maximize the plausibility of their personal success. This research's theoretical and conceptual framework for examining these concepts was grounded in a review of the relevant literature.

The foundations of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), derived from a legal perspective that has now delved into the realms of education, provide insight into this dilemma for Black student-athletes. A conceptual framework as it relates to self-advocacy for students with disabilities and its etymology from the civil rights movement was analyzed in conjunction with the theory of student involvement, which is aligned with CRT. These theories underpinned the review of the literature as it relates to race. Also, the theoretical framing of this study linked the legal aspects of special education and provided a sociological examination of Black student-athletes with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013).

### **Purpose Statement Restated**

This phenomenological study examined the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to fully participate in the college experience while exercising self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones. This study collected and analyzed data on the educational careers of Black student-athletes with disabilities and the lack of self-advocacy, which hinders the pursuit of their goals. The study examined themes pertaining to family advocacy, as well as self-involvement and internal issues relating to their learning and/or behavioral disability. It investigated their ability to navigate the university system as well as whether they accomplished their overall objectives.

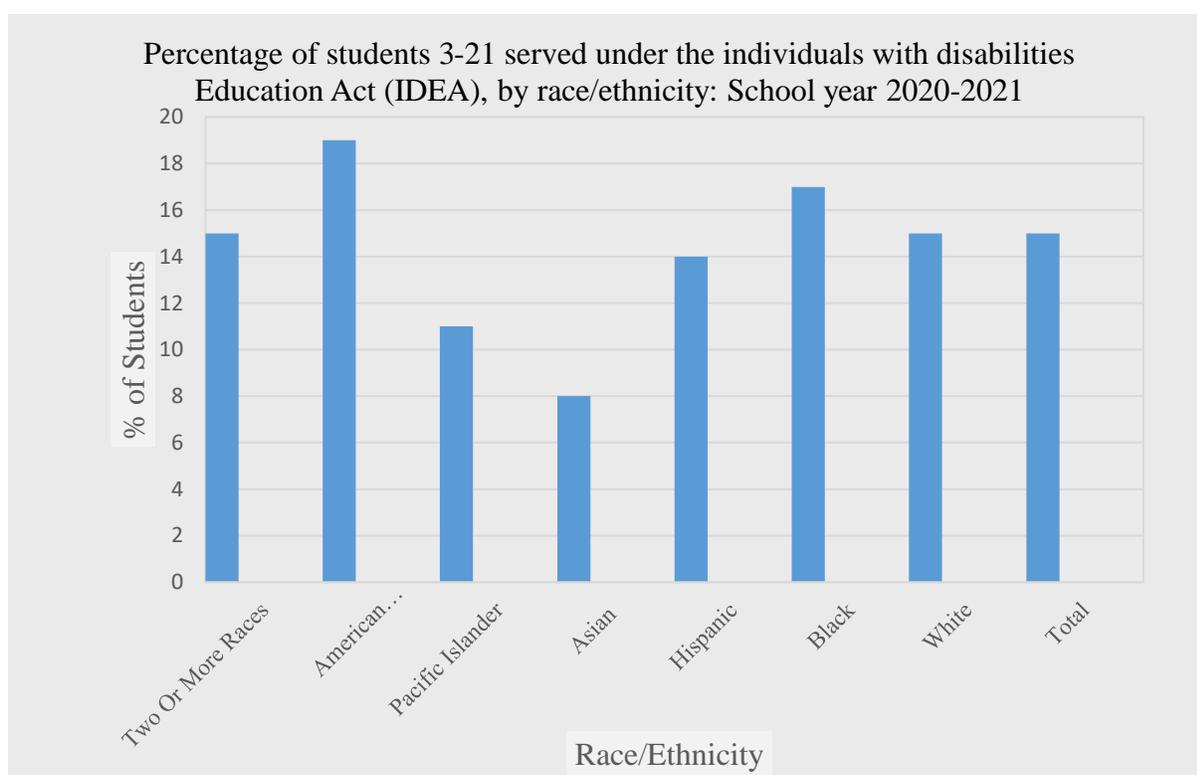
The number of public education students who have received an IEP is 6.6 million (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014). In 1975, Congress authorized Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), to provide educational support for children with disabilities. Prior to the implementation of P.L. 94-142, only one in five children with disabilities received an education, which led to the establishment of rights for students with disabilities in the field of education (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Since its implementation, P.L. 94-142 has undergone three reauthorizations (1986, 1990, and 1997). These reauthorizations addressed early intervention (1986), changed the name from EHA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1990), and in 1997 looked at the improvement of support for children with disabilities and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Seventeen percent of Black students in K–12 received special education support services aligned with their educational eligibility and followed the criteria under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Implementation of these laws provided a Free and Appropriate Education for students ages 3–21. The Department of Education (2023) found that Black students (17%) were second only to American Indian/Alaska Natives (19%), equating to 15% of all public school students for those identified with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act during 2020–2021 based on the total public school enrollment. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of this population's distribution by disability.

### Figure 2

*Distribution of Students Ages 3–21 by Percentage Served Under IDEA by Race/Ethnicity: School Year 2021-2022*

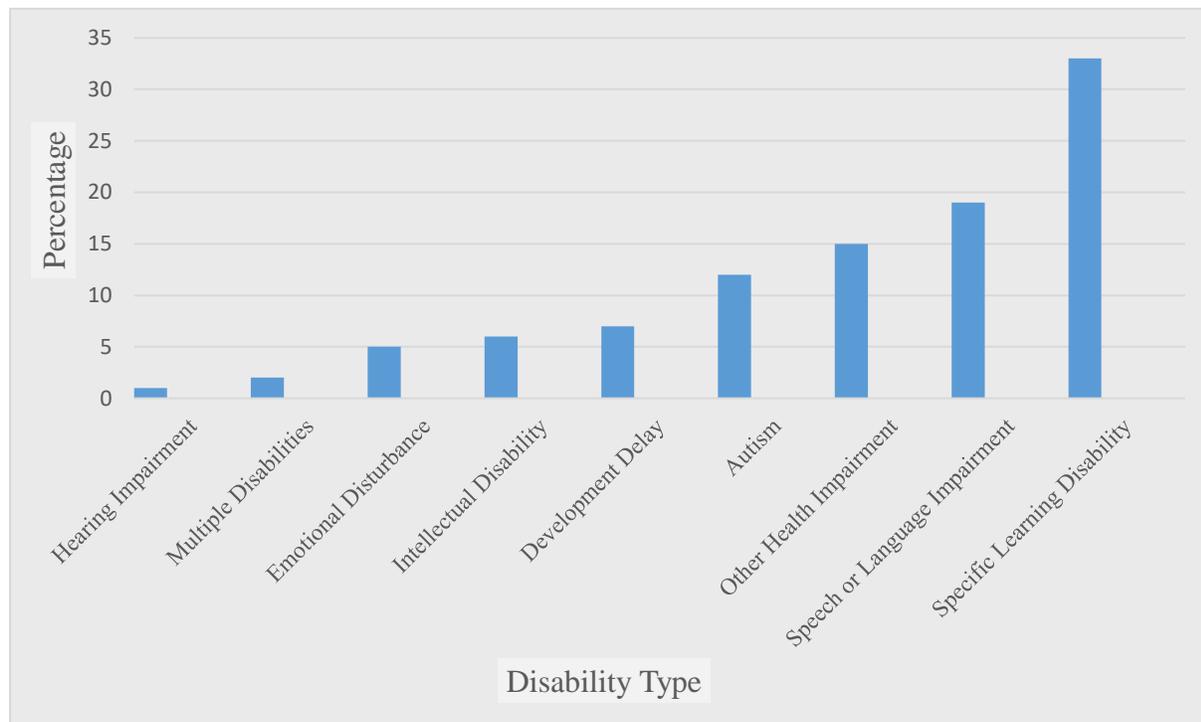


*Note.* Adapted from *Condition of Education*, by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, National Center for Education Statistics, (2023). Students With Disabilities. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>. In the public domain.

IDEA encompasses the following disabilities: SLD, other health impairment (OHI), autism, emotional disturbance, speech and language impairment, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairment, intellectual disability, traumatic brain impairment and multiple disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In the 2020–2021 school year, 7.2 million (15%) of these students were diagnosed with disabilities, were served under IDEA, and matriculated in the public school system. Thirty-three percent of these students were diagnosed with an SLD, and 15% were diagnosed with OHI (which ADHD is classified under; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Figure 3 depicts the distribution of students between the ages of 3 and 21 who received specialized support services for a particular disability type during the school year of 2020–2021.

**Figure 3**

*Distribution of Students Ages 3–21 by Percentage Served Under IDEA by Selected Disability Type: School Year 2021–2022*



*Note.* Adapted from *Condition of Education*, by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, National Center for Education Statistics, (2023). Students With Disabilities. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>. In the public domain.

Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), 76% of students with disabilities ages 14–21 who attended high school in 2019–2020 graduated with a high school diploma. For the purposes of this study, the special education diagnoses emphasized are SLD and ADHD).

Students with disabilities on college campuses have rights based on federal laws. However, while these laws apply to universities, their enforcement is evident only when the students seek assistance from the appropriate offices (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities/Office of Student Accessibility). Two federal laws that protect students with

disabilities are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504). Both federal mandates prohibit discrimination based on disability at all public and private institutions. The difference is that the ADA does not apply to institutions run by religious institutions, while Section 504 applies to any school, including schools that are church-affiliated and receive federal funds (e.g., student financial aid loan programs; U.S. Department of Education, 2021a).

Students who have been diagnosed under the eligibility criteria of SLD or OHI (ADHD) do not possess an outward physical disability that can be observed by the common viewer. These diagnoses are evident via cognitive processing deficits as well as investigating behavioral difficulties outside of an instructional setting (Padhy et al., 2015). The processes and methods of pinpointing these diagnoses require an experienced and qualified doctor or mental health provider (Lovett & Bizub, 2019). Hidden disabilities are defined by Rehfuss and Quillin (2005) as disabilities that “affect learning and social interaction with subtle, or few physical or visible, characteristics such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, specific learning disabilities, emotional behavioral disorders” (p. 47). Student-athletes who have hidden disabilities may exhibit issues with spatial awareness, vocal expression of thoughts, and in some cases, social behaviors that are considered immature as compared to their peers of the same age. They may also appear easily distracted or display overt behaviors that manifest as impulsive and hyperactive, which can affect their ability to follow specific instructions (National Association for Sport and Education, 2012).

As is evident in the classroom setting, these students benefit from interventions and strategies that enhance their skill sets and help them compensate for their disabilities. Establishment of eye contact, “chunking” information into incremental steps, being explicit, and

combining verbal and aural methods when communicating are interventions that are utilized to maximize not only academic but also athletic achievement. Coaches who work with student-athletes with hidden disabilities (students diagnosed with SLD and/or ADHD) tend to implement similar strategies to that of teachers to increase competency on the field. If coaches do not exercise implementation of appropriate strategies and are unprepared when working with these students, there is a significant impact (National Association for Sport and Education, 2012).

Because of continuous acknowledgement and redirection of negative behaviors, student-athletes' self-confidence and capacity to improve their character are affected, which may result in negative feelings toward themselves and their respective sports (Beyer et al., 2009).

Considering the learning styles of these students in all aspects of their academic and athletic endeavors will maximize their progress in both areas. If a student-athlete with hidden disabilities can excel academically, this can increase their potential for opportunities outside of sports. Although these disabilities are not outwardly visible, the difficulties they present contribute significantly to the transition from high school to college (Weiss, 2011).

In 2001, the Pacer Center described a transition plan as the following:

A truly successful transition process is the result of comprehensive team planning that is driven by the dreams, desires and abilities of youth. A transition plan provides the basic structure for preparing an individual to live, work and play in the community, as fully and independently as possible. (p. 1)

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017a), the ITP, a document within the IEP, addresses the transition needs of students with disabilities. With the assistance of the IEP team, an ITP assists in establishing postsecondary goals and objectives for students. These future endeavors include, but are not limited to, college admission management (two-year and four-year colleges), vocational goals, and career dreams (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a).

In 2015, GreatSchools staff published an article providing insight into the ITP process. The ITP in the student's IEP, which is implemented as soon as the student turns 16, provides significant support for high school students with learning disabilities and ADHD. IDEA compliance requires that the ITP, an annually reviewed and updated legal document, contain specific elements (GreatSchools Staff, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education's (2017a) transition guide, the ITP includes:

- (1) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where applicable, independent living skills; and (2) the transition services (including courses of study) necessary to assist the student with a disability in achieving those goals. (p. 6)

However, while this document meets all the academic and even legal components for high school, it does not provide a hands-on guide that is recognized by the university once the student transitions (Knight, 2016). According to Mader and Butrymowicz (2020), this lack of guidance and support leads to a high probability of the student dropping out of school, especially in their first year.

Students with disabilities have the protection of the IEP and the ITP process, which legally address their transition needs during high school. Once students with disabilities embark on postsecondary education, universities are legally bound by the guidelines and compliance with Section 504 and Title II of the ADA to conduct an analysis of a student with a documented disability for the purposes of providing accommodations. While gaining support is the objective for these students and there is encouragement for these students and their parents to work in conjunction with the disability support services (DSS) offices at their respective colleges, unfortunately at the collegiate level, all students with disabilities must initiate the process of reaching out to the DSS office and adhere to their procedures. Unlike K–12 where the schools

must provide a FAPE, this is not the case at the university level (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a).

The ITP process is an essential document for students with disabilities who aspire to matriculate at the college/university level. The ITP is intended to create a means of student advocacy through a legally binding process and format; however, the actual written document appears to lose its authenticity and relevance at the postsecondary level. Even though families are familiar with the legal structure that the ITP provided in terms of execution and advocacy on behalf of the student or family during high school, it is difficult to take full advantage of what each DSS has to offer at the collegiate level. Further, the myriad of steps required by a particular university, coupled with a lack of knowledge and familial support, could be a deterrent for the Black student-athlete with disabilities seeking support.

### ***The Demands of Being a Black Student-Athlete With Disabilities***

The life of a student-athlete can be demanding. Matriculating and becoming acclimated with a university while engaging in coursework and maintaining a vigorous athletic schedule is challenging. Penn et al., 2015, reported that athletes dedicated an average of 50 hours per week on activities specifically geared towards their specific sport. These 50 hours include activities such as practice, team meetings, film study, strength and conditioning, and game competitions, as well as medical treatments and travel time (Penn et al., 2015). While the typical student-athlete must balance academics and athletics, the Black student-athlete with disabilities must grapple with the aforementioned challenges as well as trying to engage in a collegiate environment where one may be a minority outside of their respective sport (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020). Student-athletes with learning and behavioral disabilities, especially student-athletes of color (Harper et al., 2013), tend to have lower graduation rates than their college

peers. Although many attribute this to Black men leaving their respective athletic team in pursuit of their professional endeavors, it has been found that this early exodus does not automatically result in a professional career (Martin, 2008).

Struggling with and enduring racism, which leads to difficulty with self-involvement within the university setting, has also been identified as a risk factor for Black students when matriculating at predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). When reviewing research on Black student-athletes, significant factors affect their involvement on school campuses, balancing of schedules (academic and athletic), and issues with race overall. When categorizing Black student-athletes with disabilities, it is necessary to consider the factors that inhibit their participation: being Black, an athlete, and a student with a disability. In addition, the effect that the combination of these trials has on their ability to advocate for themselves and flourish is a source of concern. Factors such as limited engagement and lack of academic preparation lead to internal personal issues such as thoughts and feelings of inadequacy. These interactions with peers and faculty may lead to the perception that social and academic standards are lower than they are (Garrison-Wade, 2012). In addition, the lack of Black leadership at the collegiate level may hinder these athletes' ability to connect with those in positions of authority (Jolly & Chepyator-Thomson, 2022).

### ***Theory of Student Involvement***

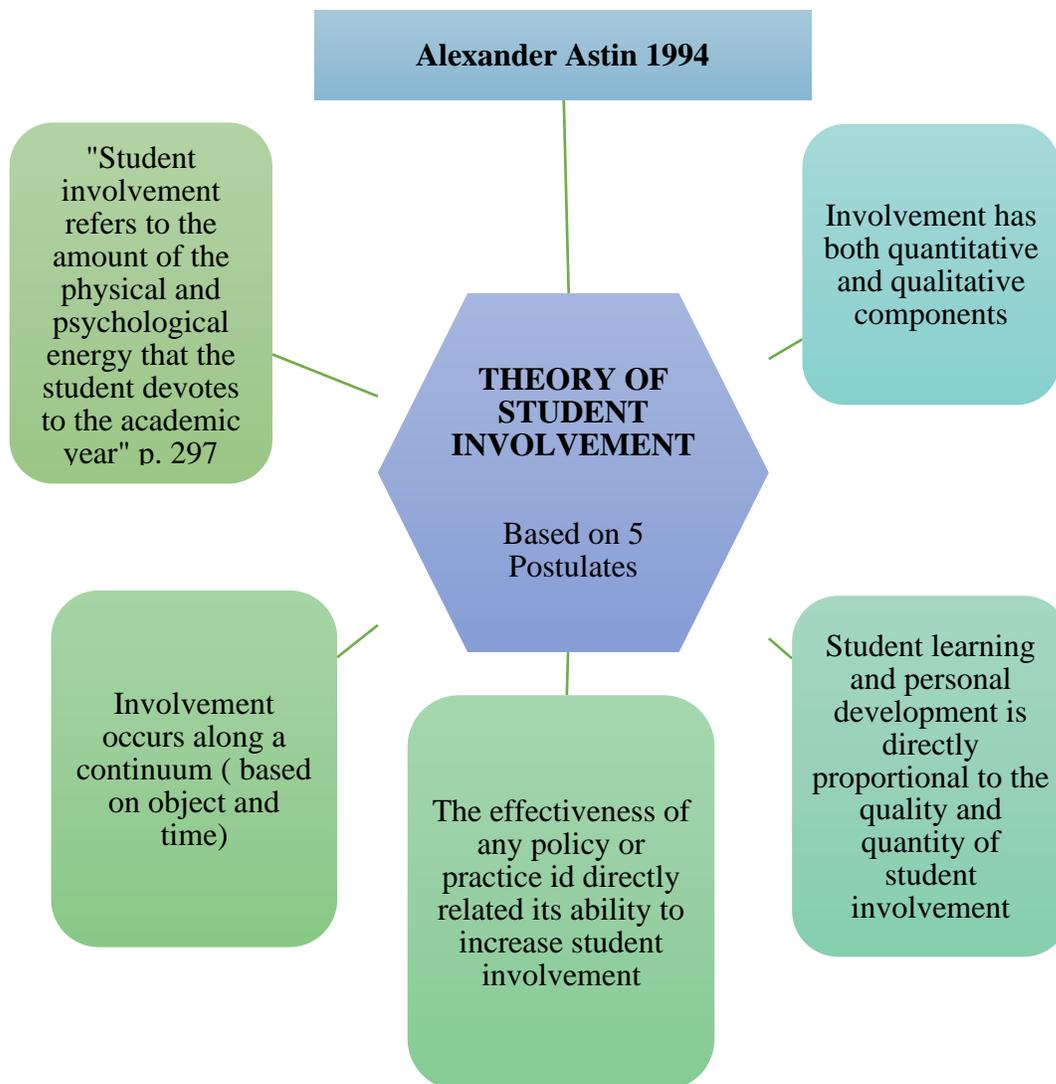
At first glance, it appears that student-athletes are involved in their universities by default because they agree to align with the university in exchange for a personal valuable asset: their talent. However, the rigors of scheduling practices, classes, tutors, and individual exercises may hinder the connection that could exist if this committed relationship between athlete and school evolved on a different level. According to statistics collected by the National Center for

Education Statistics (2018), 19% of enrolled undergraduates reported having a disability; of them, 17% were Black and 10% were post-baccalaureate students. These statistics speak to the limited number of Black students with disabilities on college campuses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Astin (1984) described student involvement as the amount of physical and mental energy a student invests in the academic experience. Research related to students dropping out of college is correlated to the student's level of involvement in the institution. This theory of involvement considers five areas related to a student's level of involvement.

The first area refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. Second, regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object. The same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times. Third, involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams). The fourth area shows the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. Fifth, and lastly, the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to that policy or practice's capacity to increase student involvement. (Astin, 1984, p. 519)

Theoretically, the concept of athletic involvement correlates with satisfaction in four aspects: (a) the institution's academic reputation, (b) the intellectual environment, (c) student friendships, and (d) institutional administration. However, there is evidence that a student-athlete's level of involvement tends to isolate them from their peer group (Astin, 1984). While one can make an argument for the Black student-athlete's alignment with the Theory of Student Involvement, it has been found that full engagement in educational campus opportunities is more prevalent in certain sports and for student-athletes of certain ethnic groups (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020). The five postulates of Alexander Astin's theory of student involvement are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4***Theory of Student Involvement*

*Note.* Adapted from *Knowledge and Understanding of Student Populations and Student Development*, by W. J. Archer, Wholehearted Student Affairs, Oregon State University College Student Services Administration. <https://whitneykjones.weebly.com/knowledge-and-understanding-of-student-populations-and-student-development.html>. In the public domain.

The NCAA (2018) provided a demographic analysis of the percentage of influential individuals who have direct contact with student-athletes (NCAA, 2018). These data are

disseminated by race, gender, and sport. The data reflect a prevalence of White individuals in leadership within the athletic domain. When aggregating the data that reflects the percentage of Black individuals who hold leadership roles, such as athletic director, head coach, assistant coach, academic advisor, and life skills coordinator, the percentages are low in comparison to their White counterparts. Table 1 illustrates the racial disparity between the ratio of Black student-athletes to White leadership and Black leaders.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Make-Up of Black Student-Athletes in Comparison to Black and White Individuals in Leadership*

	Black Participants	White Participants	Total Number of Participants	Percentage of Blacks in Leadership	Percentage of Whites in Leadership
<b>2020</b>					
Black Student Athletes	81,421		504,711= 16.1%		
Director of Athletics	117	946	1,114	10.5%	84.9%
Head Coach	1,866	17,046	20,242	9.2%	84.2%
Assistant Coach	7,369	34,407	46,180	15.9%	74.5%
Academic Advisor	517	1610	2366	21.9%	68%
Life Skills Coordinator	145	391	581	24.9%	67.2%
<b>2021</b>					
Black Student Athletes	78,186		493,297= 15.84%		
Director of Athletics	129	931	1,106	11.6%	84.2%
Head Coach	1,916	16,890	20,111	9.5%	83.9%
Assistant Coach	7,381	33,072	44,807	16.4%	73.8%
Academic Advisor	509	1,639	2,633	19.3%	62.2%
Life Skills Coordinator	151	391	599	25.2%	65.3%

*Note.* Adapted from *NCAA Demographics Dashboard* [Data Visualization Dashboard] by NCAA Demographics Database. National Collegiate Athletic Association (2022). Copyright NCAA (2023). <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2018/12/13/ncaa-demographics-database>. Copyright permission pending.

These intercollegiate leaders have direct interpersonal exchanges with Black student-athletes, which can significantly affect the academic trajectory for these students. Raunig and Coggins (2018) looked at the relationship between the university coach and university faculty. Typically, coaches of collegiate teams have more contact with student-athletes than course instructors and play a larger role in the lives of student-athletes than faculty members. The relationship is crucial to the student-athlete's involvement, especially Black student-athletes with disabilities. Clark and Parrette (2002) addressed the challenges that students with disabilities encounter on college campuses, including adjusting to contenting demands, responding to negative stereotypes, requiring specialized support services, and coping with a learning disability. Foster and Huml (2017) discovered a correlation between a student-athlete's athletic aptitude and identity and their declared major, which involves less academic rigor.

Based on the research provided, this could be more prevalent for the Black student-athlete when considering the third area of the student theory of involvement. Although bound by the NCAA governing body for their athletics programs, the intercollegiate athletic staff members' initial interaction with Black student-athletes and their parents commences in the form of recruitment. These representatives take on varied roles such as ethical role models and advisors regarding conduct outside of their respective sports and in the classroom (Raunig & Coggins, 2018). However, if there is lack of familiarity and connectedness outside of the common interest of the actual sport, limited representation of one's race impedes the development of an organic relationship. It has been found that students who are attending universities situated in predominantly white communities have difficulties acclimating to their new environments, which could lead to issues associated with student stress (e.g., balancing

practice and examinations, difficulty with organization, meeting deadlines, and poor time management; Edwards, 2000).

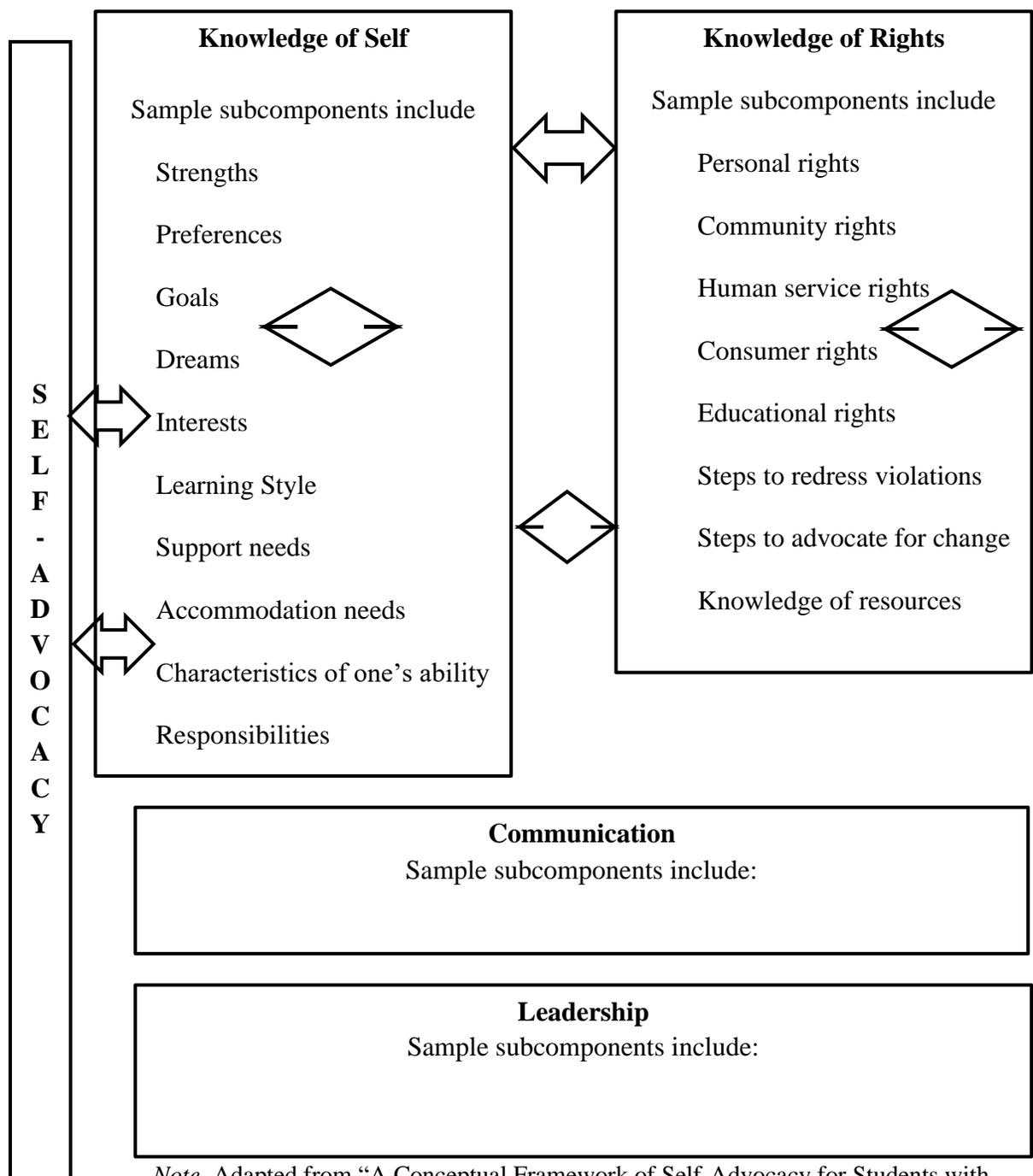
Perception of Black student-athletes is that they are mentally inferior and are seen as disposable commodities, which is different from their non-Black counterparts and how their intellectual skill sets and academic aptitudes are regarded (Gayles et al., 2018). For student-athletes with disabilities, the relationship with the instructor is critical. Eliminating professors' preconceived notions about student-athletes and forming relationships with the student-athlete and coaching staff would enhance student involvement. How faculty communicate with the student-athletes affects what they hear and what they believe about their potential, which, in turn, affects their level of motivation (Raunig & Coggins, 2018). This is true for all students, but the risk of losing it all with one injury or failing grade requires delivery of instruction and meaningful interactions, which are crucial for Black student-athletes with disabilities.

### ***Self-Advocacy of Students with Disabilities: A Conceptual Framework***

The self-advocacy movement can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement for individuals with disabilities (Longhurst, 1994; Williams & Shoultz, 1982). Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) noted that students with disabilities who possess skill sets associated with self-determination have been shown to experience postsecondary success. Self-advocacy is a subset of self-determination. Self-confidence, self-advocacy, knowledge of oneself, and creation of goals are factors that have proven to be important in developing leadership skills (Pocock et al., 2002). Figure 5 depicts the self-advocacy framework, which consist of four components: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership.

**Figure 5**

*Self-Advocacy Framework*



*Note.* Adapted from “A Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities,” by D. W. Test et al., 2005, *Remedial and Special Education* 26 (1), p. 49 <https://doi-org.lib.pepperdine.edu/10.1177/07419325050260010601>. Copyright permission pending.

## **Knowledge of Self**

Students who are connected socially, academically, and culturally to a university tend to possess skill sets associated with self-reflection and have a sense of what is necessary to succeed. The first component of the self-advocacy conceptual framework is the knowledge of self. Knowledge of self consists of the following subcomponents: strengths, preferences, goals, dreams, interests, learning style, support needs, characteristics of one's disability, and responsibilities (Test et al., 2005). Once a student is aware of who they are, they can begin to take the first step toward self-advocacy.

The knowledge of one's preferences, goals, learning style, strengths, deficits, and needs for special supports and modifications, as well as understanding the essence of one's disabilities or the comorbidity of their disabilities, are all discussed in the research. Knowledge of self encompasses an awareness of strengths and needs—most importantly, in learning. Collegiate student-athletes with disabilities must accept their learning style, be willing to recognize the hidden disability that exists, be willing to undertake the required procedures, and be willing to participate in a secondary evaluation to document the disability to re-establish their need for support (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

An understanding of self and one's learning style is the precipice of engaging in the self-advocacy process. Student-athletes who have been diagnosed with a hidden disability tend to possess cognitive deficits related to the area of executive functioning, which can negatively affect self-advocacy skills (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Cognitive abilities associated with executive functioning include working memory, verbal self-regulation, inhibition of behavior, and motor control (Wicks-Nelson, 2015). Lacking the skill set to apply these abilities can affect not only a

student's willingness to seek assistance, but the application and generalization of the resources in the university setting, once retrieved.

### **Knowledge of Rights**

Federal and state mandates have existed to support students with disabilities. Laws associated with the concept of a Free and Appropriate Education have been aligned with the enactment of the IDEA to support students with disabilities. FAPE is a regulation that has been in existence since 1973 and aims to serve students with disabilities by ensuring student achievement and inclusion in programs that would typically exclude disabled students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The execution of IDEA set a governing precedent in the field of education for these students and the support and modifications that must be implemented and followed. These students not only have rights K–12 and if pursued these student-athletes may have those rights at the collegiate level. Furthermore, student-athletes with disabilities have rights under the guidelines of the NCAA. While these rights are available to student-athletes with disabilities at the collegiate level, several restrictions and university loopholes prevent individuals from obtaining those accommodations needed to assist in learning (Knight, 2016). Therefore, knowledge of rights is crucial for a student-athlete with disabilities as those supports and accommodations are not implemented unless the student meets the exigencies put forth by the university's disability support services office.

Knowledge of rights or knowledge of what one is legally entitled to (Brinckerhoff, 1993) is the second component in self-advocacy. Personal rights, community rights, human service rights, consumer rights, educational rights, steps to redress violations, steps to advocate for change, and knowledge of resources are examples of subcomponents for the knowledge of rights component within the self-advocacy model (Test et al., 2005). Student-athletes with disabilities,

historically, those who had IEPs during grades K-12 are more likely to be aware of their rights. For student-athletes with disabilities, there are entities that provide legal ordinances to govern and ensure the protection of rights and that attempt to curtail discrimination against these students based on their disabilities. The American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensures the rights of students with disabilities at the collegiate level (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1998). For student-athletes, one of the governing bodies is the NCAA. However, the NCAA has established regulations for students with educational impacting disabilities upon entering college and participating in a student's respective sport. These regulations address all athletic divisions (NCAA, 2014a).

#### ***ADA and Section 504***

Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act state that no acts of discrimination are allowed for students in K-12 or in higher education. It states:

No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation. (Section 504)

The preceding section (12181) specifies that this provision applies to "elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or postsecondary private school or other educational institution." Private universities and colleges are covered by Title III, which states:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20), shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

If a college, university, or postsecondary institution, a public higher education entity, or an agency or institution accepts federal financial aid, they must comply with Section 504 guidelines.

Although religiously affiliated schools are not covered by the ADA, they must comply with Section 504 if they or their students receive any federal funding (Studentcafé, 2019). Table 2 provides a comparison between the rights and procedures at the college level and those at the K–12 level.

**Table 2**

*Comparison of IDEA and ADA & Section 504 K–12 and Postsecondary School*

	<b>IDEA (K–12th grade)</b>	<b>ADA &amp; Section 504 (Qualifying Postsecondary Schools)</b>
Who is affected?	All children with a disability until they graduate from school or turn 22 (whichever comes first).	Everyone with a disability, provided they are “otherwise qualified” to attend school.
What rights are guaranteed?	Access to Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)	Protection from discrimination based on disability.
How is a disability assessed?	School is legally responsible for identification and evaluation of students’ disabilities.	Students must provide documentation of the disability to the college (e.g., medical records, IEP from high school).
How are accommodations made?	Schools develop and follow an IEP, may offer extra testing time or special education courses.	Students must request “reasonable accommodations” on their own; schools must respond to the request to provide equal access to education for all students.
Who is responsible for the provision of specialized equipment such as wheelchairs?	School distributes necessary devices and aids.	School does not distribute necessary devices and aids; students secure their own.
Are parents involved?	Parents are actively involved.	No, students over 18 are adults in the eyes of the law.
What happens if a school violates a student’s rights?	Appeals process with school or legal action.	Appeals process with school or legal action.

*Note.* Adapted from *The Americans with Disabilities Act and Your Rights as a College Student*, 2023. <http://studentcaffe.com/prepare/students-with-disabilities/ada-your-rights-college-student>. In the public domain.

Federal laws are in place to protect students with disabilities from discrimination from the moment they are diagnosed. Knowledge of educational rights is a subcomponent of knowledge of rights. Knowledge of NCAA guidelines for student-athletes with disabilities is

essential for student-athletes to navigate and comprehend what is expected of them and what constitutes reasonable accommodations within the NCAA's jurisdiction. The NCAA has its organizational definition of an Education-Impacting Disability. The diagnosis includes “learning disabilities and disorders such as ADHD, mental health disorders, medical conditions, deaf or hard of hearing, and Autism spectrum disorder” (NCAA, 2014a, para. 1). These students must follow the guidelines set forth by the University under ADA and 504 federal guidelines. The NCAA has its own guidelines to accommodate student-athletes with disabilities. According to the NCAA, the student must be aware that they are responsible for taking the initiative to advocate for whatever accommodations are necessary to meet their academic goals. Unlike the university requirements from the disability support services, the NCAA considers whether a student has had an IEP, 504 plan, or an educational eligibility from high school (NCAA, 2014a, para. 2). Knowledge of the intricacies of laws and rights afforded to these student-athletes allows them to advocate for their rights to accomplish their personal and educational goals.

### **Communication**

“Assertiveness, negotiation, articulation, body language, use of assistive technology, listening, persuasion, and compromise” are examples of communication subcomponents (Test et al., 2005, p. 49). “Communication involves transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages. It consists of a sender, a receiver and channel of communication” (Munodawafa, 2008, p. 369). Munodawafa’s definition of communication incorporates the subcomponents of communication within the self-advocacy model. Behaviors are also associated with mode of communication and, if not fully understood, can elicit in executing the intent. Assertive communication coincides with the components of knowledge of self and knowledge of rights. Pipaş and Jaradat (2010)

maintained that an assertive mode of communication necessitates an awareness of one's requirements and the ability to acquire them.

Another subcomponent of communication is the use of assistive technology. Assistive technology is used to increase, maintain, or improve the potential of a student with a disability (Dell et al., 2012). IDEA defines assistive technology as “items, devices, equipment, or products which may be commercially available, customized, or adapted to help a person with a disability to function or to improve, maintain or increase their capacity to function” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b. para. 1). Pencil grips, computer programs, and tablet applications that provide text-to-speech are all examples of assistive technology (Young & Maccormack, 2014). One common device that is used at the collegiate level for students with disabilities is the Smartpen. Students with learning disabilities have great difficulty taking notes during lectures and discussions. These students exhibit processing deficits that manifest in their listening comprehension and written expression skills, which are essential for retaining and capturing information in written form during instruction (Boyle & Joyce, 2019). Smartpens are an all-in-one device that records the lecture while the student takes written notes simultaneously (Boyle & Joyce, 2019). While this device does not provide a method of direct communication, it allows the student to become adept at technology and able to contribute to class discussions (Boyle & Joyce, 2019).

To self-advocate, communication for the Black student-athlete with disabilities is essential; yet they may face barriers such as acclimation and integration into the academic environments of the university (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, and communication are intertwined and may influence how they advocate for their needs that are essential to their success. Improving the integration process of student-athletes is

essential and can provide meaning for inclusive and supportive college campuses. Academic advisors and counselors who are committed to developing the academic skill sets of student-athletes would contribute to the connectedness of these students with the university, which could result in improved communication (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

### **Leadership**

The component of leadership contains six subcomponents. Test et al. (2005) referenced knowledge of group's rights, advocating for others or causes, political action, team dynamics and roles, knowledge of resources, and organizational participation as subcomponents for leadership. "Leadership involves learning the roles and dynamics of a group and the skill to function in a group" (Test et al., 2005, p. 50). When evaluating the subcomponents of leadership within the self-advocacy theoretical framework, the subcomponents consider the individual's ability to utilize the personal skills learned and provide support for their peers, which could evolve into a leadership role. Servant leadership places emphasis on relationships. It encompasses an ethical approach to one's involvement and interactions with others while encouraging them to do and be their best in society (McBath, 2018). Stodden et al., (2005) cited focus groups that have determined that college students with disabilities acquire self-advocacy skills from discussion forums and from examining the strategies implemented by their college-age peers with disabilities, who serve as a help group and share resources and information regarding services on campus. Clark and Parette (2002) found that students with disabilities could benefit from holistic support programs that address academic and athletic issues. This support can be delivered in the form of intervention and strategies that address the evolving and changing needs of a student-athlete with a disability rather than solely viewing the student as a participant of an athletic sport (Clark & Parette, 2002). Student-athletes face many challenges and obstacles that are different

from the personal experiences of others. These experiences may include (a) adjusting to competing demands, (b) responding to negative stereotypes, (c) requiring specialized support services, and (d) coping with learning disabilities (Etzel et al., 1996). Black student-athletes with disabilities have the potential to demonstrate behavioral and academic qualities that equate with the subcomponent of leadership as it relates to being a team member and looking out for those who confront similar challenges. The endorsement of utilizing leadership skills by the athletic academic counselors who support these students is essential for not only the student-athlete's success but for the university (Choudhary et al., 2013).

### ***Critical Race Theory's Central Tenets***

“Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in American society” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). In the field of education, CRT research focuses on social justice and racial equality in schools (Jay, 2003). CRT originated in the 1970s and was framed based on the principles of critical legal studies and radical feminism movements (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Literary founders and contributors of the movement, such as Bell (1980), Freeman (1978), and Delgado and Stefancic (2017) envisioned a theory to contest inconspicuous acts of racism and to recognize setbacks that have occurred over time since the triumphs experienced during the civil rights movement. CRT, via its advocates and community of scholars, analyzes and seeks to restructure the relationship between, race, racism, and power, while promoting a community and empowerment paradigm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT in 1994 evolved as a systematic framework addressing educational inequality; since then, it has prompted several studies and examined educational methodologies and practices (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings (2012) contended that the concept of race and racism are heavily interpolated in the social sciences, which has a significant influence on education;

therefore, the ideas associated with race and racism exist in some form in educational scholarship and research. Under the premise of CRT from an educational perspective, researchers have investigated disproportionality in special education designations as it relates to Black children (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Cooper and Hall (2014) investigated the NCAA and implications for culturally responsive and race-conscious sports leadership by scrutinizing the NCAA's policies and practices. While varied movements have evolved from CRT based on the interpretation and exploration of the tenets, there is not much diversion from its legal and political origins.

For the purposes of this study, specific tenets were analyzed from an educational perspective to see how the manifestations of these tenets are evident in Black college athletes with learning disabilities and those who have been diagnosed with ADHD. This study further investigated how these Black student-athletes with disabilities navigate and self-advocate their learning processes. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described the tenets of CRT: (a) racism is normal, not aberrant; (b) interest convergence; (c) race as a social construction; (d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and (e) voice or counternarrative.

### ***Critical Race Theory and Black College Athletes With SLD and/or ADHD***

At the onset of the NCAA in the early 20th century, the racial demographics of student-athletes were significantly different from what is depicted in the 21st century. NCAA sports have transitioned from being predominantly White to varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Cooper et al., 2017). Exploration of the tenets of CRT, infused with the student involvement and self-advocacy theories, were addressed when looking at CRT and its impact on Black college athletes with SLDs and/or ADHD. Three of the five listed tenets are explored including (a) racism as normal, not aberrant; (b) interest convergence, and (c) voice or counternarrative.

**Racism is Normal, Not Aberrant.** The world of athletics for Black athletes mirrors the experiences of Black people and their stance in society (Simiyu, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) noted that racism is a “normal science” and described it as the way society “does business,” which is the experience of most people of color in the United States (p. 8). Scholars such as Du Bois (2008) credited this stance for Black people in society to slavery, as well as the significant racial prejudice that exists. In the history of athletics, one’s thoughts or perceptions of race and/or skin color influence the appraisal of an athlete’s capabilities and talents (Simiyu, 2012). These perceptions set the tone and create a mindset within the Black student-athlete that their success is based solely on their accomplishments and advancements in their respective sports (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, 2000). This concept of racism being normal contributes to the undesirable dialogue around the issue because it is not recognized or brought to the forefront (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). At PWIs, institutional racism tends to reveal deeply rooted sentiments towards Black students that contributes to their lack of connection to the university (Kunjufu, 1986). These sentiments are both demonstrated by overt acts of racism or inadvertent oblivious statements or commentary that can lead to an underestimation of a Black student’s cognitive skills and knowledge (Foster, 2005). For Black student-athletes, having to overcome the marginalization and underrepresentation at the university level can be further compounded by having been diagnosed with a hidden disability. Before they arrive on campus, Black student-athletes encounter race-related trials that affect their ability to achieve their athletic and academic goals in a university with a racially dominant foundation and perspective (Simiyu, 2012). These trials affect the level of involvement and active versus passive participation a student will exude in reaching their goals. Involvement in student organizations and athletics has a positive correlation with leadership development, and universities are responsible for providing these

leadership skills (Maak & Pless, 2006). According to Astin (1984), learning is more successful when students take an active role in the process. More time and energy spent on learning can lead to better long-term outcomes (Astin, 1984).

**Interest Convergence.** Interest convergence, as described by Bell (1980), is when the dominant race pursues racial justice under the purview of self-benefit. “Civil right gains for communities of color coincide with the dictates of White self-interest. Little happens out of altruism alone” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 22). The NCAA attempts to present itself as an organization that promotes education by creating ever-changing academic prerequisites and policies (Brand, 2006). However, students with learning and behavioral disabilities, especially Black student-athletes (Harper et al., 2013), tend to have lower graduation rates than their college peers. Black people utilizing their talents has existed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and now at varied educational institutions (i.e., PWIs), Black student-athletes are contributing to the advancement of these institutions, which has been evident throughout history.

Black student-athletes, while making up a small percentage on college campuses, have an enormous and impactful presence in revenue-generating sports such as football and basketball. Football is an income-producing sport that helps fund non-revenue-generating sports such as swimming, crew, and golf, which are populated by White middle- and upper-class student-athletes (Donner, 2005). The universities’ revenue-generating sports (e.g., men’s football and basketball) gain funding sources such as television and radio contracts, ticket sales, and corporate sponsorships because of a winning program that contributes to scholarships for all team sports. The more success the teams experience, the greater the payoff. Yet, the educational interest of Black student-athletes converges with that of the education of others (Donner, 2005). These athletic agencies rely on the talent of Black student-athletes to enhance their extensive

budgets, and in exchange these athletes count on colleges to invest monetarily in their athletic talent to augment their athletic skills while simultaneously working towards a degree (Hawkins, 2013).

Because of interest convergence, the promotion of the student's talent as the primary contribution to the team interest tends to diminish the student-athlete's academic goals, and the emphasis shifts. This is initiated during the admissions process when admissions officers tend to minimize or disregard a student-athlete's historic academic background (Bowen et al., 2011). These student-athletes, particularly Black men, are graduating at rates significantly lower than their White counterparts (Harper, 2018). However, while these students are not graduating at a rate commensurate to their peers, colleges still benefit from their talents as well as their images (Hawkins, 2013). Bloomberg described collegiate athletics as an “entertainment juggernaut” where universities are accruing over 19 billion dollars (for over 1,000 NCAA schools) and 10-million-dollar salaries for top football coaches (Boudway & Bhasin, 2022). For years, student-athletes’ name, image, and likeness (NIL) have generated millions of dollars in revenue for the NCAA and its universities, but the players do not receive any monetary payment outside of what was allowed in their scholarship stipend prior to 2021 (Gadit, 2012). The NCAA has functioned under the guideline of being a governing body, which oversees the competition of various sports from an equitable and safe perspective while simultaneously infusing athletics and academics to enhance the overall experience of the student-athlete (NCAA, 2021a). In June 2021, after years of litigation between former student-athletes and the NCAA, the NCAA established an interim policy allowing student-athletes to engage in NIL contracts to generate personal income (Powell, 2021). Twenty-five states have allowed student-athletes to collect monies from their NIL deals, and the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled against the NCAA in a separate antitrust case

referring to the limitations of the specifics of the student-athletes scholarship awards (Boudway & Bhasin, 2022). Although the NCAA is now having to share the wealth with the student-athletes, a disparity continues amongst male and female athletes, particularly between White female and Black female athletes (Hruby, 2021). Interest convergence exists within the sports arena. The idea of lessening standards for students to participate in collegiate athletics for financial gain further contributes to the lack of preparedness for a Black student-athlete with disabilities (Benson, 2000; Hodge et al., 2008), which results in their lack of connection to the university (Astin, 1984). Yet, the university, the coaches, and the NCAA benefit at the expense of these students' lack of preparedness in the educational realm, while gaining monetarily from these players prior to their allowed time frame of early departure from their respective sports (Hruby, 2021). The interest of the student-athlete is superseded by the dominant culture, which includes those who profit from the talent of the Black student-athlete (Ingraham, 2020).

**Voice Counternarrative.** “Voice is important—how voice is expressed, how voice is informed, how our voice differs from the dominant voice” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 320). López (2003) described the concept of counternarratives or counterstories as a central principle of CRT. The idea of counter narrative is to bring light and value to the stories of people of color, which, when viewing its application to the theory of CRT, the theme of race is paramount (Mensah, 2019). With the idea to bring attention to the voices of Black student-athletes with disabilities, Vaught (2011) cautioned against the idea that the intention is not for others to empathize but is intended to be utilized to create a means for voices to be heard. Past studies have suggested that society holds inaccurate stereotypes of Black people, which leads to negative views of them (McCreary & Wright, 1997). Furthermore, literature suggests that history has traditionally

ignored the voices of those who have been considered disparaged or marginalized (Matsuda, 1987).

The method of counter storytelling, or counternarrative, is CRT's manner of confronting the concept of generalizing the White experience as a universal standard that creates the narrative of how to perceive the culture, the behaviors, and the overall understanding of people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The ability to tell stories is a meaningful method for minority communities to be heard and gives meaning to various forms of discrimination such as microaggressions, unconscious discrimination, or structural racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). When people of color use their voices, culture plays a role as it provides a way of seeing the world via a different lens and socially reconstructing it (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Hiraldo (2021) noted that this change in perspective as it relates to counterstories can impact the analysis of the college campus' climate and provide insight as to how universities can address inclusion and diversity in an organic manner and not undergo a passive or perfunctory approach with the intention of maintaining diversity. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) noted that counterstories can function as a methodological and theoretical approach to forging a community for those who are considered marginalized, associating an identity or a personality who is familiar to students who matriculate on campus, and placing relevance of educational theory to practice.

Black student-athletes with disabilities have been able to share their experiences via counternarratives to gain insight into their experiences being Black, being a Black student, and being a Black student with a disability. Hawkins provided the perspective from young Black collegiate athletes and professional athletes on how even financially successful Black athletes are confronted with forms of racism (Hawkins, 2019). This population has had their stories analyzed,

explained, and retold for a long time. CRT, via the tenet of counternarratives/countervoice, provides a platform for voices to be heard and internal stories to be shared.

### **Gaps and Inconsistencies in the Literature**

When examining Black students, specifically Black student-athletes with disabilities, there is a great deal of literature that speaks to male Black student-athletes, including literature that investigates phenomenological studies involving Black men and the exploitation that has taken place over decades (Rhoden, 2006). While research provides an overview of the overidentification of Black children for special education (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2022), There are studies related to self-involvement, yet there is limited analysis on how Black student-athletes with disabilities manage in the areas of self-advocacy and combating issues with self-involvement under the guises of racial biases that exist at the collegiate level. While there is limited research regarding this population, their needs and voices are relevant.

### **Chapter Summary**

Sensitivity and respect for the cultures and backgrounds of these high-achieving, student-athletes with low self-esteem are essential (Caesar & Caesar, 2006). Student-athletes face daily obstacles that most college students never face. When acquired, self-confidence, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and goal setting have proven to be essential for the development of leadership skills (Pocock et al., 2002). The hidden disabilities of Black student-athletes are compensable, but their skin color cannot be changed. Existing stereotypes may lead to discrimination against Black student-athletes, who are viewed as inferior to their White counterparts. Male or female student-athletes of color who are first-generation enrollees and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds face social challenges that are not apparent without access to their personal enrollment data. Lastly, student-athletes of color with disabilities exhibit difficulties inherent to

their disabilities that must be formally documented to be meaningfully addressed. The application of empirical research can raise awareness of the needs of student-athletes of color with disabilities and reduce cultural or academic biases associated with the student population. Utilizing the CRT fundamentals described in this study will hopefully shed light and add value to these students' voices, as well as pique their interest in conducting further research in this field.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to investigate Black student-athletes' experiences with student involvement, self-advocacy, and balancing academics and athletics when they have an SLD and/or ADHD. Comparing the academic performance of Black student-athletes to that of their peers revealed significant disparities (Harper, 2018). This, along with being diagnosed with an SLD and/or ADHD, contributed to these inequalities. This study examined the ability to self-advocate and participate in the school setting while managing an educational eligibility of an SLD and/or ADHD and facing racial undertones in the college setting.

#### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided this qualitative study was: What part, if at all, does self-advocacy play in the capacity of Black student-athletes with disabilities to balance athletics and academics?

The following subquestions emerged from the main research question:

- SQ1: How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?
- SQ2: How do the tenets of CRT pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voice of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?
- SQ3: How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?
- SQ4: How does exposure to the advocacy skills of family members affect the ability of Black student-athletes to independently advocate for their academic

and/or athletic well-being in high school and college?

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research was to investigate experiences and meanings and to capture as precisely as possible how a phenomenon was experienced within its context of reference (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research is a method for investigating and comprehending the significance that individuals or groups attach to a social or human issue. Qualitative methods take a critical stance towards knowledge. Qualitative research acknowledges the impact of cultures and customs. It identifies further how the exchange of knowledge and experiences between two or more people is constructed. The qualitative research design for this study was based on a solid theoretical foundation and focused on interviewing participants with open-ended questions so that a coherent understanding could emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The phenomenological approach is a conceptual and psychological research design in which the researcher describes the subjective experiences of individuals in relation to a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was utilized in this study to explore life experiences that described the essence of their educational journeys as Black student-athletes with an SLD and/or ADHD (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological methodologies emphasize individual viewpoints and interpretations. Consequently, they are effective for fully comprehending thoughts and perceptions, providing new insights into people's perspectives and behavior, and sifting through the obstructions of established presumptions and preconceived notions (Cleland, 2017).

Giorgi (2009) referred to the Husserlian approach known as transcendental phenomenology or descriptive phenomenology. This methodology enables the researcher's

inquiry to be evaluated consistently to counteract any biases or preconceived notions that might influence the participant (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This method enables the researcher to establish rapport with the participant while eliminating assumptions based on the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon (Ashworth, 1996). To gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of Black student-athletes attempting to balance academics and athletics while being involved on a college campus and advocating for their goals and dreams, the transcendental phenomenological approach is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology that aims to get an in-depth understanding of the human experience condition (Moustakas, 1994). This approach further provided the necessary platform by placing value on the descriptions of the situations mentioned. This further enabled me to guide and assist participants in deriving meaning and interpretation from their experiences (Creswell, 2007).

I was able to embrace multiple realities due to the ontological assumption. When examining individuals, researchers are investigating to reveal these multiple realities. The actual proof of multiple realities consists of the use of multiple types of data in narratives employing the real statements of different individuals and presenting diverse points of view. This enabled me to report multiple perspectives as themes emerged from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

An assumption could be made that there were individualized factors that generated both diverse and similar perspectives on the investigated phenomenon. Based on their diagnosed disability, their understanding of it, their family history, their relationships with the athletic staff at their institution, and their interactions with professors, each participant's experience was unique. A further assumption was that participants would be hesitant to disclose experiences without anonymity, but it was also assumed that participants would answer interview questions

honestly and candidly due to my level of experience and knowledge working with individuals with disabilities.

Qualitative research is characterized by reflexivity and the researcher's role, where the researcher has a consistent and intricate relationship with the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Alvesson and Sköldborg (2000) viewed reflexivity as an awareness that the researcher and the participant influence one another reciprocally and continuously during the research process. Research reflexivity encompasses how one's thinking comes to fruition, how thoughts evolve as new understandings emerge, and how this affects research (Haynes, 2012).

From a transformative worldview, research contains an implementation strategy for reform that may alter the lives of the participants, the institutions, and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I gained insight from the participants without further marginalizing the population through the investigative process and inquiry into this phenomenon. Incorporating the concepts of CRT, I examined the perspectives of Black student-athletes and their lives as they navigated collegiate institutions academically and advocated for their needs as students with learning and/or behavioral difficulties. I placed microaggressions experienced because of race at the forefront of all aspects of the research process, thus challenging conventional explanations of the experiences of individuals of color (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I incorporated components of the disability theory through the types of questions asked, took into consideration the labels applied to these individuals, how the collection of data would benefit the community, and how the data would be reported in a respectful manner when interviewing individuals with disabilities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These theories discuss the various characteristics that the participants balanced being a Black student-athlete with an educational eligibility of an SLD and/or ADHD, and attempting to self-advocate, maximize, and participate fully in the collegiate experience.

## Setting and Sample

This research was conducted in the United States and two foreign countries. Although every participant in the study is a citizen of the United States, some are currently playing their respective sports in countries such as Japan and Uruguay. After completing their collegiate athletic careers with their universities, some participants played professionally in the United States. However, due to circumstances such as team roster changes, salary negotiations, and expectations from the athletes or professional organizations, these athletes discovered better opportunities elsewhere in the world.

This study utilized the nonprobability sampling technique of purposive sampling to gain insight into the experiences of eight Black student-athletes who were found to have an educational eligibility of an SLD and/or ADHD while in high school and/or college. In qualitative research, purpose sampling or judgment sampling is frequently employed to identify and select the most resource-efficient and information-dense cases (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling is a technique in which specific settings, individuals, or events are selected on purpose to collect data that cannot be obtained in any other way (Maxwell, 1996) and when the researcher includes cases or subjects because they believe they justify involvement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The goal of purposive sampling is to focus on individuals with specific traits who will be able to contribute more effectively to the research (Etikan, 2016). As the sample was based on my judgment, there was a possibility of researcher bias in purposive sampling. This evaluative, subjective aspect of purpose sampling is only a significant disadvantage when such judgments are ill-conceived or poorly studied—that is, when judgments are not based on clear criteria, such as a theoretical framework (Sharma, 2017). While the various techniques for purposive sampling have differing objectives, they can provide researchers with the rationale to

make theoretical, analytic, or logical inferences from the sample under study (Sharma, 2017). Age, sexual identity, knowledge, specific focus, or organizational philosophy may serve as a starting point for researchers to narrow the purpose of the study, which helps to mitigate researcher bias and fits well with the study's objective (Patton, 1990). Black student-athletes with hidden disabilities such as SLD and ADHD must manage not only their learning methods, but also the facilitation of working with professors, coaches, advisors, and peers while advocating for their needs and coping with racial microaggressions at the collegiate level. If a student is determined to be eligible for an IEP during high school, the ITP portion of the IEP is intended to be the educational tool that provides these students with the blueprint to understand the concept of self-advocacy.

Current and former Black student-athletes with the educational eligibility of an SLD and/or ADHD who were presently playing or had played for an NCAA-governed institution or university were asked to participate in the research. Potential participants were gathered through referrals from professionals who worked in higher education or athletics and were familiar with individuals who met the research criteria. Each contact received the personal contact and colleague email recruitment letter (Appendix A) and via recruitment flyers (Appendix B) to elicit participants. The participants were provided with the researcher's contact information via recruitment flyers (Appendix B) and letters (Appendix C) established expressly for this study and maintained in strict confidence. The researcher's email and google voice phone number were made available to interested parties. Upon selection, participants received an email in the form of a letter (Appendix D) from the researcher's Pepperdine University email account to discuss their willingness to participate and receive an explanation of the parameters met. Once they agreed to participate, the participants received a scheduled interview confirmation email (Appendix E) and

they were provided an informed consent form (Appendix F). These current and former Black collegiate athletes were assessed and found to be eligible for special education services with an educational eligibility in elementary, high school or college with an SLD or ADHD. Some of these athletes now compete in university and college sports governed by the NCAA. Depending on NCAA and professional sports regulations, a portion of the participants had participated in their respective college sports for the minimum amount of time prior to playing professionally, which can range from one to three years. A subset of these athletes had graduated from their respective colleges and were no longer playing professionally; however, they might still play for recreational purposes. For the purposes of this study, those who had graduated or declared a major were required to identify their field of study and any associated minors. Eight Black men and women were chosen to participate, and the population range was ages 21–40. The intent of the study was to have 10 individuals, however, there were some who disclosed not wanting to discuss their disability and others who did not want to bring attention to their university. Although the process was made clear it would be confidential, this and other factors related to time or just an unwillingness to participate, appeared to lessen the research sample.

The participants recruited represented a range of socioeconomic backgrounds within the Black community. The participants included those who were employed in their field of choice and those who pursued their dreams outside of sports. Their current employment was examined solely in relation to its impact on their level of self-advocacy as Black college student-athletes. Lastly, participants who were recruited also had the unique opportunity to interact with a variety of athletic department personnel, including coaches, academic specialists, and advisors during their athletic stint at their college or university.

A strength of the sample was the extent of the participants' playing experience in their respective sports, their experiences and involvement in their education, as well as the distinctiveness of respondents in terms of age, family, social background, and level of educational attainment. The results were not intended to be numerically representative, as is the case with a qualitative approach that aims for a nonprobability sample. The purposive sampling was designed to reveal the wide range of responses, including those who were less likely to respond. The transferability of the findings is limited because of the relatively small sample size of individuals with a confirmed educational eligibility of an SLD or ADHD.

### **Human Subject Considerations**

Such in-depth research frequently necessitates an appreciation for the experiences of others to yield novel insights about a given phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The implementation of a phenomenological study emphasizes the interviewee's life, and sensitive information may be revealed, necessitating the researcher's deliberate efforts to protect the participant's confidentiality. Participants received written information via the informed consent form regarding the study's emphasis and focus, as well as its overall purpose, to determine whether they wished to participate. This information was also explained verbally to allow the participants the opportunity to ask questions. The informed consent form detailed the steps of their participation in the study, which included questionnaires and interviews pertinent to the research.

The interview process was explained to each participant. Participants were informed of the questionnaire that was sent prior to the interview in Appendix G. Rapport was established to ensure a level of confidence as well as comfortability with the interview process. Participants were informed of the approximate length of the interview as well as their right to refuse to

respond to questions or to discontinue participation at any point in the study. The interviewees had the opportunity to determine the interview time based on their availability and access to a private setting. The participants were asked specific one on one open-ended interview questions, Appendix H.

The confidentiality of all information collected during this study is being maintained as required by laws governing the protection of personal data (Appendix I). Throughout the analysis process, privacy was maintained. The student-athletes were not anonymous to me; however, they were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Student-athletes were assured that their name, image, and likeness would not be used. Using coding cycles, information collected via interviews was analyzed and synthesized. The completed interview protocols, transcriptions, and any .mp4 data will continue to be stored in a secure location, on a password protected computer using password protected software. Any printed documentation pertaining to the interview responses or coding results will be locked in a filing cabinet for three years following the conclusion of the study, after which time they will be destroyed. To ensure the security and confidentiality of the information, the device and any stored files were encrypted.

For this study, participants' identities were concealed using pseudonyms associated with their gender. The pseudonyms of the participants, the date of the interview, and a number associated with the number of interviews were documented to ensure confidentiality. Their respective sports were discussed, but the high schools, universities, and professional teams with which they were formerly or currently affiliated were not mentioned. No names of athletic department personnel were recorded for the purposes of this research. A description of the responsibilities performed was acknowledged, but the individual's title was not mentioned. All names in transcripts were redacted.

The risk to participants in this study was minimal. The category of review, as defined by the *Federal Regulations of Human Research Subjects*, falls under exempt Category 2 because the research entailed interviewing procedures regarding an experience. The process involved interactions (verbal and written responses) and audio and video recordings for data collection. This research adhered to the guidelines of the Internal Review Board (IRB) when considering individuals who were considered vulnerable. An application for exempt research under the Category 2 guidelines was approved by Pepperdine University's IRB, (Appendix J and Appendix K).

### **Instrumentation**

In-depth, qualitative, semi structured interviews were conducted for this study. This method, coupled with a meticulously crafted schedule, permitted the collection of data for the purpose of providing pertinent information regarding the investigated phenomenon. Using in-depth, qualitative interviews allowed for open-ended questions and probing to maintain focus and allowed the participants to provide details (Pajo, 2018). Another advantage of interviews, particularly for this research, is that the participant could provide historical information while I was able to control the direction of the questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The interview questions were derived from the research questions and were intended to encourage the participant to provide open and honest responses. Before beginning the interview, portions of the informed consent document pertaining to the interview process were reviewed with the participant, and the respondent was able to ask questions throughout the interview. Before recording the interview, the participant's approval was sought. The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes depending on the depth of the participant's responses.

The interview questions pertained to the experiences of Black student-athletes diagnosed

with an SLD and/or ADHD who, while trying to balance academics and athletics, attempted to be involved in their school setting and advocate for their needs. The initial questions focused on getting to know the participants and obtaining background information, followed by content questions that dissected the essence of the phenomenon being studied and pertained to gaining knowledge and understanding.

The eight participants' lived experiences were probed with non-intrusive questions to provide clarity and elicit deeper thought or reflection. The interview procedure was structured by providing the participants with details regarding the interview. The date, time, and all Zoom information included login, the protocols encompassing video conferencing, how and why the interviewer would mute and unmute during the process, the estimated interview duration, and how my and participants' identities would be displayed on the video screen. The protocol consisted of a comprehensive greeting I read, an explanation of the purpose of the study, and an informed consent form to instill a sense of comfort for the participant and to limit unanticipated occurrences.

At the conclusion of the interview, the participant had the chance to share any pertinent information they deemed essential. I appropriately thanked the participant and expressed gratitude. I then summarized the subsequent steps and explained how participants could access the study's findings.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity, a crucial aspect of qualitative research, is achieved by determining whether the findings are valid from the researcher's, the respondent's, and the audience's points of view (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To establish the validity of this study, interviews were conducted, and background questionnaires were collected and reviewed for clarity and understanding. The

researcher and a colleague reviewed the responses to determine the authenticity of the responses and the alignment of the responses with the interview questions.

To ensure validity, qualitative strategies were employed. Triangulating multiple data sources, such as questionnaires and interviews, which involves examining evidence from the sources and using it to construct a cogent justification for themes that have become apparent, thereby enhancing credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher clarified any potential personal biases brought to investigate the phenomenon. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), clarification of biases permits self-reflection on the part of the researcher and results in an open and honest narrative that resonates well with readers. Lastly, highlighting contrasting themes and perspectives increased the study's validity. Phenomenological studies are based on lived experiences; consequently, real life consists of diverse perspectives that do not always converge. Contradictory information strengthens the credibility of a story (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For qualitative research to be reliable, the researcher must consider the procedures used to ensure consistency throughout the research process (Yin, 2009). These processes may include verification of transcripts for errors, consistency in coding, and cross-checking of codes. (Creswell, 2016). Authenticity is a trait that can be woven throughout the research process, which contributes to the validity and reliability of the research. Methods involving cross-checking and verifying transcripts, along with consistency in following interview procedures and protocols, contribute to the research's trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

For data collection, this investigation employed some of Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggested methods. The participants who were interviewed also reflected on the process through

which they participated in the events as part of their collegiate experiences as Black student-athletes with an educational eligibility of an SLD and/or ADHD (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Efforts were made to recruit individuals through athletic networks, including high school and college coaches, special educators and administrators, and school psychologists who had worked with Black student-athletes, as well as Black student-athletes who were familiar with others who might relate to the study and meet the established criteria for a participant. I attempted to recruit at least 10 male and female participants. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), three to 10 participants are typical for phenomenology studies.

Data were gathered through virtual interviews and questionnaires. This allowed for uniformity in the interview process and protocol and reduced bias for respondents as the researcher was not in their direct presence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All interviews were conducted by the researchers and ranged between 60 and 90 minutes.

The virtual interviews were scheduled utilizing the Zoom scheduling and invitation feature. Zoom's advantages for qualitative interviews are influenced by impersonal, technical, and logistical elements: rapport, convenience, and usability (Archibald et al., 2019). Scheduling, appointment confirmation, and security features are built into the Zoom platform. However, as per compliance regulations via the university IRB, interviews were not recorded in Zoom, but an external recording system was utilized instead. The audio-recorded interviews and transcripts generated by an external encrypted software were downloaded to my computer's hard drive and safeguarded using the Google Drive with password protection, which adheres to the general data protection regulation under the Privacy Legislation Act.

IEP and ITP plans, as well as any previous elementary school through 12th-grade psychoeducational evaluations were utilized as part of the data collection process, if made

available by the subject. Advantages of retrieving participant-related documents included the ability to document a formalized definition of each respective educational eligibility, which differs from how the participant may articulate their understanding of their learning and/or behavioral disability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze qualitative data, qualitative researchers use both inductive and deductive methods, such as constructing patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing data into increasingly abstract informational components. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended employing a back-and-forth process between themes and data to identify central themes. I then used deductive reasoning to determine whether additional evidence can support each theme or more information is required.

For each research question, the interview questions were grouped accordingly to ensure that the phenomenon was addressed. This study's data collection procedure coincided with the data analysis process. It was possible to analyze interviews for one athlete while conducting interviews for another, which influenced the reporting of findings. As a result of differing viewpoints, the interview process evolved to incorporate cultural diversity. It cannot be assumed that, simply because all the participants were Black, their perspectives would share a common set of themes (Saldaña, 2013).

The data were derived from transcripts of the recorded interviews using multiple methods, including a transcription service that included a speech-to-text software, to determine themes that emerged from the responses of the interviews and the documents associated with the participants. The data were organized, categorized, and sorted into codes derived verbatim from the interview transcripts and field notes (Saldaña, 2012). This study employed NVivo coding as

its primary objective was to adhere to the actual phrases and concepts extracted from the participants' words. This enabled me to capture the inherent meanings of a participant's lived experiences. Statements generated from the interviews were put in quotation marks to capture the intended meaning from the respondent.

When analyzing data, the processes of winnowing the data and coding were conducted. The process of winnowing the data was incorporated into the data analysis process to aggregate the data and concentrate on those things that were relevant and effective in attempting to comprehend the phenomenon. Coding is an additional data processing technique described by (Creswell, 2007, 2012). Coding is the process of segmenting and classifying text to produce data-based explanations and themes (Creswell, 2007, 2012). The processes of winnowing and coding the data obtained from the interviews and any documents provided by the subject aided in developing meaningful themes to interpret the results.

### **Data Management**

The collected data consisted of interview recordings, transcriptions, and interview protocols completed. In addition, any IEPs and psychoeducational evaluations provided by the participant pertaining to their educational disability were collected for the purposes of this study. Prior to the interview, a background questionnaire was emailed, along with the interview protocol, to the participants. After the interview was completed, recorded, and transcribed, the data were password-protected and secured via the Google platform. All digital documents were stored in this format on a password protected device belonging exclusively to me. Physical documents are stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

Google provides a tool for backing up all digital data on its platform (e.g., interview transcripts and scanned documents). The physical documents were stored in a locked filing

cabinet for the duration of time required by law. Within the informed consent, all participant permissions and the assurance that all information would be redacted and assigned a pseudonym. The form indicating the meanings of the pseudonyms the physical documentation is stored in a locked file cabinet.

The researcher was responsible for data management in the research project. The data description is included in the actual research document. Access was granted based solely at my discretion. Once the necessary guidelines and procedures were followed and the document was deemed ready for publication, the document's data was shared and published. The researcher owns the dissertation. The work is copyright protected under Title 17 of the United States Code and other applicable copyright laws.

### **Chapter Summary**

Using a philosophical and psychological perspective, phenomenological qualitative research enables participants to analyze their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Examining this phenomenon of the Black student-athlete enabled an appreciation of multiple realities and an attempt to comprehend these multiple perspectives through themes viewed through various lenses. This approach enabled Black student-athletes to discuss their thoughts and reflect on their experiences. It was anticipated that respondents' experiences would yield answers by aligning interview questions with research questions and investigating evolving themes. In Chapters 4 and 5, themes pertaining to race, learning disabilities and/or ADHD, student involvement, and self-advocacy among Black student-athletes was examined. Investigating the experiences and combing through the data allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the proposed phenomenon, with the expectation of eliciting answers that may increase awareness when working with Black student-athletes.

## Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

In this chapter, the collected data are presented in tables and narrative form. The perspectives of Black student-athletes with disabilities on their interactions with coaches, athletic academic advisors, and professors, as well as how being Black, a student-athlete, and having a hidden disability affected their ability to participate in their collegiate experience. This study also investigated whether participants felt their voices were being heard, as described in the sections that follow. The chapter concludes with a list of the findings that are analyzed in Chapter 5.

### Context

This phenomenological study examined the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to participate fully in the college experience while exercising self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones.

The overarching research question that guided this qualitative study was: What part, if at all, does self-advocacy play in the capacity of Black student-athletes with disabilities to balance athletics and academics?

The following subquestions emerged from the main research question:

- SQ1: How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?
- SQ2: How do the tenets of CRT pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voices of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?
- SQ3: How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?
- SQ4: How does exposure to the advocacy skills of family members affect the

ability of Black student-athletes to independently advocate for their academic and/or athletic well-being in high school and college?

Table 3 shows the alignment between the subquestions and the interview questions.

**Table 3**

*Alignment of Subquestions and Interview Questions*

<p><b>SQ1:</b> How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?</p>	<p><b>SQ2:</b> How do the tenets of CRT pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voice of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?</p>	<p><b>SQ3:</b> How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?</p>	<p><b>SQ4:</b> How does exposure to family members' advocacy skills affect Black student-athletes' ability to independently advocate for their academic and/or athletic well-being in high school and college?</p>
<p>3. Can you describe some of the academic challenges you had in school (while in college and prior to attending college)?</p>	<p>12. Was learning difficult for you, and what strategies did you use to make it easier?</p>	<p>4. When do you recall having educational eligibility for an SLD and/or ADHD?</p>	<p>1. What family member(s) do you feel was your biggest educational advocate speaking to teachers on your behalf?</p>
<p>11. How did having this educational eligibility affect your level of involvement in the collegiate experience?</p>	<p>13. Upon attending college, did you disclose your educational eligibility to anyone? If so, who?</p>	<p>7. Do you remember the process?</p>	<p>2. Which family member (s) was your sports advocate when talking to coaches on your behalf?</p>

<p><b>SQ1:</b> How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?</p>	<p><b>SQ2:</b> How do the tenets of CRT pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voice of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?</p>	<p><b>SQ3:</b> How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?</p>	<p><b>SQ4:</b> How does exposure to family members' advocacy skills affect Black student-athletes' ability to independently advocate for their academic and/or athletic well-being in high school and college?</p>
<p>14. What were some of the challenges that arose from playing your respective sport?</p>	<p>16. What was your relationship with your academic advisor?</p>	<p>5. What do you know about SLD and ADHD?</p>	<p>9. Do you recall at what age you participated in the IEP process?</p>
<p>15. What was your involvement in your college campus outside of your respective sport?</p>	<p>17. Did your institution have an academic program specifically for student-athletes with educational eligibility for a learning disability or ADHD? Can you describe the program and your involvement in the program?</p>	<p>6. Did anyone explain your educational special education eligibility to you?</p>	
	<p>18. Did you use any of the accommodations that were available to you?</p>	<p>10. Do you know what an ITP is? If so, do you recall the ITP process?</p>	

## **Data Collection Process**

Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit participants for this research. Having worked in the field of education, I have specialized in students who have an educational eligibility of an SLD and ADHD. A total of 12 people were invited to participate in the interview process, and eight of those 12 (seven men and one woman) met the study criteria and were willing to fully participate in the research process. These athletes participated at a high level of competition at their respective institutions, which included seven PWIs and one HBCU. They attended these schools and played their respective sports for a predetermined period to reach their individual objectives. Further, these exceptional student-athletes were diagnosed with an SLD and/or ADHD. One participant was accepted to graduate school and was concluding his bachelor's degree, while another returned to his institution to complete his bachelor's degree. These two participants will receive their diplomas in spring 2023. The remainder are either professional athletes or pursuing other careers. The participant interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing and an external recorder. To maintain confidentiality, as required by the IRB, the recordings were not recorded using the Zoom software. Software was employed to ensure accurate transcription. All participants were asked identical open-ended inquiries regarding their disability, their self-advocacy, and their level of involvement during their college years. For the objectives of this study and to maintain confidentiality of participants, each participant was given a pseudonym.

## ***Participant Profiles***

Table 4 consists of an overview of the participant information, which includes the pseudonym assigned, the gender, the time spent in college, the type of college attended, their sport, and their disability.

**Table 4***Participants' Identifying Information Associated with Pseudonyms*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Female or Male</b>	<b>Years in College</b>	<b>Type of College HBCU - Historically Black College PWI - Predominantly White Institution</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Disability</b>
1. Amal	Male	5 years (currently finishing)	PWI	Football	Specific Learning Disability
2. Amos	Male	5 years	PWI	Basketball	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
3. Caleb	Male	5 years	PWI	Rugby	Specific Learning Disability
4. David	Male	5 years (currently finishing)	PWI	Track	Specific Learning Disability
5. Elijah	Male	2 years	PWI	Basketball	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
6. Ethan	Male	4.5 years	HBCU	Football	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
7. Gabriel	Male	2 years	PWI	Basketball	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
8. Adina	Female	4 years	PWI	Track	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

The following are profile descriptions of the participants. Data were collected via qualitative interviews, which were combed through and analyzed to create themes and subthemes that align and answer the overall research question and subquestions for this study.

Adina is a 34-year-old special education teacher from Los Angeles, CA. Adina ran track at the junior college level and transferred to a university on the West Coast where she was recruited and received a scholarship to run track. Adina experienced difficulty in the classroom, especially in mathematics and with managing her time. She discovered that she possessed behaviors associated with ADHD after taking a psychology course and reading a book that noted that her behaviors correlated with those associated with ADHD. Adina completed her university requirements and maintained her eligibility to run track. She achieved her bachelor's degree and went on to pursue post baccalaureate education by obtaining a master's degree. She is currently working on her special education teaching credential.

Amal is a 38-year-old retired NFL player from Los Angeles, CA. Amal was diagnosed with an educational eligibility of SLD while in middle school. Amal, once determined to have an educational eligibility of SLD, an IEP was implemented. Amal achieved a football scholarship to a major university on the West Coast and played for 3 years prior to being drafted to the NFL. Amal played for the NFL for 13 years.

Amos is a 33-year-old musician who grew up in Los Angeles, CA. Amos was diagnosed with ADHD by his pediatrician while in elementary school. He was prescribed medication at that time to regulate his behavior and assist him with focusing in the classroom. In high school, Amos was determined to have an educational eligibility of OHI with behavioral characteristics associated with ADHD. He was recruited and obtained a scholarship to attend a major university in the Pacific Northwest to play basketball. Amos attended school for 5 years and achieved his bachelor's degree; however, he did not play his freshman year as he was injured.

Caleb is a 24-year-old lifeguard who was found eligible for special education services for having an SLD while in elementary school and received academic support under the guidelines

of an IEP. Caleb attended school (K–12) in Los Angeles, CA. He was a walk-on rugby player in the Pacific Northwest. Caleb was injured while playing rugby and was cut from the team as a result. Caleb continued to attend school for 5 years and graduated with his bachelor's degree.

David is a 26-year-old student from Los Angeles, CA. David attended a junior college and transferred to a private university in California where he currently attends and is in his 5th year of school. David was found to be eligible as a student with an SLD and received academic support services with goals and objectives within the IEP process. David ran track while attending junior college and attempted to continue running track upon transferring to the private university; however, he discontinued it to focus on academics. David will achieve his bachelor's degree in spring 2023 and intends to attend graduate school in the fall.

Elijah is a 27-year-old professional basketball player who was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. Elijah was recruited and received a 4-year scholarship to attend a university on the East Coast for 2 years prior to entering the NBA draft. Elijah was determined to have an educational eligibility of ADHD upon entering his freshman year of college and was prescribed medication. Elijah currently plays professional basketball overseas.

Ethan is a 26-year-old high school counselor from Baltimore, MD. Ethan was diagnosed by his pediatrician with ADHD in elementary school and was prescribed medication. Ethan did not receive educational support services from kindergarten through 12th grade. Ethan played football for 4 years and attended college on the East Coast for 4.5 years. Ethan comes from a family of football players and was recruited and received a scholarship to attend college. Ethan achieved his master's degree after completing his football career.

Gabriel is a 32-year-old professional basketball player from Los Angeles, CA. Gabriel played in the southern region of the United States for 2 years where he was recruited and

provided with a 4-year scholarship. However, he attended school for only 2 years prior to entering the NBA draft. Gabriel was diagnosed with an educational eligibility of OHI with behavioral characteristics of ADHD while in the 12th grade. However, he did not receive academic support via an IEP. Upon entering college, he was reassessed by the athletic academic advisement team which determined the continued existence of ADHD. Gabriel was recommended and prescribed medication to curtail his behaviors to ensure that he focused in the classroom and on the court. Gabriel is currently playing overseas and has expressed interest in being an ambassador and spokesperson for individuals with ADHD once he retires.

### *Codes and Themes*

I created codes that were utilized within the Nvivo software to aggregate the themes. Subthemes evolved from those themes to hone in on the essence of thoroughly answering the research question and subquestions. Table 5 includes the themes and subthemes along with their definitions. There are a total of six themes and twenty subthemes.

**Table 5**

### *Themes and Subthemes with Definitions*

	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Student-athlete's knowledge of disability</b>	First exposure to knowledge of disabilities, educational rights	Awareness of disability, whether diagnosed by a pediatrician or determined to be eligible by the school psychologist in the school setting (K-12) and assessments and diagnosis through the university process
	Schools' knowledge of student's disability	
	ITP exposure or lack of ITP exposure	

	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Components of self-advocacy</b>	Ability to reach goals	Students' learning components of self-advocacy through their parents or advocates. The ability of athletes to utilize their voices for their goals and what they wanted to achieve, whether it be athletics at a professional level, graduation, or whatever goal the student-athletes sought to achieve.
	Ability to communicate for rights	
	Learned aspects of self-advocacy	
	Parental demonstration of advocacy	
<b>Impact of self-involvement</b>	Impact of balancing athletics and school	The impact of being Black, an athlete, and having a disability have on being involved in the campus environment
	Involvement affected by having a disability	
	Involvement impacted by being an athlete	
	Access to facilities because of athletic status	
<b>Relationship/ Interactions with coach</b>	Interest convergence; the interest of the coach versus the interest of the student-athlete	Student-athletes' ability to have a relationship with their coach and the coach has the student-athletes' best interest.
	Support of the coach for the player	
	The impact of the race of the coach	

	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Athletes' interactions with advisors</b>	Advisor-athlete relationships perception	Athletic advisors listening and tuning into the voices of athletes and their needs; the relationships that evolved and existed between the athlete and the advisor.
	Experiences of racism, microaggressions through advisement	
	Advisor knowledge of disability	
<b>Athletes' interactions with professors</b>	Professors' lack of knowledge of working with students with disabilities	The experiences of racism (the student perceiving a difference in treatment possibly due to race), microaggressions (student not being allowed to utilize accommodations (i.e., assistive technology) through interactions.
<b>Athletes' interactions with professors (cont'd)</b>	The athlete's experiences of racism and microaggressions through interactions with instructors	
	Professors' Perception of student-athletes	

Six themes were formed from the use of qualitative data from the interviews conducted with eight participants. Themes were derived and notated with their respective definitions. Further analysis produced 20 subthemes which were grouped under the six identified themes. The themes and definitions aligned with the subthemes to answer the overarching question and subquestions related to the theoretical framework and relevant theories related to this research. Data were derived from the literature, evaluated, and sorted into themes.

## Theme 1: Knowledge of Disability

The Knowledge of Disability topics and subthemes are listed in Table 6. The overarching themes and subthemes center on the Black student-athletes' awareness of their own handicap and the ITP process, as well as the awareness of their institution or university.

**Table 6**

*Knowledge of Disability: Themes and Subthemes Within the Data*

Theme	Subthemes	Sources	References
Student-athlete's knowledge of disability			
	First exposure to knowledge of disabilities, educational rights	6	8
	School's knowledge of student's disability	4	6
	ITP exposure or lack of ITP exposure	2	3

The participants were questioned about their first understanding or knowledge of having a hidden disability and asked how they were made aware of their educational rights. Of the eight participants, two reflected on elementary school, three on middle school, one on high school, one on college, and one was unsure of when he first became fully aware of his disability.

Oh, around first grade, that's what I noticed. It was a struggle. I was in a general education class in first grade. And I really struggled. I remember with reading, writing, and math, it was, it was a huge struggle. (David)

I think I was in the fourth grade. Fourth or fifth grade? It was around that time. Yeah. When I was younger, I kind of just saw it as I was hyper and couldn't sit still and stuff like that. But now I understand that it can cause a fluctuation of, like, your emotions, your eating habits, your sleeping patterns, and all kinds of things. So, now that I'm older, and

I've tried to do a lot more research, so that I'm able to, you know, give myself the things that I need. (Ethan)

I feel like I was, I wouldn't say more in middle school. It's kinda like I became more aware. And then, yeah, just think that came through like my education throughout like middle school, elementary school, middle school, high school, just learning what helped me learn individually. (Caleb)

I would say around 15 or 16 I found out. Because when I was like 12, or 13, I was, like, joking around saying that I had it (ADHD). And then, like 15 or 16, when I researched and looked around and looked into it, that is when I, that's when I figured out that I had it. (Elijah)

The participants were asked questions regarding the college or university they attended, awareness of their disability, and how it was disclosed to members of the college community such as coaches, advisors, and their universities disability support offices. Of the eight participants, seven shared that it was communicated either through their recruitment process via the coaches or through their enrollment process.

So, when I got to the university, they would pretty much have like it was like two days and it was like two hours almost like a test and then they had like different puzzles they showed me different puzzles. (Elijah)

I didn't really make a big deal out of it in college. Simply because at that time, I still just didn't know everything that came with it. I kind of just push through it. I'm sure it affected me more than I realized. (Ethan)

They started asking me questions about it, and then I was able to talk with my advisor. And my advisor did another test after my placement test, and then I was diagnosed. And once they did that, they saw that I didn't do well on the test. So, they discovered ADHD. (Gabriel)

I told a few people, I told my coach before going on to the team, I let him know just like, hey throughout school and I had a learning disability. (Caleb).

Well, my coaches knew. And then my academic advisor knew. They all knew but the one person that I had was as a one-on-one. She knew, so she started off as a tutor, my first year. (Amos)

During the time that they brought me in to play, they started to have more and more athletes that had disabilities. So, I was like, the first one. And then after that, they started to be like, wait a minute, these dudes, they got disabilities, they can play football. The

academic advisor pulled me out of practice one time and training camp my freshman year. And he took me to this place. It was kind of like doing our own IEP. (Amal)

There were five students who reported having an IEP. However, one vaguely remembered the ITP process, and one participant participated fully in the ITP program and process. This participant shared his perspective regarding the process and how he appreciated the autonomy. However, he believed that it was a process not geared towards higher education.

At my high school how they did this, it was like a program, it was called DOTS. And I remember once a month coming to talk to us about careers, you know, what, you know, what kind of job or career you want to go to after college. Like, we didn't go on college trips, we would go to your local community, we went to actually one community college, we just went to one. (David)

## **Theme 2: Components of Self-Advocacy**

Table 7 summarizes the sources and references on Self-Advocacy's various aspects according to overarching themes and their constituent subthemes.

**Table 7**

*Components of Self-Advocacy: Themes and Subthemes Within the Data*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
Components of self-advocacy	Ability to reach goals	5	5
	Ability to communicate for rights	6	11
	Learned aspects of self-advocacy	5	8
	Parental demonstration of advocacy	7	10

In this theme of self-advocacy, there were four subthemes. Respondents discussed their experiences with and perspectives on self-advocacy, including the role their parents had in their development and the ways in which they were able to speak with others and recognize opportune moments that helped them achieve their goals.

Three of the eight participants spoke about their ability to reach their goals and what components or aspects of their college experience assisted them in reaching their goals.

I've reached my goals in football. (Amal)

So, here's the thing. That's why that is very odd to people is very strange, because like I said, the way they approach it is, you know, they kind of have that attitude, just like your boss would at work. Or it's like, if you want to succeed, you have to do this, and they're gonna be tough on you to do it, right. (Amos)

Like it helped me get to my dream. And like I said, like, what I wanted to do was playing the NBA. And they helped me do that, you know. And that's the team that believed in me. (Elijah)

So, you know, just being a young man, you know, and being away from home, I think that some of some of the things that I was kind of going through was kind of fear, you know, felt the fear of not, you know, not making it or fear of not doing well enough in school to not being able to play and, you know, never had fear on the court. But it was a lot of fears for me off the court, which kinda, you know, made me put my guard up. But my goal was the NBA. (Gabriel)

Seven of the eight participants discussed their ability to express their needs, and the factors that inhibited them from expressing their needs, or expressing their journeys to those close to them for fear of how they would be perceived.

I didn't want to talk and I didn't want people to find out if I start talking like he got he can't read he can't write but I didn't know if you can't read right when we talk but that's I looked at it and I isolated myself from a lot of people I don't even have relationships with my college teammates at all because I didn't really talk to, I talked to a lot of them here and there. I know we shared the same struggle. We didn't, we didn't really like, tell each other we struggled. It was a nightmare. (Amal)

100% for sure. And, like, that's one of the benefits of me, like, being younger, the benefits of me being the youngest is that, you know, growing up, you can watch and learn. Kinda like what to do, like what not to do, like, you know, learn from the mistakes, the positive, the good and the bad, you know? And, and, kind of understanding I had

three of my brothers go, the one before me, so I kind of understood what to plan overseas. So, I'm playing overseas, one of them is playing in the NBA. So, I kind of, they really advocated for me, especially like basketball and then school, they really helped me and told me what it was like. (Elijah)

In class I would say I'm gonna use this recording device to record lectures. Some teachers had a problem with things and now you can't use it. Yeah, just think that came through like my education throughout like elementary school, middle school, high school, just learning what helped me learn individually. And then I was called to my professors like, hey, like, I know, this is how you teach. But me personally, like, if you were just to slow it down a little bit or use different examples that would really help me or if you would draw pictures, or if we were like looking at a YouTube video. (Caleb)

I had the meeting, the IEP meeting, they were really impressed. I went to a couple places, so I went to the DSPS office. And then also I gave it this other site. This group, I can't remember what it was called, I think it was called, like, Project Learn or something. (David)

Yeah, I did advocate for myself and express how I felt, like even with the tutors, or, because, that is, I am generally, I just kind of say what's on my mind. And just generally speaking, so if I felt some type of way, if it was too much pressure or anything, like I suppress it, because I don't like, you know, saying anything. I wish I could have said that or did that differently. I kind of just, you know, do or say, pretty much how I feel, real emotional for sure. (Elijah)

With the first two head coaches, I definitely think I was an advocate for, for us as players. And those two coaches kind of wanting me to be because they understood the knowledge that I had from, from my father and from always being around it (football). So, they definitely wanted me to be an advocate for our team and speak up if I felt like something wasn't going right, or if I had ideas that I think needed to be brought to light. (Ethan)

There's definitely a lot less comfortability, you know, still trying to get to know everything with a changing environment. And you know, so a lot of adjusting. And I probably didn't advocate for myself as much because there wasn't the same level of comfortability, like, just, in the first meeting of people (once transferring to the university). (Adina)

Participants were asked questions regarding who their first advocates in academics and sports were and how they influenced them to speak up for themselves. Five of eight participants were able to recall who they felt were their first advocates.

Both of my parents were advocates, my dad was more of the one he used to go to classes, he was making sure you know, he made sure you know, doing your work. And then he'll make sure that wasn't like a troublemaker class. And, you know, if I have a problem with

the teacher, make sure you call me. My mom was more of like, okay, I'm just gonna do the education part. (Amal)

My grandmother was the biggest for sure. Oh, my grandmother would advocate for me by being in the school where she would come up to the school and talk to the teachers about things that are needed or for progress that needed to be made. And my grandfather will be at all my practices, so he was always talking to, to the coaches about, you know, what I needed to work on. (Amos)

My, my mom, just in the sense of like, she kind of knew what, what I was looking for. Like education was like, what helped me, like, being around in closed spaces. So, teachers who have, like, more of, like, a one-on-one type of scenario. She always, like, come to my IEP meetings every year. (Caleb)

I've pretty much been the captain, team captain. So, but I would definitely say like, it's been a village that has been, you know, my advocate when it comes to running track when I actually sat, so the first time I sat in an IEP meeting, I want to say I was in seventh grade, and I don't know why it took that long. But seventh eighth grade, that's when I had sat in the meeting. But I, then it was around my junior/senior year, but I think my senior year, I actually did the meeting by myself because I was 18 at the time. (David)

My mom and dad. Pretty much my brothers. You know, me being the youngest, I will say that they always my biggest advocates playing at, you know, pretty much the highest level. They really helped me, especially me. (Elijah)

Participants were asked to reflect on specific acts of self-advocacy that they had witnessed, and seven of the eight participants recalled situations in which their parents took an active stance or made an adamant decision based on their academic or athletic circumstances.

My parents, they did the best they could, like they used to send me to like, like, little different tutoring places. But you know, they used to send me to different tutoring places, but it was like, how can I get better when I have no homework because we could never take our books home? So, it's like, it was kind of like a waste of money. It was like a daycare, like, I just, like we will watch your kids and just pay us. (Amal)

My mom explained my IEP to me and what I needed to learn. (Caleb)

My mom has been such a huge advocate for me, even currently now in college she still is a very big advocate and supporter for me, and I'm, you know, just so blessed and grateful to, you know, have my mom just really helped guide me just in the right direction. Regarding my education journey, and you know, I'm just so blessed and thankful, because without her, I would not be in any of the positive situations that I'm in. So, my mom is literally the reason why I'm here. Like, she gets 100% of the credit. (David)

Oh, no good. I did not take the medication the school gave me, nah, nah. Because my parents said, you better not take that, so I didn't take it. I didn't take it. (Elijah)

We knew that I had ADHD, but nobody really knew or what like, what, what all that came with. So, I think my dad did a good job of staying on top of me and making sure I got assignments done and making sure I had everything I needed for school, making sure that he had communication with my teacher. He was heavily involved. And because my dad was involved in athletics all my life, my dad was a college football coach as well. So, he always had a great relationship with all my coaches and kept open the line of communication with them. (Ethan)

At home, when it came to education it was pretty much my mom really trying to make sure we're situated. My dad came in, he was the expert when it came to that, you know, due to the simple fact that he never played sports on a professional or college level. But, you know, he played in, he played in high school, and he had a brother that played in college and could have potentially gone professionally. (Gabriel)

There wasn't a time where I didn't necessarily need somebody to speak for me. I can recall, like, when we went to the state track meet, I know, my mom coordinated with the coach, because we had to spend the night, you have to take the bus and stay in a hotel. When I was in college, when I got a visit to when I got, you know, like offers to get like scholarships and gotten visits. And I was like, about to go by myself. My dad was the one that ended up speaking with the coaches and was like, if I can't come my daughter's not coming. He ended up going on the scouting visits with me. (Adina)

### Theme 3: Impact of Student Involvement

Table 8 provides an overview of the sources and references by themes and subthemes that are associated with the components of Student-Involvement.

**Table 8**

*Impact of Student Involvement: Themes and Subthemes Within the Data*

Theme	Subthemes	Sources	References
Impact of student involvement	Impact of balancing athletics and school	6	11
	Involvement affected by having a disability	3	3
	Involvement impacted by being an athlete	10	10

Balancing athletics and academics as described by seven of eight participants is similar to a job. The participants reflected on the rigors of their day-to-day schedules and how balancing classes and workouts impacted their overall wellbeing.

Yeah, it was challenging because of football training. And the hardest class I had, it count six units. You have to take that class, you know, pretty much another requirement to graduate. It was a six-unit class. Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9am to 12. And oh my God, I had to take that class twice, but even regular students that don't have disabilities take the class two or three times. So, I got to take it the first time and if you get a D, you get the units. The professor knew I was trying, she knew I had disabilities and stuff like that. Took it again and next year I got a C. But the reason why I think I got the C the second time is I had a different tutor my last two years. (Amal)

We're just staying focused and then kind of just staying on top of everything I was able to do, classroom wise. Basketball wise, it was easy to focus, but in the classroom with my diagnosis, it was hard for me. Man, cuz I can't, it's not that I don't want to, I just can't. It's hard for me, because my team starts to travel too and everything else is going on. The most challenging part was the, the amount of work along with everything else that was going on. So, practice, like, it was a hard adjustment. In high school, you just show up for school. And then by three o'clock, you have practice, and you practice from three to five, or whatever it is, you go home, in college is not the same. In college, you have your workouts, like, you, we might get up for weights at 5:30 in the morning, and be done by seven o'clock. So, that's a two-hour weightlifting session, then you got to go to class, they're expecting you to stay awake, and the 2-hour lecture with the lights off in a big auditorium. And then you go, you'd have maybe three classes that are kind of similar. Then around two o'clock, you're walking down to the gym, and then you have practice from two to five. Like you get out at five, you get dressed, you shower, and then you have to go right to the study area. So, they have tutoring, which, depending on how many classes you had, you got to tutor from, let's say, 7:30 to 9:30pm at the latest. (Amos)

So, we would go to study hall for X amount of hours a week; I know, different coaches would have different hours. But I know our coach took us four hours for, like, the underclassmen. And then once you have a 3.0 and above, it turned into, like, optional, like, you could go to study hall, but it will look good for the program. So, you should go. You kind of have to, now, like hold yourself at a higher standard because like you're also representing the school too and then the academics as a part of it. So, I just feel like that was another challenge that I would personally face because I will try so hard in the classroom. Then I had to translate onto the field too. So, it's kind of like two areas where I had to, like, be good at. I would definitely say time management. Just knowing like, from the span of the week, I need to get x y & z done before I gotta go to practice before lifts. I feel like there is pressure to do well, or else you will kind of like, fall behind or get called out during practice or during our team meetings. It was a competition within the team, other than like building a brotherhood, I guess within a team was more so like competition. That's the kind of vibe I got from it. (Caleb)

Oh, it was a struggle. It was, you know, I think it was a lot of days where you're tired, I was tired. You know, it wasn't just like, mentally tired from home, it was physically tired as well, you know, even mentally, spiritually because, well, you're putting in that much work and effort and you're putting your body through an absolute wringer waking up at six o'clock in the morning, you know, getting to bed at 10:30–11 at night. Doing homework, you know, then you have to wake up you know, then Fridays, you have track meets all day you're traveling. So, all that plays a factor. It wasn't like I had, like, the actual college experience because I was doing so much else more. (David)

You got to think about it like being a student-athlete is more than, more like a job than it is being like a student. Like I told you, like I'll wake up at nine o'clock pretty much every day and get back at seven and looking back at it and I don't even know how I did this it's like this is crazy. You know, so I feel like it was more like an obligation than anything. And that's why one of the things too, I knew I wasn't going back to college as well, because I didn't like school. And there I felt like, like I was working a real job. So, I was like, nah, this is not for me. And I wasn't like I wasn't enjoying it fully, because of the obligation that I had, you know what I'm saying? With, you know, with extra tutoring classes, but knowing you wake up in the snow is to your ankles sometimes. (Elijah)

They tried to give me like Adderall and everything like that, but I never take it. Like, that's when they started accommodating me with extra tutoring sessions. Like right after practice, I have tutoring session. They may like 6pm, 5pm, 6pm was an extra tutor and I had to go back, so college was more like a job to me than anything. Because with basketball, with the weights, with the classes, and then a tutor, and I was not getting back to my apartment until like 7pm, every day started at like nine, so it was like, real hard for me. (Gabriel)

It was a requirement that you went to study hall. So, the requirement that you'd be a full-time student when you compete in sports. So, I was a full-time student. And then when I wasn't in class, I was at track practice, we also had to go to the weight room. And we also had study hall hours. You could phase out of study hall if you maintained a certain GPA for the school year. But in the beginning, you have to do that. So, I felt like I didn't have time because then once I was out of practice, once I was done with weight room and study hall, then you know I was either doing homework or trying to hang out, make some friends and hang out. So, I didn't have time to join a sorority if I wanted to do that or any clubs on campus like track was my class. (Adina)

The participants discussed that having a disability and coping with it may affect social relationships and being involved in the college experience, especially outside of their respective sports. Three of the eight participants spoke to how they felt affected by having a disability on the college campus.

I'd say it affected me. So, like, the whole time in college, I was pretty much like I was in high school. It affected me majorly, and socially because, you know, I didn't like, talk to people, I didn't talk to, like, girls. Like, I kind of like, stayed away from crowds or just people because I didn't want people knowing that I had an issue with reading or writing. It was more so like, just trying to stay away from people, just simply from the embarrassment of like, dang, how do you not know how to do that? (Amal)

It was the, the amount like the class sizes, I would, I had one class, it was Psychology, where the whole class was like the auditorium. And I was like, almost like a few hundred students. I'm just like, if I had a question, I wouldn't want to raise my hand because if I said something wrong I would deal with social anxiety. I would try to sit in the front. Oh, another challenge would be, or I would say like, picking, which teachers were more, I will say, like they would not be more lenient towards the student-athletes. (Caleb)

It's really been something that has had its challenges, of course, and it still is a challenge today. But I would say that, I do have to sometimes work two to three to four times harder than I guess, your average student, you know, we're taking in the material and working hard and even sometimes, that may not even sometimes be enough. (David)

The subtheme of being involved outside of their respective sports was described by the respondents, as well as the missed moments when they could have been involved or changed how situations were approached.

You get home, maybe get home around 10-10:30pm, depending on what's been going on. And then you might have to repeat that same process the next day, depending on what your schedule is. Outside of basketball, just in general, it was cool. I was able to make friends, I was able to, you know, socialize and, you know, do parties and stuff and, or whatever, and I was able to meet people in the Black Student Union. There was a lot of like, open mics that I would go to, because obviously, I played music. So, that was what naturally drew me in. So, I was able to meet people through that as well. Yeah, I was like, that was easy, because the way my personality is, uh, you know, and then I let a friend that was on my team that had the same personality as me like, we're just easygoing people and like, we're approachable. (Amos)

All athletic teams pretty much hung out with all the other athletic teams. I wouldn't say like, segregated, because like, they all know each other. I guess because it was such, like, a small school. We would have, like, get together or like team bonding experiences or exercises, we will go out for community service. (Caleb)

Outside of playing, we pretty much do everything together, because we all live together in the same apartment. So, that's one of the things that helped me out. It was comfortable. And I see that like none of the freshman's or anything like that stay in the dorms. Like, are you not sometimes, the freshman's will stay in the dorms. The dorms, everybody stay in the same apartment building. And that was a big thing as well. As far as like, other people being social, already, I wish I could probably talk more to other people outside of

basketball, but not really a whole bunch of connections were made outside of basketball. (Elijah)

Um, yeah. And I realize it more now because I have a better understanding of ADHD. When I was in college, I didn't really talk to anyone that didn't play football or wasn't an athlete. And that's something I will say, I struggle with my whole life. Like, I didn't like doing anything outside of my comfort zone. Like, I found what I was comfortable with and I just stuck to that. And up until a couple years ago, that's pretty much how I live life. So, I was comfortable with my teammates, those are the people I talked to, if I met some friends through them, and then cool, but I wouldn't really go out of my way to talk to anyone outside of my circle or make friends or get involved in campus activities. And it was something I now regret. But at that time, I just wasn't. I just didn't want to do anything outside of what I was used to outside of my comfort zone. (Ethan)

I would say not too much, you know, because number one, you look at kids nowadays, and they have more of a platform. You got to, you go on social media and things like that. So, it's easier to be accessible, you know what I'm saying? As opposed to back in the day, you know, which wasn't necessarily the case back in the day. The impact on me socially, you know, not wanting to come off as too hyper. You know, I think that I've gotten better, because that just comes with all you know, I think ADHD and maturity really, and immaturity doesn't match. So, I think, you know, I was very immature. But, you know, on top of ADHD, so it was kind of tough for me to, you know, put myself in, in different spaces. And then, you know, growing up for me, it was just a lot of basketball, basketball, basketball, and my family. (Gabriel)

My friends were on the track team, my friends were athletes. They were on the track team, the football team, mostly tracking, couple of basketball teams and a couple of volleyball players but for the most part track and football. (Adina)

#### **Theme 4: Relationship/Interactions with Coaches**

Table 9 provides information that was associated with the responses provided by the participants and their perspective of their relationships and interactions with their coaches.

**Table 9***Relationship/Interaction with Coaches: Themes and Subthemes Within the Data*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
Relationship/interactions with coaches	Interest convergence: the interest of the coach versus the interest of the student-athlete	6	14
	Support of the coach for the player	5	10

In investigating the relationship/interactions between the student-athletes and their coaches, two subthemes emerged from this theme. Seven of eight participants spoke about their experiences with their coaches. Reflecting on their interactions with their coaches, as well as the actions of their coaches, participants provided their perspectives on whether, in fact, their coaches had their best interest in mind for meeting their goals.

And I think they was, like, willing to do whatever to have success. And we ended up having, like, a lot of success due to the fact the top athletes they were recruiting. And the coach got fired, because we weren't graduating. And they got him out of there because we had the lowest graduation rate. So, the school was making the money they gonna say, Yeah, well, we keep that money. But I didn't reach my full potential in football due to the fact that nobody taught me how to play the position I played. So, I had a man who, man, had, I had to cut the coach. And this is where I learned, where later in life after I finished playing, where the learning disability kicked in. (Amal)

I think, like, now that I'm old, I realized that basketball or life, just sports in general, especially on a collegiate level, or even a high school level, you know, like, it's more of a business. And I think they think of it as, you know, this is what it is, this is, you know, just come with a territory, so you just got to deal with it. So, they weren't encouraged. And that is the mindset. I felt there was not a lot of empathy. Like, if I missed the tutoring session, you know, struggling in the class or whatever, even with tutoring, it was like, you know, they were, like, very, very non-empathetic to it, it was more like, okay, more tutoring, oh, extra tutoring. (Amos)

I was taking gross anatomy. And I wasn't doing so good in that class. So, I missed a lifting session for a study session. For anatomy class, I was like, I'm about to fail this class, I don't want to feel it. I rather go to the study session then go to weights. And then I

ended up getting in trouble because of that. So, after that moment, I was kind of like, you want me to be a student-athlete. But when I change my priorities, like I want to come here for school and not here for play and then I just thought it was crazy. So, I will say, a coach in particular, he would, of course, he would focus on academics, but I feel like his priority was just rugby. And then once I got injured, I got cut from the team. All like the support, like all the tutoring, all like, yeah. So, that's why I was like kind of thing. They kind of left me like, stranded. I remember like, I went to my coach's office and he made me sign something that kind of, pretty much reporting, I don't have, like, the same access. I don't have early registration to classes. I don't have the tutoring opportunity for that for student-athletes. I can't go into students like the academic hall or I can't go to PT. (Caleb)

The coach wanted me to stay for the, for the sake of the team making the team better. You know, if I stay there, it benefits the team. It helps the team. It's a better team. And then even when I went to the draft, was getting asked different questions and everything like that. Like, why'd I leave everything like that? I'm like, well, he said that at the, my freshman year, you know, they'd be good to go. He said you needed another year. It was more so I think the interests of beneficial for himself. If he keeps me, it keeps me there that the team would do well, you know what I mean? And that benefit? It makes him look good as well. (Elijah)

He was, he was more of an advocate to taking Adderall and things like that, it just, it is what he would have preferred? You know, you know, I'd be coming out of school, you know, being one of the top, you know, being the number one small forward in the country, and then a top player in the nation. You know, I knew that I wasn't going to be there that long. For the coach, I mean, it's a coach's dream to get a guy who can average 20 plus points a game to stay four years. (Gabriel)

So, but anyway, she (the coach who recruited me) ended up leaving, she was also a White woman. But you know, she saw something that I guess this coach wasn't able to see. And I don't know if it was for his requests, or who talked about it, but it wasn't discussed with me. They just made a decision and then when I came back next year, they let me know that they think that I would excel or thrive better if I just kind of focused in on my better events and not the events I was recruited for. (Adina)

I definitely think he had my best interests in mind. I think that coach cared about our team tremendously, especially in recruiting, because we were his first recruiting class. And he had, like, a vision for us to not only change the perspective of football, the football team on the campus, but student-athletes and the entire, like, school in general. And he put that on our shoulders, and we really try to try to do our best to, you know, live up to that. And when he left, it like, broke our hearts like we couldn't, we could leave it, but we understood he had to do what was best for his family. And even after he left, we still tried to carry on the practices that he taught us. And honestly, I felt like when other coaches came, there was some pushback with the new coaches in our class, because he felt like we still wanted to kind of carry on our old coach's ways, and he kind of didn't like that. So, we always kind of felt like those coaches couldn't wait for us to get out of the door, to be honest. (Ethan)

I also asked questions about family relationships beyond the recruitment process. The questions explored the existence or lack thereof of a holistic approach of the coach supporting its student-athletes.

My grandmother and my grandfather had relationships with the coach. It was a professional courtesy from the coach. Okay, almost along the lines it's like that he recruited us or he recruited the players. So, the relationship that he built with the parents, he kind of still wanted to keep those and not make it seem like, "Okay, I just was kind of getting cool with you, because your son." I think it was more like that. So, I would say professional courtesy to check on the parents or whatever. I just don't think coaches are that empathetic about, you know, tutors, especially when, let's say there's a group of people, there's a whole group of student-athletes who have to do the same thing. And it's in their mind, or in a normal person's mind. If they're able to do it, then you can do it, you just got to deal with it. (Amos)

Something that helped me was they will have you sign in for study hall when you come in, and also each day, they'll track your hours. And then by the end of the week, our coach will see, player by player, how many hours they went in the study hall. And if we weren't at the right hour, he would cut us from waves or cut us from practice. To kind of like, put us in like, oh, we messed up in this. So, we gotta like, focus on our study or hours, so we won't hinder our team. (Caleb)

So, I think I had like four head coaches while I was in college. The first one that recruited me. He was like an uncle to me. He was, he worked at University of Maryland with my father. So, he used to like training and stuff. He's always been like an uncle to me. So, me and him had a great relationship. The next head coach was the offensive coordinator the year prior. I had an okay relationship with him. I think he really cared about our team. We just couldn't put it together that year. The next year, that head coach, I had an okay relationship with yet, he just I don't know, that relationship was just I don't know. I just didn't trust him. And then the next one. I didn't play a full season for, but he was, he was. (Ethan)

I can say that I don't think he did (support me). But I knew that the coach who recruited me did it. I think most assistant coaches that brought you to the school as long as you're a kid, that's not a joke. I'm sorry, not a jerk. You know, I think they start to you know, they build a relationship, is that's all three years, you know, he's recruited me solid, a sophomore, junior senior. We built the relationship. Right. And, you know, and, you know, I had his trust and things like that. And, you know, we had a lot of conversations over the phone and me taking visits and things like that. So, I think that you know, you know, him being talking with my parents, anytime they needed someone to talk to about a situation happening or something that was going on. He was the one that they'll reach out to without reaching out to the head coach, and I think that's where they're relationship was built. (Gabriel)

One of my biggest challenges in college, just trying to figure out what I wanted to do. So, I think they (the coaches) had my best interests in mind as far as, like, okay keep your grades up, do well in class, you know, all that stuff so you can graduate. (Adina)

### **Theme 5: Athletes' Interactions with Advisors**

Table 10 categorizes the sources and references by theme and subthemes looking at the Black student-athletes' interactions with their advisors from their perspective during their collegiate experience.

**Table 10**

*Athletes' Interactions with Advisors: Themes and Subthemes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
Athletes' interactions with professors	Professors lack of knowledge of working with students with disabilities	2	3
	The athletes' experiences of racism, microaggressions through interactions with instructors	3	3
	Professors' Perception of student-athletes	3	4

This subtheme explores the relationship with the advisors and issues related to advising. All eight participants shared their interactions and experiences with advisors and how they perceived the advisors perceived them. Some of the participants spoke about tutors instead of advisors; yet, all spoke about some form of relationship.

It was a great relationship. I mean, it was, it was great. I will say it was like, she is like how you kind of be already with family. You know, I mean, you guys have those ups and downs. But at the end of the day, I knew that the stuff that she, you know, that she was pushing on me she wanted me to succeed. It wasn't that she, you know, disliked me or anything like that. So, we would have a lot of pushback on you know, I don't want to do the assignment. Now, I can do this at a certain time, but she knew I was a procrastinator. So, we were both hands on stuff like that, and we still have a relationship to this day. If I text her or whatever, if I need anything, I'm able to call or text her and ask her questions. And she has no problem, we meet up with her, as well as meet my wife for dinner and things like that. (Amos)

Yes, I had academic advisors, I had tutors. I had study hall every day, we had, like, mandatory study hall for students, they would bring incentives to the rest during study hall. We could, like, request what classes we needed to test for, and they would come to our study hall sessions. So, we had, we had good academics support, especially in my last two years there, my academic advisor, my primary academic advisor was White. And he was one of the main people that could tell if something was off with me. He had a great relationship with our team. Not everybody liked them, but like him because he was hard on us. But I think it was exactly what we needed. And it definitely got our program going in the right direction academically. (Ethan)

The relationship was really good. She talked to me. I mean, she understood what she was dealing with. And she helped out a lot. And she, you know, she made it convenient for me. If I told her, like, it is too much today, like, if I've been there, like an hour or so. One day then, she was like, okay, come in earlier this day. But the relationship was real good, though. Like, you know, she really helped me out a lot. For sure, she really wants to help to their job, like really serious. Because I know computer can be, I think she kind of, she worked at the school. And that was just like her main job was helping students, student-athletes. And being a tutor for student-athletes. That was our main job. So, she was nice. And she really, she really helped a lot. (Elijah)

You know, they every now and then they would give me Adderall as well, I'll take it every now and again. But I wouldn't, I didn't like, you know, take it every day. You know, and what else, but my, but my relationship between the teacher and the, and the tutor was, I'm sorry, the academic advisor and the tutor was really, it was really good. (Gabriel)

It was great. Not sure how other athletes felt. I look back because there were times where I might have just walked into the office like I need to talk to you. I felt very comfortable. The academic advisors were in the study hall and you had to make an appointment if you wanted to connect; they weren't just like, readily available. (Adina)

They were there to help, like, with the study hall, with our student-athletes, and they would occasionally like, check in, see how we're doing with our classes? How are we doing with our sports, how we're, like, handling ourselves off and on and off the field. And then when the time will come, which change our classes for the next quarter. They

will kind of like sit us down and check with us, like what we want to do with our career. (Caleb)

At the community college I had an academic advisor and extra tutoring. (David)

It was a nightmare because it was, like, more so like, just tried to pass each subject and I never was able to, like, to get the help to get better. So, it was like, yeah, we know you've been struggling, but it was like, we ain't got time to help you do better. So, I never actually got better. And then it was just like, I never got, I never got, you know, I never got to the mountaintop. Let me just say that. When it came to just getting better, well, just do the best you can. And hopefully you pass. It would be interesting to have a conversation with him now. That knowing that like all this information, with dyslexia, ADHD, and all these things coming out now to where it's like, like, when he looked at me, like he looked at me then or they look at me different now like, man, it wasn't survival, you know, using us. It was wild, it was just like, you just ask, you do the best you can, you know. (Amal)

One participant disclosed his thoughts regarding racism and how it affected him and his learning experience.

They keep bringing us the academic guy. He took a dislike, he didn't really like me, let's just say that. And it wasn't that I gave him a hard time, it was that he had to work harder. I feel like if I was his same race, I think he would have more empathy, more compassion, more love for me, more like, probably like a nephew or son or something like that. I mean, people don't want to include race with a lot of things. But you have to include race when it comes to education. (Amal)

This subtheme relates to whether advisors have knowledge of their student-athletes' hidden disabilities and whether they connected these students to the necessary services needed to access instruction.

I had ADHD, so it was hard for me to focus. By that time, I wasn't taking my medication anymore, because I didn't like the way that it made me feel. So, by the time college rolled around, I was trying to do everything, just on my sheer ability to try to stay focused in class and not the medication anymore. I had ADHD at an early age. I was taking medication for that in elementary. (Amos)

Through the center for students with disabilities I had a one-on-one tutor. Then they had offered a disability service where I could go, like getting more tutoring on the side. They also offered, like, a pen, that while in class, I can take notes and I can record the lesson. Like through audio. I get the pen with a certain notebook where I'll take notes or like, hear what the teacher was talking about. So, then I can go back and like, use what they offer that add service for disability. (Caleb)

The extra time on tests, if I wanted to, I couldn't take the test by myself. I couldn't take it by myself, but I could take the test before class or after class. Mainly the tutor would help and because they knew what I could do and you know, that's what was best for me at the time. I had my own tutor, though. (Elijah)

### **Theme 6: Athletes' Interactions with Professors**

Table 11 looks at the sources and references categorized by the themes and subthemes as it relates to the Black student-athletes' interactions with their professors.

**Table 11**

*Athletes' Interactions with Professors: Themes and Subthemes Within the Data*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
Athletes' interactions with advisors	Advisor-athlete relationships perception	7	12
	Experiences of racism, microaggressions through advisement	1	2
	Advisor knowledge of disability and accommodations	2	2

Four participants discussed specific interactions with their professors and how those interactions impacted them.

I didn't really have relationships with any of the professors. I had a relationship with one, and it was one of my music teachers. But as far as relationship, I didn't have any relationship with any of my professors. The majority of the classes were too big, and I didn't care that much to participate in office hours and stuff like that. I think I went every now and then, I was getting tutored, so I felt like I didn't, you know, I mean, I didn't need it. I would play the system, I would go and introduce myself and like hey, like, you know, me just talking to show my face. So, that now if my name ever comes up, they could put a name to the face, but I'd never like, went out of my way to have a relationship or like, have a constant communication with the professor or anything like that. (Amos)

I had a few teachers that was, like, they were really understanding and they really helped me through understanding certain topics. I had one teacher send me a zoom, and he even, during quarantine, was like just getting out of bed because he said I want you to understand this lab. He would break it down, step by step. He did that a few times, actually. And another teacher was like, “Are you having trouble?” and would say I could come by the office and sit and walk you through this protocol, and you can use me as an example as, like, how to read my heart rate or blood pressure. He also provided little tips and tricks, which was really helpful. (Caleb)

Students, and similar to my coaches, like some of my professors would notice when, when I was off, or when things were going on and stuff like that. And like I said, that's the advantage of having 10 to 20 students in your class, your professor sees you, she sees your face, she gets to know your personality. She knows when you're down or when you're happy. And I got to build genuine relationships with professors that I still talk to, to this day. (Ethan)

If I can remember correctly, I don't think my professors knew. Or maybe they maybe they did. Maybe they (the advisors) probably spoke with them because that was the reason why my tutor was able to sit in the back. (Gabriel)

Two participants diagnosed with an SLD shared how they believed professors lacked knowledge of learning styles and how that affected their ability to successfully access instruction according to their respective learning styles.

I was feeling like they needed more education about how to deal with, how to deal with that, like how to help people who have disabilities or how to accommodate to them. I feel like, because when I talked to him, like, there were some teachers who were like, nah, get ready, not not ready to accommodate, but they just weren't, like, educated on the topic. And some very close, not close minded with, they're just like, so set on like what they wanted to do, not open up to different, awkward different teaching strategies. I spoke the more people were to, like, use those resources, then they will have like, the result that they're looking for. I just thought they needed to, like, base, they will say one thing, but not really follow through with it. (Caleb)

So, one thing I've noticed, even at the current college I'm at, is that a lot of professors or teachers are not very trained on how to deal with students with learning disabilities. So, because of that, oftentimes, students, especially when they get to college, completely fall through the cracks. Because professors are not trained or well equipped, understand. Every student learns different. Right, you know, it doesn't mean that, you know, we're lazy, or we're not trying, it's just that we learn information differently. Along the lines, even kind of here, there have been professors that are even in that are teaching Liberal Studies, even be shocked that these professors that are teachings, you know, future educators and they don't even understand, you know, and that's the part where I find very scary, you know, because if you can't teach, you're gonna have all types of students. So,

you can't teach us and you don't know, well, how am I supposed to learn from you about going into a classroom, and you can't even help me? So, I think a lot of people just need to be, a lot of professors or teachers need to be, well, way more trained properly and better, and have a better understanding of students and understand that modifying work doesn't mean that it's a shortcut. (Ethan)

One athlete spoke to the racism that he felt that he experienced when interacting with instructors and how he felt.

They all knew that I had, you know, an IEP and all that stuff during this day. It was all cool. They all worked with me. Except for one dude. He didn't work with me. So, like, this class was a pass no pass, right? This class was hard for me. He knew the professor. They were the same. Same culture. Let me say that right. I think he was in on that sh\*\* too. Like, to me, I think he wanted to get me up on out of that school. He didn't want me to pass cuz if I didn't, if I didn't get the work in, you know. I was hoping I would have been eligible that season. (Amal)

I tore my ACL during practice, and I had needed to get surgery back in LA, and I had a doctor's note that was emailed to me. And I had to show it to my advisor, to the teacher, so I can miss that finals weekend of exam. And I asked her to take it online before I leave, and I showed her the, the doctor's note. She said it wasn't good enough. Like I just felt like she said no way too quickly. And I was like, come on. So, it's a valid excuse. And then I remember, same class to another person was injured. Missed a whole like, few weeks prior to the exam and missed the exam, they, and they're still able to take the exam. And the only difference was like, like a soccer player. (Caleb)

I think that as a Black man, automatically, you know, White people have a perception of you. Oh, this, this guy is dumb. You know, I'm saying because he's Black. And most of the time when you're dealing with White athletes, if you listen to what they're saying, they talked about how smart he is. Because they know from a standpoint of athleticism, and things like IQ and all those things, you know, they don't have that athleticism, but for some reason, they always say they have the IQ, right? Most of the time, that's why quarterbacks are White. That's who runs the team, you get what I'm saying, you know, team captains and things like that, you know, some of the time you have a White boy on a basketball team. You know, as he gets older, he's the one who's the captain. Like, I think that a lot of that comes from you know, race, especially going to school in the South. You know, I think that race definitely plays a somewhat of a factor you know, to a degree but like I say, you know, not knowing certain things, you know, being from LA we don't necessarily experience racism to us because of how diverse things are. (Gabriel)

Two participants spoke about how they believed the professors perceived, engaged, and interacted with them as student-athletes. One student attended a PWI and one an HBCU.

So, they don't want anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. Where, like, it's like a device or using an accommodation for a test, they don't like that. When I wanted to use

my recorder, like, let's say we're going over, like, a test or like an exam and they will not let me use my device. They will say they don't want you recording with, like, the answers or something, so you can give to other people. (Caleb)

I will say my overall relationship with my professors was good. Um, my school being a smaller school, the class sizes weren't that big. Like, my classes had about 15 to 20 people in them. So, our professors knew our names, like we knew our professors on like, first name basis, and got to build relationships with professors throughout the semester. So, even if a student is struggling, you know, your professor on a personal level, to where you can go to their office and talk to them, or maybe have a quick tutoring session with them. Or maybe they just like you enough to let you make up an assignment that you miss. So, I definitely think my professors made it a little easier for me to succeed. With going to a smaller school in general, I think it's advantage of going to a smaller school is the class size. Because I know, at some schools, there's classes, where it's like a lecture hall, and it's 200 people in the auditorium. If you're in that type of situation, your professor is not going to know who you are. So, I think in general, that's an advantage of going to a smaller school. (Ethan)

## Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the interview responses and questionnaires that were utilized to gain insight into and answer the overarching research question and subquestions. From the data presented, I identified six findings that are analyzed in Chapter 5. Those are:

- F1: There is insufficient training for coaches, advisors, professors, and tutors on diversity and inclusion.
- F2: Medication is increasingly provided in lieu of behavioral modifications.
- F3: There are insufficient systems in place to aid in the education of Black student-athletes with disabilities regarding self-advocacy, from the high school to the collegiate level.
- F4: Student-athletes tend to have a less well-rounded collegiate experience.
- Hidden disabilities tend to be ignored by professors and advisors.
- F5: The accommodations for Black student-athletes to address learning deficits are provided in the form of excessive amounts of tutoring.

## Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The chapter includes the context of the chapter; the purpose; and the arching question and subquestions; the findings derived from the research; the conclusions; implications for policy, practice, and scholarship; recommendations, an evaluation; and a summary.

### Context

This phenomenological study examined the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to engage fully in college life while utilizing self-advocacy, juggling academic and athletic obligations, and managing racial overtones. The overarching research question that guided this qualitative study was: What part, if at all, does self-advocacy play in the capacity of Black student-athletes with disabilities to balance athletics and academics? Together with the subquestions, this question served as the cornerstone for achieving the objectives of this study.

The following were the subquestions:

- SQ1: How, if at all, does the allocation of time between academics and athletics affect the student involvement of Black student-athletes with disabilities?
- SQ2: How do the tenets of CRT pertaining to race, interest convergence, and the voice of Black student-athletes being heard influence student engagement in academic advising while pursuing academic and athletic goals?
- SQ3: How might Black student-athletes who participated in the ITP process in high school use these skills to advocate for themselves in college?
- SQ4: How does exposure to the advocacy skills of family members affect the ability of Black student-athletes to independently advocate for their academic and/or athletic well-being in high school and college?

## Findings

This research was guided by the concepts of student participation and self-advocacy. Interviews with eight Black student-athletes with disabilities yielded the information used to form the conclusions. Literature and interviews were used to support the following findings, which serve as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations.

F1: There is insufficient training for coaches, advisors, professors, and tutors on diversity and inclusion. While certain instructors have received special education certification, they often lack experience with pupils of varying learning styles and an accurate grasp of the unique behavioral features of those with ADHD. They misunderstood the students with learning difficulties, believing that they were simply unmotivated or uninterested, when in fact they had processing deficits, a unique learning style, and a potential need for assessment and classwork accommodations as opposed to a curriculum change. The interview responses and cited literature were consistent.

I feel like they (the professors) needed more education about how to help people who have disabilities or how to accommodate them. I feel like because when I talked to him, some teachers were like, Nah, get ready, not ready to accommodate, but they just were not educated on the topic. And some were very closed-minded, they were like, so set on what they wanted, and that was not to do any different teaching strategies. (Caleb)

So, one thing I've noticed, even at the current college I'm at, is that a lot of professors or teachers are not very trained on how to deal with students with learning disabilities. So, because of that, oftentimes, students, especially when they get to college, completely fall through the cracks because professors are not trained or well-equipped. Understand? Every student learns different, right? You know, it doesn't mean that, you know, we're lazy, or we're not trying, it's just that we learn information differently. (David)

It has been found that student-athletes with disabilities benefit from comprehensive support programs that address both academic and athletic concerns (Clark & Parette, 2002). This support can be provided through interventions and strategies that are tailored to the ever-

changing requirements of a student-athlete with a disability, rather than viewing them as a participant in an athletic activity (Clark & Parette, 2002).

F2: Medication is increasingly provided in lieu of behavioral modifications. In this study, participants who were diagnosed with ADHD mentioned their college or university's use of medication to modify their behavior as opposed to changing their diet, modifying their behavior, or focusing on information that could be gleaned from individualized testing. The results from the individualized assessment could be utilized to determine alternative intervention and behavior support strategies.

He (my coach), was, he was more of an advocate to taking Adderall and things like that, it just, it is what he would have preferred. For the coach, I mean, it's a coach's dream to get a guy who can average 20 plus points a game to stay four years. (Gabriel)

Oh, no good. I did not take the medication the school gave me, nah, nah. Because my parents said, you better not take that, so I didn't take it. I didn't take it. (Elijah)

You know, they, every now and then, they would give me Adderall as well. I'll take it every now and again. But I wouldn't, I didn't like, you know, take it every day. You know, and what else, but my, but my relationship between the teacher and the, and the tutors, I'm sorry, the academic advisor and the tutor was really, it was really good. (Amos)

According to the research, coaches' and schools' priorities typically take precedence over those of the individual athlete. The dominant culture, which includes those who benefit from the talent of Black student-athletes, takes precedence over the student-athlete's best interests (Ingraham, 2020).

F3: There are insufficient systems in place to aid in the education of Black student-athletes with disabilities regarding self-advocacy, from the high school to the collegiate level. When entering high school, Black student-athletes with SLD and/or ADHD participate in the ITP procedure as part of the IEP. Students may increase their chances of receiving assistance from

college coaches and academic advisors if they employ their newly acquired self-advocacy skills by reaching out to professionals. There are still students who remain silent.

I didn't want to talk and I didn't want people to find out if I start talking, like, he got, he can't read, he can't write. But I didn't know if you can't read right when we talk, but that's, I looked at it and I isolated myself from a lot of people. I don't even have relationships with my college teammates at all because I didn't really talk to, I talked to a lot of them here and there. I know we shared the same struggle. We didn't really like, tell each other we struggled. It was a nightmare. (Amal)

Through the center for students with disabilities I had a one-on-one tutor. Then they had offered a disability service where I could go, like, getting more tutoring on the side. They also offered like, a pen that, while in class, I can take notes and I can record the lesson. Like through audio. I get the pen with a certain notebook where I'll take notes or like, hear what the teacher was talking about. So, then I can go back and like, use what they offer that add service for disability. (Caleb)

Conversing confidently dovetails with knowledge of self and knowledge of rights.

Knowledge of one's own requirements and how to get them are important to becoming an assertive communicator, according to the literature (Pipaş & Jaradat, 2010).

F4: Student-athletes tend to have a less well-rounded collegiate experience due to balancing academics and athletics. The schedule of a student-athlete is demanding and leaves little time for extracurricular activities outside of class, practice, strength and conditioning sessions, and tutoring sessions that tend to be increased by athletic advisement when a student expresses difficulty in a particular course.

We're just staying focused and then kind of just staying on top of everything I was able to do. Classroom wise, basketball wise, it was easy to focus, but in the classroom, with my diagnosis, it was hard for me, man, cuz I can't, it's not that I don't want to, I just can't. It's hard for me, because my team starts to travel, and everything else is going on. The most challenging part was the, the amount of work along with everything else that was going on. So, practice, like it was a hard adjustment. In high school, you just show up for school. And then by three o'clock, you have practice, and you practice from three to five, or whatever it is, you go home, in college is not the same. In college, you have your workouts like you, we might get up for weights at 5:30 in the morning, and be done by seven o'clock. So, that's a two-hour weightlifting session, then you got to go to class,

they're expecting you to stay awake, and the two-hour lecture with the lights off in a big auditorium. (Amos)

It was a requirement that you went to study hall. So, the requirement that you'd be a full-time student when you compete in sports. So, I was a full-time student. And then when I wasn't in class, I was at track practice, we also had to go to the weight room. And we also had study hall hours. You could phase out of study hall if you maintained a certain GPA for the school year. But in the beginning, you have to do that. So, I felt like I didn't have time because then once I was out of practice, once I was done with weight room and study hall, then, you know, I was either doing homework or trying to hang out, make some friends and hang out. So, I didn't have time to join a sorority if I wanted to do that or any clubs on campus, like, track was my class. (Adina)

According to the data, athletes spend around 50 hours every week participating in sporting events and activities. About 50 hours are put in each week (Penn et al., 2015) between various activities including practice, team meetings, film analysis, strength training, game contests, and travel. The data and literature speak to the student-athlete managing their time to maintain eligibility to compete at the highest collegiate level to fulfill their scholarship responsibilities and achieve their goals. Penn The demands of balancing this type of schedule while attempting to concentrate on academics, particularly while attempting to learn material according to one's cognitive strengths, are challenging. Moreover, this balancing act tends to hinder the student-athlete's ability to maximize instruction at a level commensurate with peers who do not participate in athletics or have hidden disabilities.

F5: Hidden disabilities tend to be ignored by professors and advisors. Some professors' lack of understanding of an SLD and/or ADHD, coupled with their preconceived notions of Black students, creates an environment that is not conducive to these students. The stereotype of the Black athlete, exacerbated by the fact that these students have disabilities, does not facilitate the attention that they require. This lack of attention may cause the student to "shrink" or not self-advocate as they do not want to be perceived as dumb or lazy.

I had ADHD, so it was hard for me to focus. By that time, I wasn't taking my medication anymore, because I didn't like the way that it made me feel. So, by the time college rolled

around, I was trying to do everything, just on my sheer ability to try to stay focused in class and not the medication anymore. I had ADHD at an early age. I was taking medication for that in elementary. (Amos)

I didn't really have relationships with any of the professors. I had a relationship with one, and it was one of my music teachers. But as far as relationship, I didn't have any relationship with any of my professors. The majority of the classes were too big, and I didn't care that much to participate in office hours and stuff like that. I think I went every now and then. (Amos)

I think that as a Black man, automatically, you know, White people have a perception of you. Oh, this, this guy's dumb, you know, I'm saying because he's Black. And most of the time when you're dealing with White athletes, if you listen to what they're saying, they talked about how smart he is. Because they know from a standpoint of athleticism, and things like IQ and all those things, you know, they don't have that athleticism, but for some reason, they always say they have the IQ, right? (Gabriel)

F6: The accommodations that are provided for Black student-athletes to address learning deficits are provided in the form of excessive amounts of tutoring. When student-athletes are not performing well academically or are having classroom difficulties, they receive more tutoring. If a student encounters difficulties or needs accommodations, such as taking an exam in a monitored area, the adviser may request assistance from professors. However, if the student advocated for themselves with the assistance of the university's disability resource center, they faced greater obstacles because professors were not receptive of the center's recommendations for students with disabilities. The Black student-athlete appeared to benefit more from the intimate environment typical of HBCUs than from a PWI with a greater emphasis on athletics, possibly because the professor or advisor was better able to assess the level of assistance the student required to succeed in smaller classes.

Like, if I missed the tutoring session, you know, struggling in the class or whatever, even with tutoring, it was like, you know, they were, like, very, very non empathetic to it, it was more like, okay, more tutoring, oh, extra tutoring. (Amos)

The academic advisors were in the study hall and you had to make an appointment if you wanted to connect; they weren't just like, readily available. (Adina)

My school being a smaller school, the class sizes weren't that big. Like, my classes had about 15 to 20 people in them. So, our professors knew our names, like we knew our professors on like, first name basis, and got to build relationships with professors throughout the semester. So, even if a student is struggling, you know, your professor on a personal level, to where you can go to their office and talk to them, or maybe have a quick tutoring session with them. Or maybe they just like you enough to let you make up an assignment that you miss. So, I definitely think my professors made it a little easier for me to succeed. With going to a smaller school in general, I think it's advantage of going to a smaller school is the class size. (Ethan)

## **Conclusions**

The intent of this research was to explore the impact of self-advocacy and student involvement as it relates to Black student-athletes with disabilities. Of six main subjects, 20 subthemes emerged that speak to self-advocacy of Black student-athletes' understanding and memory of their disability. A deeper understanding of the educational system and the ways in which well-informed students were able to perceive and communicate with the institution was also revealed via an examination of these themes and subthemes. Through interviews, participants described how they learned about their disabilities for the first time and the college-level accommodations they were able to access. Black student-athletes with disabilities struggle with balancing their schedules, being an athlete, and feeling somewhat isolated from the rest of the student body in these themes. It can be difficult to traverse a college campus with a hidden disability.

Based on the findings, there were three conclusions that emerged. In K–12 settings, and as was observed in the research at the collegiate level, there is an increase in the number of Black student-athletes who are diagnosed with SLDs and/or ADHD. To help these individuals access coursework and achieve their personal, intellectual, and/or athletic goals, those who engage with them must be aware of the specialized academic instruction that is necessary.

Another conclusion drawn from the findings is that Black student-athletes with disabilities may possess a sense of inadequacy, and some may have social fears that are associated with their disability, which hinders them from fully taking advantage of the collegiate experience. Students were discovered to have ties with their fellow athletic peers, yet this sense of comfortability may have been the cause of their limited ability to venture out. This might be because of the strict academic and athletic schedules, as well as the belief that all athletes should receive support services and attend study hall in spaces designated for athletes.

Negative interactions between Black student-athletes with disabilities in their relationships with professors, coaches, advisors, and tutors have an impact on the student's ability to achieve the success they desire as a college student. These negative interactions may be due to professors' or academic advisors' racial perceptions or opinions regarding Black athletes. Professors and athletic and academic advisors may believe that a Black student-athlete does not belong or that it is more difficult to make accommodations for the student to keep them eligible to play their respective sports.

The literature revealed three aspects of intersectionality: themes associated with being Black, being a student-athlete with a disability, and the policies and guidelines that govern athletic departments' methods of working with this population. The notions of self-advocacy, self-confidence, and goal setting at the beginning of the Black student-athlete with disabilities' collegiate recruitment process that transitions to the initial moments of being on the college campus are indicators of future success in college.

### **Implications**

These findings suggest that better understanding is needed around the educational paths taken by Black student-athletes with disabilities and the lack of self-advocacy that prevents them

from achieving their objectives. This study examined themes pertaining to family advocacy as well as self-involvement and internal issues relating to their learning and/or behavioral disability. It looked at their navigational skills and whether they were successful in achieving their goals. Clark and Parette (2002) discussed the challenges students with disabilities face on college campuses, including adjusting to contending demands, responding to negative stereotypes, requiring specialized support services, and managing with a learning disability.

Implications for this study are referenced in three areas: policy, practice, and scholarship. Data from the research are the basis for these implications and how they could prove beneficial for the betterment of assisting Black student-athletes with disabilities to self-advocate and become involved.

In policy, for school districts/administrations, student education needs to be revisited to determine the quality of student involvement in the ITP process and to develop the parameters of the career and transition programs to place emphasis on the student's desires and goals. Further, parents and students could benefit from workshops and enhanced educational programs with emphasis on collegiate athletic programs and the collegiate student disability resource center.

In addition, these findings suggest, from a policy standpoint, that the distribution of medication at the college level is problematic. Although students are typically at least 18 years old when they enroll in college, these student-athletes' families were involved in the recruitment process and played a decisive role prior to their enrollment in the college or university. However, if the university determined that a student's academic eligibility is affected by the behavioral characteristics of ADHD, the athletic departments have prescribed medication to modify behavior. Interactions between instructors, advisors, and student-athletes should be evaluated by external entities to investigate unethical practices regarding the provision of medication in lieu of

diet modification or other alternatives. Specialized academic instruction to address the student-athletes' learning or behavioral deficits, concentrating on the root of the problem while freeing up time for student involvement or athletic development, if the Black student-athletes with disabilities so choose.

The study's results have ramifications for policies and procedures that athletic offices and the coaching staff can put into place to better support Black student-athletes with disabilities. To effectively advocate for the athlete, there is a need for sensitivity training on how to address unconscious prejudices and microaggressions that arise in educational contexts. The coaches' interests shouldn't come before the students'. For Black student-athletes with disabilities to feel connected to the college/university they represent, they should be given time for self-care, cultural exploration, and social-emotional development.

Finally, implications for scholars, professors, and academic athletic departments that work with this population are evident. While research on hidden disabilities does exist, the transference of the methods to best support students who need extra help from teachers and academic advisors at the collegiate level needs to be investigated. Best practices on ideas and approaches that teachers might use to make their lessons accessible to students with disabilities appear to be lacking. Research on the use of assistive technology and techniques for teaching students with hidden disabilities could prove useful for educators. The research from this study has shown that professors are less likely to allow pupils to use assistive technology due to a lack of familiarity with and training in its use. Research methodologies related to interventions and accommodations for students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD that facilitate access to specialized academic instruction for Black student-athletes may be beneficial to those working in higher education.

## **Recommendations**

The obstacles that Black student-athletes with disabilities experience are innate to their conditions, and they must be explicitly documented to be meaningfully studied. Empirically grounded research can be used to address the needs of Black student-athletes with hidden disabilities with an attempt to lessen racial or academic biases within the student body.

Recommendations from the research suggest that although it was demonstrated that students attempt to manage their behaviors without medication, the ease with which medication was prescribed should be investigated to determine how the medications affect student-athletes physiologically and psychologically, thereby affecting the athletic and academic performance of Black student-athletes.

Black student-athletes with disabilities could benefit from practitioners researching the impact of mentorship using a holistic approach, focusing not only on athletics but also on all ecological components (academic, physiological, and psychological) of the student-athlete and their impact on self-advocacy and student engagement.

Consideration should be given to conducting ongoing policy evaluations of the ITP process. The IEP should be revisited in light of student involvement considerations, not only the ITP section. It is more important that Black student-athletes have ample opportunity to learn about their impairment and the accommodations needed to succeed in higher education as part of the IEP process. Collaboration between high school and college athletic departments could prove advantageous for Black student-athletes by aiding in the transition process and contributing to their capacity to learn self-advocacy and increase campus involvement.

## **Evaluation**

From the six main subjects, 20 subthemes emerged that speak to self-advocacy in relation

to Black student-athletes' understanding of their disability and when they first become aware of having a disability. The analysis of these themes and subthemes also revealed information about the educational system and the confidence level of the Black student-athletes in their learning and communication with their academic advisers, tutors, professors, and coaching staff. In the interviews, participants described how they first learned about their disabilities and the educational accommodations they were able to access while in college. In these themes, Black student-athletes with disabilities struggle with balancing their schedules, being an athlete, and feeling somewhat isolated from the rest of the student body, in addition to having disabilities that make it challenging for them to participate fully.

Tenets associated with the theoretical framework of CRT, coupled with the theories of student involvement and self-advocacy, were utilized as the foundation of this study on Black student-athletes with disabilities. The interviews proved to be significant to the findings and conclusions of this research. A methodological approach could be used to interview parents about their experience and the plight they may have faced during their children's primary educational experience and then seeing that control diminish at the collegiate level.

The emphasis of this study was on the voices of Black student-athletes with disabilities being heard and providing the counter narrative; their voices and expression coming through the interviews provided insight on what it was like to be on a college campus and their experiences with balancing academics and athletics. The results fit Astin's (1984) components of the theory of student involvement and how they apply to the Black student-athlete when considering the concepts that deter student involvement. Dissecting the factors related to student involvement, such as physical and psychological energy, academic and athletic policies that impact student involvement, and the idea of learning and personal development being proportional to the quality

and quantity of student involvement, all have some alignment and connectedness when considering the balance of academics and athletics.

All components of self-advocacy related to knowledge of self, rights, communication, and leadership are factors that were reflected in various facets of the research when evaluating the findings. Through the research process, it was enlightening to hear the experiences and thoughtful reflections of the interviewees regarding what could have been done differently and the self-learning regarding their disability that the participants have acquired over time. Their responses highlighted how educators, special education teachers, school psychologists, and K–12 administration could do a better job of engaging the student in the problem-solving process and presenting and discussing the IEP and ITP process to increase the Black student athletes' ability to advocate for themselves. Guidelines are in place and provide the provisions and regulations that should be followed in completing this legally bound document; however, some participants had no recollection of the ITP.

For a student to be successful at the college level, it is crucial to emphasize best practices and ensure that they are well-informed before they get to college. I would delve into the intricacies of the educational process and focus on administrative practices, contemplating what procedures are in place to evaluate these processes at the collegiate level and considering checks and balances. In addition, as a trainer of aspiring school psychologists, I will use this research to inspire future school psychologists to act as practitioners when advising their students with hidden disabilities on possible navigational tools that can be utilized throughout the transition from high school to college. Participation of school psychologists in the ITP process is essential because it enables school psychologists to provide Black student-athletes with insight into their

disability and casts light on the strategies required to improve learning and their access to college-level instruction effectively.

### **Chapter Summary**

I explored the experiences of Black student-athletes with disabilities and offered their perspectives on the self-advocacy skills they may have picked up from their parents, other family members, or the educational system for those who had IEPs from K–12. The study also looked at how well Black student-athletes with disabilities could connect with coaches, advisors, professors, and other university activities outside of their chosen sports. The themes and subthemes that emerged from this research served as support for the theoretical framework and pertinent ideas that served as the study's foundation. In Chapter 5, I evaluated the findings and conclusions and considered implications, recommendations, and evaluations. This study is a catalyst for the voices of Black student-athletes with disabilities as it relates to advocacy on all educational levels. Legal platforms related to student-athletes receiving compensation for their NIL have been litigated and now implemented for these students. However, there is a need for Black student-athletes with disabilities to practice self-advocacy skills to take full advantage of their collegiate experience and dispel the negative connotations that those in higher education may possess when working with them. Skills associated with self-advocacy and speaking up for their goals and objectives are advantageous for Black student-athletes with hidden disabilities. Those working with this population must remain aware that the nonexistence of a visible impairment does not imply the absence of a disability.

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## APPENDIX A

## Personal Contact and Colleague Email Recruitment

Greetings, Colleagues and Friends,

I am currently completing my Ed. D. in Educational Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. Research is a requirement for me to complete this degree. My study's objective is to investigate the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to participate fully in the college experience while exercising self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones. The study will investigate themes related to family advocacy and self-engagement.

Individuals who meet the following criteria will contribute to the research:

- ❖ Black student-athletes who participated in sports at the collegiate level.
- ❖ Are between the ages of 21 and 40.
- ❖ Have met the eligibility criteria/time frame for their respective sports according to NCAA requirements for graduation and/or leaving early to pursue professional sports.
- ❖ Have/had an educational eligibility of SLD and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) educational qualification.

Please contact me or have the athlete contact me directly at [trene.turner@pepperdine.edu](mailto:trene.turner@pepperdine.edu) or via cell phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your time, assistance and consideration.

Sincerely,

Trené L. Turner  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B

## Social Media Recruitment Flyer

**Seeking Young Adults/Adults****If you ....**

Have an educational eligibility of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and be at least 21 years old (ADHD)

Were a Black collegiate student-athlete who attended a U.S. college or university

Are comfortable reading and speaking in English.

*Then you are invited to participate in a study consisting of interviews and sharing of your college experiences!*

**Title of study:**

Academics and Athletics: A Phenomenological Study of Self-Advocacy and Student Involvement in Black Student-Athletes with Disabilities

*If you are interested, the potential participant will undergo a brief screening to verify if in fact they meet the criteria noted above. Once, selected, Trené Turner will review the next steps proceeding the questionnaire and interview process.*

**Time Required:**

ompletion of a background questionnaire

Willingness to participate in a 60-90 minute Zoom-recorded video interview

**Contact Information:**

For more information please contact:

**Trené Turner, Principal Investigator**

**Trene.turner@pepperdine.edu**

## APPENDIX C

## Recruitment Letter

*This letter will be used from information generated from personal contacts/ social media connections*

Dear Exceptional Athlete,

My name is Trené Turner and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study on Black Student Athletes who have an educational eligibility of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and I need your help! I am seeking volunteer study participants for participating in interviews, responding to a series of questions related to your experience. Interviews will take place over Zoom and will last approximately one hour. You will first be asked to complete a background questionnaire, which will provide information prior to the interview so that we can concentrate on the actual research questions. You may be asked to participate in one possible follow-up interview for the purposes of clarification that may arise via the transcription process while analyzing the interviews. Follow-up interviews will not last longer than one hour. To ensure confidentiality, the interview while over Zoom, the researcher will ensure that the researcher's space is free from outside intrusion or disruption. Anytime throughout the research process, you have the right to choose to discontinue participation without penalty.

Your participation in this study will help in providing insight to your experiences in the hope of establishing best practices for athletic personnel in development of intentional and culturally relevant advisement practices and services that better fit the needs of Black Student athletes with learning and/or behavioral disabilities. If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please contact Trené Turner via email at [trene.turner@pepperdine.edu](mailto:trene.turner@pepperdine.edu) or phone (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your participation,

Trené Turner  
Doctoral Student  
Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Educational Psychology

## APPENDIX D

## Screening and Scheduling Script Template

Dear [ Name ],

Thank you for your response and contacting me. My name is Trené Turner, and I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. As you are aware, I am conducting research on the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to fully participate in the college experience while engaging in self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones. This communication is intended to determine and confirm your eligibility to participate in this study. With your permission, I would like to ask you some preliminary screening questions. I appreciate you taking the time to respond to the following questions.

The following are:

- ❖ Did you participate in college athletics in the United States?
- ❖ Do you fall between the ages of 21 and 40?
- ❖ During high school or college, did you qualify as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?
- ❖ Did you meet the NCAA's requirements for graduation and/or leaving early to pursue a professional sports career in terms of eligibility and/or timeframe?

*\*If the participant's responses do not meet the aforementioned criteria, the researcher will thank them for their time and explain that they do not meet the qualifications at this time.*

*If the participant's responses meet the aforementioned criteria, the researcher will ask the following additional questions.*

- ❖ Do you feel comfortable discussing your eligibility for higher education?
- ❖ Do you feel at ease discussing race?
- ❖ What is the most effective method of contacting you? If mobile phone, what network (i.e., WhatsApp)?

*After answering these questions, the researcher will share the following:*

Based on your responses, you are invited to participate in the study. To provide you with the consent form, I would like to send you an email. Within the next week, I will contact you via telephone. I will review the consent form with you and answer any questions, as well as discuss the pre-interview questionnaire and schedule the interview. Following this call, I will send you an email containing a Zoom link to the interview.

The interview is expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes. The Zoom meeting will be recorded with your permission. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your identity as a participant in this study will be kept anonymous, and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the duration of the study and after its conclusion. Your name will not be recorded and you will be identified using pseudonyms to protect your privacy. The data will be stored on secure computer software that is password-protected on a password-protected computer device with separate and unique passwords for each. Once the data has been transcribed, saved, or printed any personally identifiable information will be redacted, and all

files will be stored on a password-protected device or in a fireproof safe. Regarding the storage and security of data, the Internal Review Board's guidelines will be followed.

If you have any questions, please contact me via phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or [trene.turner@pepperdine.edu](mailto:trene.turner@pepperdine.edu).

Thank you again for your participation,

Trené L. Turner

Doctoral Student

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Educational and Psychology

## APPENDIX E

## Scheduled Interview Confirmation Email

Dear [Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

Your interview is scheduled for (date) at (time) per our phone conversation on (date). The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes.

Below is the zoom link (XXX). Please be ready to join the meeting 3-5 minutes prior to the start of your interview.

If you have any questions prior to the interview, do not hesitate to email me at [trene.turner@pepperdine.edu](mailto:trene.turner@pepperdine.edu) or call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Again, I appreciate your participation, time and I look forward to our upcoming interview.

## APPENDIX F

## Informed Consent Form

**IRB #:**

**Study Title:** *Academics and Athletics: A Phenomenological Study of Self-Advocacy and Student Involvement in Black Student-Athletes with Disabilities*

**Authorized Study Personnel:**

Principal Researcher: Trené L. Turner

**Invitation**

Dear [Name],

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study conducted by Trené L. Turner under the direction of Martine Jago, Ed.D. at Pepperdine University. This form is intended to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate, as participation is voluntary. Before deciding whether to participate, you should read the following information and ask questions about anything you do not comprehend. You will be asked to sign this form if you choose to participate.

Additionally, you will receive a copy of this form for your records. Please email the researcher if you have any questions.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Black student-athlete between the ages of 21 and 40 who participated in a collegiate sport and had an educational eligibility of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Further, your ability to self-advocate and be involved in the collegiate experience during that time will be investigated as well.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

The purpose of the study is to examine the ability of Black student-athletes with disabilities to participate fully in the college experience while exercising self-advocacy, balancing academic and athletic demands, and navigating racial undertones. This study will collect and analyze data on the educational careers of Black student-athletes with disabilities and the lack of self-advocacy that hinder their pursuit of their goals. The study will examine themes pertaining to family advocacy, as well as self-involvement and internal issues relating to their learning and/or behavioral disability. It will investigate their ability to navigate the collegiate system as well as whether or not they accomplished their overall objectives.

**What will be done during this research study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short background questionnaire along with a 60-90-minute semi-structured virtual interview consisting of approximately 18 questions via Zoom video conferencing at a mutually agreed upon date and time. The questionnaire and interview instrument (questions) was created by the researcher and reviewed by the dissertation chair and committee. Two colleagues with research and interview strategy experience as well as expertise with the complexities of working with individuals with

disabilities and understanding student involvement and self-advocacy will be consulted to establish the content validity of the protocol. The interview will be recorded with your consent for the purposes of data collection and coding. You may choose to opt out of the study at any time without any consequences.

**How will my data be used?**

Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research question.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

This study poses a low risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional, and/or psychological distress because the interview focuses on your personal lived experiences encompassing sensitive subject matter such as race and racism. No anticipated financial, personal, social, or legal risks exist for participants.

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

While there are no direct benefits for the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to collegiate athletic advisement programs, including a greater body of literature regarding the opportunities to implement strategies and techniques to effectively support all stakeholders.

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

Participation is voluntary in this study. Other than deciding not to participate, there are no alternatives to participation. Participants can therefore opt out at any time.

**What will participating in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to the volunteer participant to be in this research study.

**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?**

Voluntary participation in this research will not be compensated.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

The primary concern of every member of the research team is your wellbeing. If you experience a problem as a direct result of participating in this study, you should contact the principal researcher immediately.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be de-identified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the researcher during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as a group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**What are your rights as a research subject?**

Before agreeing to participate or during the study, you may ask and receive answers to any questions you have about this research.

***For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.***

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You may decline to participate in this research study or withdraw from it at any time before, during, or after the study begins for any reason. Your withdrawal or refusal from this research study will have no effect on your relationship with the researcher or Pepperdine University.

**Documentation of informed consent**

You are deciding voluntarily whether or not to participate in this research study. Signing this form means that (a) you have read and understood this consent form, (b) you have had the consent form explained to you, (c) you have had your questions answered, (d) you will have the opportunity to review the research questions, and (e) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participant****Name:**

---

(First, Last: Please Print)

**Participant****Signature:**

---

Signature

Date

## APPENDIX G

## Background Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

---

2. What was the time-frame you attended college?

1 year  2 years  3 years  4 years

3. Where are you from?

4. Where did you first attend college?

5. Was that the only college you attended?

Yes  No

6. If No, What other college did you attend and for how long?

7. What sport did you play in college?

8. What is your educational eligibility? Circle one

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Both

## APPENDIX H

## Interview Questions

**One on One Open-Ended Interview Questions****Volunteer Participate information**

Interviewee:
Age range: (21-40)
Date and time:
Length of interview:

**Introduction**

Prompt	Check <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Greeting	
Consent to record	
Structure and definitions	

*Participant's Introduction – Review of the questionnaire and any follow-up questions.*

**Interview Questions**

1. What family member(s) do you feel was your biggest educational advocate speaking to teachers on your behalf?
2. Which family member (s) was your sports advocate when talking to coaches on your behalf?
3. Can you describe to me some of the academic challenges that you had in school (while in college and also prior to attending college)?
4. When do you recall having an educational eligibility of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?
5. What do you know about SLD and ADHD?

6. Did anyone explain your educational special education eligibility to you?
7. Do you remember the process?
8. Did you have an IEP?
9. Do you recall what age you participated in the IEP process?
10. Do you know what an ITP is? If so, do you recall the ITP process?
11. How did having this educational eligibility affect your level of involvement in the collegiate experience?
12. Was learning difficult for you, and what strategies did you use to make it easier?
13. Upon attending college, did you disclose your educational eligibility to anyone? If so, who?
14. What were some of the challenges that arose from playing your respective sport?
15. What was your involvement in your college campus outside of your respective sport?
16. What was your relationship with your academic advisor?
17. Did your institution have an academic program specifically for student-athletes who have an educational eligibility of a learning disability or ADHD? Can you describe the program and your involvement in the program?
18. Did you use any of the accommodations that were available to you?

**Closing instructions:**

Prompt	Check $\checkmark$
Express gratitude	
A follow-up to clarify?	
Study results	

## APPENDIX I

## IRB Data Management

## GPS IRB Data Management/Protection Plan

## Data Description

- Data collected during interviews via audio recorder device.
- Interview data transcribed by the transcriber.
- Data coded by the researcher

## Existing Data (if applicable)

N/A

## Format

## Metadata (if applicable) Storage and backup

- Voice recording data
- Metadata transcribed by transcriber stored on USB disk, and electronic file stored on secure Google software storage owned by the researcher
- Metadata coded from transcription data stored on USB disk, and electronic file stored on secure Google software storage owned by the researcher

## Security Responsibility

The researcher will have the responsibility of securing the data and metadata

## Intellectual property rights

The participants will own the rights to their stories. The researcher will own the rights to the metadata and the data analysis produced from the participants' stories.

A description of the information to be gathered; the nature and scale of the data that will be generated or collected.

The data gathered during this research study will include the personal lived college experiences of Black student-athletes with disabilities and their ability to balance athletics and academics.

A survey of existing data relevant to the project and a discussion of whether and how these data will be integrated.

N/A

Formats in which the data will be generated, maintained, and made available, including a justification for the procedural and archival appropriateness of those formats.

The data will be generated via a .mp4 file produced by an audio device recorder during scheduled interviews and stored on a USB drive and Google software storage folder owned by the researcher. The USB drive will be kept in a locked safe owned by the researcher and kept at the researcher's residence. Transcribed data will be generated as text files. Once the data is transcribed the interview audio recording files will be deleted. The transcribed data will be kept on a USB drive and Google software storage folder and stored for three years.

Storage methods and backup procedures for the data, including the physical and cyber resources and facilities that will be used for the effective preservation and storage of the research data.

Google software and a USB will be the primary storage method for the data— interview .mp4 files and transcribed data files. Once the research study is completed, the interview recording files will be deleted from both the Google software and USB storage device. The transcription files will remain archived for three years upon which time they will be permanently deleted.

A description of technical and procedural protections for information, including confidential information, and how permissions and restrictions will be enforced.

The technical and procedural protections for information will be as follows:

- Upon collecting confidential information (sensitive demographic information including name and age), the participant's name will be replaced by a pseudonym for identification.
- All data produced from interviews will be protected on secured, encrypted files and storage devices.
- Only the researcher will have access to this data.

What are the Names of the individuals responsible for data management in the research project?

Trené L. Turner, Researcher

Entities or persons who will hold the intellectual property rights to the data, and how intellectual property rights will be protected if necessary. Any copyright constraints (e.g., copyrighted data collection instruments) should be noted.

The participants will own the rights to their stories. The researcher will own the rights to the metadata and the data analysis produced from the participants' stories. No copyright is necessary for the data or data collection instruments

Access and sharing

*Audience*

There will be no secondary users of the data

*Who are the potential secondary users of the data?* None

Selection and retention periods – N/A

A description of how data will be shared, including access procedures, technical mechanisms for dissemination and whether access will be open or granted only to specific user groups. A timeframe for data sharing and publishing should also be provided.

N/A

A description of how data will be selected for archiving, how long the data will be held, and plans for eventual transition or termination of the data collection in the future.

All .mp4 files produced from interviews will be deleted once data transcription is completed and analysis is complete. The transcribed data will be archived on Google software storage drive and USB external drive for three years. After three years, the files will be permanently deleted/erased from Google software storage and USB external drive.

Ethics and privacy

**Participants' recordings and transcripts will be assigned a pseudonym to protect the identity of participants. Confidentiality measures include not recording the name of the individual and storing the information linking subject identity to pseudonyms separately from recordings and transcripts. If a breach in confidentiality occurs, there is minimal risk of harm to the participants.**

Each participant will be given an electronic informed consent form prior to participating in the interview. The consent form will outline what is required for their participation and what their rights are as a participant. These documents will be signed prior to the researcher conducting any interview.

The interview audio recordings will be uploaded to the Google software storage file and saved to an external USB drive as backup. Only the researcher will have access to both storage areas. The confidential information of the participant such as name, will be masked via pseudonyms.

The researcher will follow IRB's ethical principles including:

- Respect for persons; respect for participants autonomy
- Beneficence by maximizing benefit and minimizing harm
- Justice: equitable distribution of research burdens and benefits

Budget (if applicable)

Costs associated with this research study includes but not limited to:

- Costs for USB (external storage device) and Google software service
- Qualitative Analysis software (NVivo)

The researcher will not seek small grants for these costs but will be prepared to fund these expenses.

#### Data organization

For each interview, a new audio .mp4 file will be created. The naming convention for each file will include the pseudonym of the participant (male or female), the date of the interview, and a number associated with the number of interviews. For example:

Mary\_04222023\_1.mp4

(a female name) = participant Pseudonym

(2023) = date of interview

#### Quality Assurance

To ensure data quality throughout the process, the researcher will record interviews on two different devices in case one device has unexpected issues. The recordings can be checked during interview breaks for quality.

#### Legal Requirements (if applicable)

N/A

## APPENDIX J

## IRB Approval

Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Date: March 13, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Trene Turner

Protocol #: 23-02-2092

Project Title: Academics and Athletics: A Phenomenological Study of Self-Advocacy and Student Involvement in Black Student-Athletes with Disabilities

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Trene Turner:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

## APPENDIX K

## IRB Completion Certificate



Completion Date 05-Feb-2023  
Expiration Date 05-Feb-2028  
Record ID 54196784

This is to certify that:

**Trene Turner**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of  
certification through CME.

**GSEP Education Division**

(Curriculum Group)

**GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Pepperdine University**

**CITI**

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US

[www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w75f2266b-060f-4f7d-aa20-999bcf863ecf-54196784](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w75f2266b-060f-4f7d-aa20-999bcf863ecf-54196784)