"What Is the ROI on That?":
Examining the Lack of Transition Support for Collegiate Athletes

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While athletic role engulfment is positively correlated to athletic success, collegiate athletes also experience harmful effects from this role. As the socialization process to develop a salient athletic identity initially takes years, collegiate athletes typically face various challenges transitioning out of their athletic role. Although working within the contested and problematic context of intercollegiate athletics, athletic development staff are, ostensibly, employed to assist in the holistic development of collegiate athletes and occupy an integral role in mitigating athletes' transitions and athletic role engulfment. Accordingly, the present study sought to examine the experiences and programmatic elements currently utilized by athletic development staff. Through in-depth interviews with 10 senior athletic development staff members at nine Atlantic Coast Conference member institutions, findings illustrate the difficulties in attempting to combat athletic role engulfment due to contradictory logic between intra-institutional members. We conceptualize that such competing institutional logic serves as the primary detriment of collegiate athletes' preparedness for post-athletic transition.

Keywords: NCAA, athletic role engulfment, institutional logic, athlete well-being, athlete development

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2021, the top-ranked University of Alabama football program travelled to Bryan-College Station, TX to face unranked Texas A&M University. While even the most dispirited college football fan presumably remembers the outcome of this single game, few likely remember the postgame comments by

Alabama sophomore linebacker Will Anderson. When fielding a question from a reporter regarding the atmosphere in the locker room following the game, Anderson responded:

> We have to do a better job. Football has to be the most important thing. That's the biggest thing when you come to Alabama, that's the standard. Football is the most important thing, and that's what I expressed to the team, and that's what it has to be. (Rodak, 2021, para. 13)

Anderson's postgame comments were praised in the media as strong and emotional, positioning Anderson as an unquestioned leader of Alabama football (Potter, 2021; Smith, 2021). While Anderson's comments were perceived positively by members of the media and college football enthusiasts alike, they serve as an exemplar of the competing logic prevalent throughout the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in which a primary focus on athletics is *demanded* of college athletes, often at the sake of academic performance (Clayton et al., 2015).

As institutional logics are communicated and taught to new institutional members (Jepperson, 1991), Will Anderson's 2021 postgame comments exemplify a learned logic that positions athletics (i.e., football in this case) as of utmost importance. Such positioning of athletics as paramount, combined with the cultural glorification of big-time college athletics in the United States, contributes to athletic role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1991). While athletic role engulfment is in the strategic interest of NCAA institutional members (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a), numerous negative side-effects also manifest among athletes specifically (Adler & Adler, 1991). Given the distinct contrast between the NCAA's stated mission and the prevalence of athletic role engulfment, we sought to critically examine strategic initiatives among NCAA Power-5 member institutions that attempt to enable holistic athlete development and aid in the post-athletic transition. As the NCAA exists to enrich collegiate athletes' lives through "an environment that emphasizes academics, fairness and well-being" (NCAA, n.d.a, para. 1), such holistic development would, purportedly, fulfill the NCAA's stated justification for existence, and sustained relevance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Institutional Logics

Institutional theorists seek to uncover the role of institutional actors (e.g., employees, managers) in "creating, maintaining and disrupting" the institutions in which they work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Such work can be categorized as institutional in that employees create, maintain, or disrupt according to the pervasive institutional logic in a given institutional setting. The institutional logic(s) present within a given institutional field informs and guides the behaviors, practices, and ideological foundations of institutional actors. These accepted behaviors are communicated to institutional actors and serve as justification for institutionalized policies and practices (Jepperson, 1991).

The NCAA serves as the predominant figure in the organization and governance structure of collegiate athletics in the United States and is composed of nearly 1,100 member institutions (i.e., colleges and universities) that compete across three distinct Divisions (e.g., I, II, and III). The NCAA established the division structure in 1973 to "align like-minded campuses in the areas of philosophy, competition and opportunity" (NCAA, n.d.b, para. 1). Such institutional alignment conveys differing logics pervasive within each Division. Furthermore, Division I comprises the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and Football Championship Subdivision (FCS); further exemplifying the divergent structures and ideological approaches to collegiate athletics governance intra-Division. NCAA Division I FBS, for instance, is composed of 130 member institutions that are generally similar in their status as public flagship state-serving institutions. The varying divisions and subdivisions that compose the NCAA organizational structure are indicative of the institutional layers that comprise major collegiate athletics in the United States (Corr et al., 2020; Southall et al., 2023).

In the context of the NCAA, distinctive divisions and subdivisions (e.g., Division I, FBS) are guided by unique institutional logic(s). Such differing logic(s) reflect the priorities and practices present within

each institutional layer of the NCAA. Priorities and practices may be categorized based on each unique institutional layer of the NCAA's ideological approach to revenue generation (Corr et al., 2020; Southall et al., 2023). Whereas Division III athletics do not offer athletic-specific grant-in-aid (GIA) to athletes, Division I offers athletic GIA that covers all costs related to college enrollment and attendance. Such polarizing practices regarding athletic GIA are representative of the varying ideological differences apparent between each NCAA Division. Regarding revenue generation, Division II and III athletics are often universally subsidized by the athletic department's parent institution (e.g., college or university).

Division I FBS athletics departments, however, are self-sustaining in nature, particularly among Power-5 conference members; generating enough revenue to cover expenses, many of which are often exorbitant. The Power-5 conferences represent the highest level of competition in college athletics and comprise the most financially influential NCAA members. The Power-5 conferences consist of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference (Big Ten), Big 12 Conference (Big 12), Pacific 12 Conference (Pac-12), and Southeastern Conference (SEC). Some FBS athletic departments even operate quasi-independent of their respective parent institutions, establishing privatized organizations tasked with overseeing institutional-sponsored NCAA athletics (e.g., University of Florida University Athletic Association [UAA], Florida State University Athletic Association [FSUAA]). The holistic view of collegiate athletics as supplemental to the traditional collegiate experience postulated by the NCAA is dramatically different inter-Division. This difference largely indicates the opposing logics regarding revenue generation and distribution (Corr et al., 2020; Southall & Nagel, 2009). Such logics are institutionalized within the NCAA and exemplified among the Power-5 conferences.

As a relationship exists between winning games and revenue generation (Caro, 2012), Power-5 institutions significantly emphasize athletic success (Santomier et al., 1980; Southall et al., 2005). Accordingly, the importance of successful recruiting indicates the emphasis placed on winning within the Power-5 conferences. Such emphasis further illustrates the various components fostering athletic role engulfment embedded within the recruiting process. The societal glorification of Power-5 athletics participation and the role of institutional members (e.g., coaches, recruiters) in fostering athletic role engulfment contribute to salient athletic identity formation before enrollment in college and participation in college athletics. Even university faculty in Power-5 conferences may foster the athletic role. Stokowski et al. (2020) found that non-Power 5 faculty members strived to serve as role models for college athletes.

Athletic Role Engulfment

NCAA athletes assume a unique role-set that indicates the differentiations in the experience of college athletes and traditional students (i.e., non-athletes). As Berg et al. (2021) noted, college athletes, because of their sport participation, must manage unique stressors and different demands, such as the uncertain implications of an injury, frequent time away from campus to travel to competitions and coaching changes. Accordingly, the collegiate athlete experience is encapsulated in these distinct roles: athletics, academics, and social (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991). With the recent addition of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) to the collegiate sports landscape, such roles are further expanding with the addition of the influencer role (Fridley et al., 2023). Within the tenets of role theory (Biddle, 1979, 1986, 2013; Eagly et al., 2000), role dominance occurs when an individual role, or cumulation of related roles, becomes increasingly salient. As a role(s) achieves dominance, other roles within the role set are subsequently abandoned. Accordingly, an inverse relationship exists between role dominance and role abandonment.

Athletic role engulfment is the resultant effect of glorifying the athletic experience among collegiate athletes in the United States. While athletic role engulfment is correlated to increased levels of performance among NCAA athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991), athletes engulfed in their athletic role are more likely to experience many adverse outcomes. Often the primary role abandoned, academic dysfunction and failure are directly related to athletic role engulfment among collegiate athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1987; Corr et al., 2020, 2022a; Kidd et al., 2018; Snyder, 1985; Southall et al., 2015). In addition, extant literature has illustrated alcohol and drug abuse (Leichliter et al., 1998; Martens et al., 2006), ignorance of injury (Nixon, 1992), perceptions and idealization of body image (Steinfeldt et al., 2011), attitudes toward opposing genders and sexual orientations (Anderson et al., 2023; Curry, 1991), and difficulty in post-athletic

transitions (Stokowski et al., 2019) are overtly negative manifestations of athletic role engulfment among a collegiate athlete population.

While the social glorification of collegiate athletics participation inherently contributes to the development of a disparate social role, institutional members (e.g., coaches, administrators) occupy an integral position in cultivating and developing a distinctive athletic role. Such cultivation of collegiate athletic role engulfment – as differentiated from athletic role engulfment – largely originates within the embedded components of an athlete's recruitment (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a). Institutional work functions unique to collegiate athletics serve to foster athletic role engulfment and contribute to the development of a salient athletic identity. Examples of such work, athletic recruitment activities such as official visits feature significantly greater time dedicated to social and athletic activities than academics (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a). Official recruiting visits' marginalization of an academic theme positions athletic performance as the preeminent function of college athletes.

Evident of the preeminence of the athletic role within recruitment and participation in collegiate athletics, director of football recruiting, Nik Valdiserri, detailed the recruiting philosophy formulated by the football staff in a 2022 exposé on Vanderbilt University (Vanderbilt) football. While Vanderbilt is considered a prestigious academic institution, Valdiserri contended that to achieve the quality of recruiting necessary to compete in the FBS, perspective student-athletes must choose to enroll at Vanderbilt solely due to the football program:

> We're trying to send the message, 'You're not coming here for anything but to play football'…if we're having kids choose Vanderbilt football because of the academics, then we're doing an injustice to our program. This has to be a football decision (Raynor, 2022, para. 29).

Such primacy in the positioning of athletics participation directly contributes to cultivating and developing prospective college athletic recruits' athletic identity while also further stimulating athletic role engulfment.

This disconnect between athletic and academic roles is practically reflected by comments such as those made by The Ohio State University quarterback Justin Fields in 2019. Fields stated he had rarely, if ever, been on Ohio State's campus, except for the football training facility and Ohio Stadium (Kinsey, 2019). Furthermore, in 2013, then Texas A&M University – and Heisman-Trophy-winning quarterback – Johnny Manziel revealed he was only on campus once a month (Middlehurst-Schwartz, 2013). As a graduate student during his two years at Louisiana State University, quarterback Joe Burrow took almost all his classes online (Stacy, 2019). This lack of interaction with the campus or other students indicates the separation and segregation of profit-sport athletes (i.e., FBS football, Division I men's basketball athletes). This separation further alienates athletes from institutional members (e.g., students, faculty) and contributes to abandoning the academic role. In addition, academic admission standards may be adjusted for athletes (Olson, 2019; Taylor, 2012), with standards and expectations varying by sport as well as race and ethnicity. As evident by the disproportionately large graduation gaps between Power-5 Black football and men's basketball athletes and their traditional student peers (Southall et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2015), the lack of focus on educational outcomes is racialized. Accordingly, Black profit-sport athletes are institutionalized to focus on sports (Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2010).

Within this framework codifying competing institutional logics and the prevalence of athletic role engulfment among NCAA athletes, the present exploratory study sought to examine the strategic initiatives of NCAA Power-5 institutions in the holistic development of collegiate athletes and the support they provide during the post-athletic transition. Accordingly, the following research questions were developed to assist in guiding the study:

1. To what extent is a holistic athletic department prioritized among institutional members (e.g., administrators, coaches, staff) in Power-5 athletics?
2. How do athletic support staff perceive and navigate the juxtaposition between their expressed job responsibilities and the hyper-professionalized, -commercialized, and -commodified setting of Power-5 athletics in the United States?

METHODS

Given the affiliation members of the research team held with the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the conference was selected as the site to examine Power-5 institutional programmatic development of athlete development initiatives. Such convenience sampling is often resultant of the insular nature of collegiate athletes in which an existent relationship is necessary to overcome *outsider* status (Adams et al., 2014; Brown, 2012; Gutierrez & McLaren, 2012; Kihl, 2018; LoMonte, 2020; Southall & Weiler, 2014). As such, it is important to note that a research team member currently serves as an athletic administrator for an institutional member in the ACC. The insider status of this researcher provided access to institutional members in athletic development positions across the conference. While this researcher was primarily responsible for conducting interviews with institutional members across the ACC, steps were taken during the coding process to ensure rigor within the thematic content analysis of the data.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators representing nine ($n = 9$) of the 14 ACC institutions. A total of 10 ($n = 10$) administrators within academic services or athlete development offices agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom and lasted an average of 60 minutes. The use of a semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer the ability to cover individual topics in depth as participants introduced them. Broadly, interview questions sought to understand the systematic and programmatic components currently implemented by ACC member institutions to enable holistic athlete development and assist in post-athletic transition. Holistic athlete development within the tenets of the NCAA was operationalized for the purposes of this study as the academic, athletic, personal, professional, and social development of athletes while participating in collegiate athletics.

A coding schema was formulated and developed among members of the research team. Utilizing QSR International's NVivo software was deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study. It provided researchers the ability to utilize exact participant language in characterizing the extent of athlete development initiatives. Each interview was transcribed and disseminated to interview participants as a form of member-checking to ensure accuracy within the transcriptions. All documents were stored on a password protected device only accessible to the researchers and all identifiable information – both personally and institutionally – was altered to ensure anonymity among participants and their respective institutions.

A three-step coding process consisted of establishing preliminary codes, grouping similar codes in categories, and combining categories to determine distinct thematic areas for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the coding process, researchers compared notes to ensure consistency within the thematic analysis. The implementation of a three-step coding process by three researchers was undertaken to safeguard against any bias and establish reliable and triangulated findings (Patton, 2002).

Ten participants ($n = 10$) representing nine ACC institutions agreed to participate in this study. Each participant was currently employed at an athletic department in the ACC, specifically in athlete development (e.g., "Student Athlete Development," "Student Athlete Engagement," "Student Athlete Career Development"). A greater breakdown of participant characteristics can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Title Classification	Gender	Race	Years in Position
Andrea	Assistant Director	Woman	White	2
Carole	Assistant Director	Woman	White	1
Denise	Associate Director	Woman	White	3
Kenneth	Program Manager	Man	White	5
Kimberly	Director	Woman	White	1
Michelle	Assistant Director	Woman	Black	1
Marcus	Assistant Director	Man	White	10
Sandy	Assistant Director	Woman	Black	25
Taylor	Director	Woman	White	12
Theresa	Associate Director	Woman	Black	15

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The below results, including selected quotes for illustration, represent the primary themes identified in the data analysis. As anonymity was promised to encourage openness, participants were assigned pseudonyms, which are used when examples are provided from the interviews.

Athletic Role Engulfment

Extant literature has established that NCAA athletes spanning all sports and characteristics often enter college engulfed in their athletic role (Adler & Adler, 1991, Corr et al., 2020, 2022a). Participants in this study affirmed such previous research. They stated that one of their primary objectives as athlete development staff was to assist athletes in recrafting their identity to include more than just their role as athletes. Michelle stated, "Getting our student past athletics is the challenge." Carole also alluded to the prevalence of athletic role engulfment among athletes enrolling in college:

> A lot of our students come to [university] with very, very strong athletic identities and it's not necessarily our responsibility to help them, you know, de-identify from that. But we want to help build them up in some other different identities and affirm them in ways that are beyond just their sport.

More pointedly, Kimberly stated that a primary objective of athlete development at her institution was to "separate from that [athletic] identity…to create your new identity." Given an understanding of such athletic role engulfment upon entry into college, athlete development personnel that participated in this study attempted to develop programming and/or services to assist athletes in holistic development that considers athletic, academic, social, and professional development needs.

Athlete Development Programming

Given the isomorphic formation of NCAA athletic departments (Atwater et al., 2022; Cunningham & Ashley, 2001), similar programmatic elements regarding athlete development among participants'

institutions are unsurprising. Each participant discussed the importance of athlete-alumni engagement and the value of connecting current enrolled athletes to those who have successfully transitioned into a professional (i.e., non-athlete) field. Of note, participants stressed the importance of alumni-athlete engagement with those who have transitioned out of collegiate athletics and alumni intra-institution. Theresa discussed the importance of athlete-alumni and the importance of role relatability in connecting with current enrolled athletes:

> Connecting them with people who've been in their shoes... I was a student athlete 20 years ago. They don't want to hear me talk about what it was like 20 years ago. I also was not an athlete at [university]. So I'm losing a little bit of credibility. I'm also on executive staff. Like there's all these things I know I have but then I'm losing their credibility.

While role relatability is important to establishing a locus of trust and established as a credibility-builder between individuals (Zakrajsek et al., 2013), the emphasis placed on relatability among alumni and current enrolled athletes from the same institution is noteworthy. The significance of collegiate athletics participation and shared institutional attendance to establishing credibility with college athletes co-exist as potential barriers for athletic department institutional members seeking to implement impactful programming and engage in meaningful dialogue with athletes currently or formerly competing at the institution. Denise further emphasized this point, discussing the annual alumni panel stating, "Our seniors go through this [program], it's like a panel of former student athletes specifically, who essentially like range from just out of college to like ten years out." Across participants, the importance of engaging athlete-alumni that had recently transitioned out of NCAA athletics was a noteworthy and perhaps intuitive, finding.

Other common athlete development programmatic components were career fairs, etiquette dinners, and professional preparedness (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews). Each of these initiatives focused primarily on career readiness and featured little to no emphasis on athletic role transition or shifting athlete identity. Many of the participants indicated that programmatic components of career readiness were often coordinated exclusively by the career center at the institution itself. In discussing career readiness opportunities available to athletes and athletic role transition, Michelle indicated the limited collaborative relationship between the athletic department and the institutional career center:

> I couldn't tell you if there's anything about athlete transition [in the career center]...I don't know if there's like anything formal that is targeted towards [athletes]...We don't have an athlete, like, transition out type program.

Given the unique experience about NCAA athletic participation, the reliance on institutional career centers and services most likely fails to provide adequate value to athletes seeking post-athletic transition or career readiness programming. Stating as much, Kenneth said, "There is [sic] several resources that we have through the career center that support student athletes that aren't necessarily geared towards student-athletes." In addition, such informal dialogue surrounding athletic role transition and shifting athlete identity was commonplace among participants. Similar to Michelle, Kimberly stated, "We have a transition in. We don't have a transition out." While participants indicated that discourse was occurring regarding post-athletic transition and athlete identity, consistent, systematic programming was not commonplace. Crystalizing this point, Carole stated, "We don't have like a structured four-year plan we promote. I would say that's probably more internal to us."

Given the reliance on institutional career centers and services by many participants' athletic departments, Marcus stated, "Colleges sometimes don't understand athletics." Indicative of the divide between institutional support and athletic department support, Sandy expressed the value of role relatability among institutional staff in programmatic athlete development, "We're lucky because the director of the career center was a former athlete way back in the day." Given the unique collegiate athlete experience, Denise added, "I need to arm as many people as possible to help prepare [athletes] for their future."

Kimberly also alluded to the importance of *insider status* to establish the credibility necessary to reach athletes, "One of our professors teaches a class that a lot of the student-athletes take and he's very involved in our department." The perception and importance of insider status is often sacred in NCAA athletics in which athletic department institutional members (e.g., administrators, coaches, staff) communicate the strategic insular nature of collegiate athletics to athletes themselves (Adams et al., 2014; Brown, 2012; Gutierrez & McLaren, 2012; Kihl, 2018; LoMonte, 2020; Southall & Weiler, 2014). Accordingly, participants all expounded on the importance of role relatability and insider status to achieve credibility among currently enrolled athletes. Yet, many participants indicated they relied upon institutional programming available to the entire student body to assist in athletic role transition and career readiness. Berg et al. (2021) found that critical social support for the holistic well-being of college athletes, such as developing trusting relationships, a sense of community, and culture, were duties that must be achieved by full-time athletic department staff and could not be outsourced.

Collaboration Among Institutional Members

Participants in this study indicated the importance of inter-departmental collaboration to engage athletes in holistic development. Expanding upon the importance of both insider status and role relatability, Marcus codified the importance of collaboration among institutional members:

> The number one thing is, I could preach it from the mountain top that this is important, but if your athletic director, your head coach, like the people who influence [athletes] the most don't preach [development] and don't support it and don't encourage it? Yes, these efforts will always fall flat.

Theresa iterated the importance of complete institutional commitment as well, specifically noting the role that coaches occupy in influencing athletes to take part in development opportunities and dialogue surrounding post-athletic transition, "When we have the coaches that are encouraging [athletes] to take part in these programs when they're encouraging them to connect with alumni, things like that, that goes a long way as well." Sandy stated frankly that athletes "need to feel supported from coaches" to engage in athlete development opportunities. Carole also indicated the importance of administrative support:

> First and foremost, there has to be support from your upper administration. I think if they don't value the holistic student athlete, they will ultimately find themselves in some pretty sticky situations in the future.

Although the persuasive role of coaches among athletes is relatively socialized, contrasts between the objectives of NCAA coaches and athlete development staff were a consistent theme among participants' responses. Theresa noted the integral nature of coaches engaging athletes in development. Still, she indicated a component of her job was "making sure the coaches are putting that emphasis on they're more than just there as an athlete." Denise noted the value of developing relationships with coaches to demonstrate the importance of encouraging athletes to engage with athlete development staff and services. In addition, Denise added that while her institution relies on coaches and support staff to build a relationship with recruits and athletes upon enrollment, the athlete development staff leverages their cultivated relationships with coaches to gain access and credibility to athletes:

> Coaches and support staff like strength and conditioning, sports med [sic] can kind of build those relationships and then I can kind of swoop in end of year freshman year or sophomore year kind of thing.

While the value of developing relationships with intra-institutional athletic department members is undoubtedly valuable to efforts to engage athletes in athlete development programming and services, differentiations between the operating logics and institutional work performed by coaches and athlete

development staff are glaring. Kimberly illustrated such contrasting logics stating, "[Development is] one of those things that it's like the coaches are very much like, 'we don't want to put more on their plate.'" Marcus also codified the disparate objectives of coaches and athlete development staff:

> If I'm investing all these dollars in people and time into this area, what's the return for me? And that's what coaches will say too, 'Well, we did all these efforts, all of my athletes graduated, they have a job or they're going to grad school, whatever, they all have a designated output. But if I don't win the games, I'm gone.'

Such rhetoric indicates the contrasting, and competing, logics present intra-athletic department. Participants indicate that coaches, facing immense pressure to win games or competitions, often marginalize ancillary functions within the athletic department and perhaps perceive such functions as counterintuitive to their job responsibility to win games.

Contrarily, athlete development staff members in this study consistently used idioms such as "student first and athlete second" to reinforce the perceived necessity of holistic athlete development. College athletes themselves are fixed firmly in the middle of this paradox between institutional athletic department members. College athletes are physically and psychologically placed in conflict regarding the perceived objectives of coaches (i.e., winning) and athlete development staff due to them possessing little ability to make autonomous decisions regarding their sport participation (e.g., practice times, competition schedule) or academic experience (e.g., major clustering, conflicts with athletics). In addition, Andrea alluded that athletes are acutely aware of such contradictory logics among athletic department institutional members stating, "As an athlete you're thinking like 'ball if life' and my job is my sport because my coach's life depends on us winning ball games." An interesting finding in itself, athlete loyalty to coach(es) resultant from accepted disciplinary practices and adherence to dominant institutional logics may serve as an impactful decision-making process in the context of engaging with athlete development programming and dialogue surrounding post-athletic transition. In this paradigm, college athletes may be forsaking their personal and professional development for their coach(es)' livelihood.

Marcus also alluded to the commercial underpinnings guiding NCAA institutional members. Illustrating the contradictory logics present at a systemic level between higher education and the NCAA, Marcus stated:

> How does having a 100% postgraduate success rate at the time of graduation, what is the ROI [return on investment] on that?. . .I think this is where college athletics, business, and higher ed [sic] collide in this atom sized collision. They don't play well in the sandbox. This is the uphill climb that we have to fight every day is you got this old traditional higher ed [sic] model then you have this business model of college athletics…you can't serve two masters. You're going to sell out to one of them at some point.

Such contradictory logics between higher education and the hyper-commercialized nature of NCAA athletics have been heavily examined (Corr et al., 2022b, 2023; Southall & Nagel, 2008; Southall et al., 2008, 2009, 2014) and further illustrates the contrasting dichotomy in which college athletes experience both higher education and NCAA athletics competition. Marcus further illustrated administrative value and perception of athlete development programming and services stating, "You can't swing and miss a lot in this business because it is seen in a lot of people's minds as *the extra* [emphasis added]." Interestingly, Carole also suggested a disconnect between higher education, athletics, and athlete development staff themselves:

> We kind of joke about it but our jobs are really just like what walks through the door that day because we end up kind of being the front door to the student athlete experience outside of school and outside of sports.

The conceptualization of athlete development existing between the schism of higher education and NCAA athletics competition is noteworthy to consider and perhaps illustrates athlete development as a necessary link between the *academy* (i.e., higher education) and the *association* (i.e., NCAA).

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this exploratory qualitative study illustrate the disparate roles institutional members assume intra-organization relative the promulgation of athletic role engulfment and the development of a salient athletic identity among collegiate athletes. Whereas athletics staff (e.g., coaches, recruiters) stimulate athletic role engulfment during the recruiting process and upon enrollment (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a), academics and development athletic department staff fundamentally acknowledge their professional existence to promote holistic athlete development and assist in athletes' post-athletic transition. Such disparate roles are illustrative of contrasting logics intra-organization and explanative of the differentiation of organizational priorities among athletic departments' institutional members (e.g., coaches, administrators, recruiters, and academic support). Accordingly, the findings of this study are consistent with extant literature identifying the presence of competing institutional logics intra-organization (i.e., athletic department) and within the broader field of NCAA athletics.

The contrast of logic related to athlete development creates friction within the job responsibilities of organizational members. Competing institutional priorities among members convolutes the athlete experience and further stratifies the expected role athletes assume. Whereas athletic grant-in-aid (GIA) is primarily predicated on athletic merit, Power-5 athletes are expected to assume an additional academic role upon enrollment at a given institution. For many athletes – notably profit-athletes – such an academic role may be antithetical to their professional priorities and development. Within this process, athletics staff (e.g., coaches, recruiters) determine athletic merit and scholarship distribution while conducting institutionalized work that cultivates and fosters athletic role engulfment (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a). Academic and development athletic department staff are not often substantially integrated in the recruiting process. Accordingly, academic and development staff's initial substantive interactions with many college athletes occur upon enrollment when athletic role engulfment has occurred. As the recruitment process crafts an expectation for college athletes upon enrollment and is formulated exclusively by athletics staff (Corr et al., 2020, 2022a), the contrasting organizational functions of athletic department members results in prospective athletes' athletic role engulfment upon entrance to college and the employment of academic support and development staff to deconstruct such engulfment and identity salience.

Within this discussion of contrasting institutional logic and competing organizational priorities, the experience and development of college athletes are of utmost importance as perpetuated by the NCAA itself. The contrasting priorities intra-organization discussed in this study illustrate the psychosocial conflict college athletes' experience during their formative personal and professional development (Melendez, 2009). In addition to the excessive demands placed on Power-5 athletes from an athletic training and performance standpoint, athletes must also navigate the competing logics and priorities among athletics staff and athletic department support staff. Within this power dynamic, athletics participation – and by extension, athletics staff – occupy the greatest perceived reward and benefit structure both socially and professionally. Accordingly, athletic department support staff often rely on athletics staff members (e.g., coaches, recruiters) to legitimize their job functions. Given the competing logics between organizational members and the power wielded by athletics staff members – a power exacerbated among profit-sports and illustrated in the dramatic salary differences among athletic department members – such legitimacy marginalizes the role of academic and development athletic department staff members. This marginalization further contributes to athletic role engulfment among Power-5 athletes through the diminished importance of an academic role and a singular emphasis on athletics.

Coaches' institutional work stimulates athletic role engulfment as it positively relates to athletic performance – the primary measure and compensatory outcome in which coaches are evaluated (Holmes, 2011; Maxcy, 2013). Accordingly, administrators and faculty face inherent difficulty combating athletic role engulfment and adequately preparing athletes for life upon conclusion of their athletic career. Such

juxtaposition of logics warrants an examination of intervention strategies on behalf of both coaches and administrators. Rewards for academic and social performance may motivate coaches to develop athletes holistically. However, such development is counterintuitive to the hyper-commercialized logic pervasive in collegiate athletics. Accordingly, the NCAA as an institutional body faces difficulty formulating and enacting meaningful legislation due to the multiple and contrasting logics prevalent within the field of college sport.

While the autonomous decision-making of college athletes has received considerable theoretical examination (Hatteberg, 2018; Southall & Weiler, 2014), participants in this study consistently emphasized that athlete development programming and services were at each athletes' discretion and participation was not mandatory. Comments from Carole such as, "Whether they take advantage of [development], that's really, you know, their choice," or Marcus, "Just do your job. Put the water out and let them come drink it," are symbolic of the autonomy afforded to college athletes in the limited context of athlete development. Considering the number of participant comments depicting the difficulties that athletes face upon graduation, college athletes do not appear to be required to progress through programming to assist in their post-athletic transition. Rather, participants primarily cited voluntary, incentive-based, or unstructured, impromptu programming as the primary sources for athletes to engage in identity exploration and holistic development.

Multiple participants also discussed athlete enablement and the failure of college athletes to procure the support needed to assist in post-athletic transition or career readiness before graduation. Denise stated, "Student-athletes right now just don't know how to have difficult conversations and confront situations they're just constantly trying to avoid." Regarding athlete enablement, Michelle stated, "[Athletes] have so much provided for them right now in some of these spaces that the reality of what the real world is gonna [sic] look like for some of them is so skewed." More critically, Marcus discussed such enablement of college athletes given the historical trajectory of NCAA athletics as the college sport enterprise has grown financially:

> Ten or fifteen years ago we had this idea of let's make their life of being an athlete as easy as possible…let's build athlete only dormitories. Let's have an athlete only cafeteria. Let's have athlete only services. Let's have you know all these things that were just for them, which was seen as like, what a great service you offer them…the idea of this bubble that we create around them that we think 'hey,' we market it, 'it's so awesome.' Developmentally, how much are we also taking away from them?. . .these little basic responsibilities that the general pop [sic] of students have. They don't have to worry about it.

Based on the participants' comments in this study, college athletes are more enabled than ever; such enablement makes athletes less likely to develop organically than the traditional student body (i.e., non-athletes). However, athletes competing at participants' institutions do not require holistic athlete development programming and services. Such commentary acknowledges that institutional mechanisms actively serve to engulf athletes in their athletic role before and upon enrollment with scripted activities that mandate attendance and scripted accommodation to various institutional norms yet implement no required tiered-programming or services to foster holistic athlete development. Within this context, college athletes are subject to institutional structures that strip them of their autonomy and place complete paternalistic authority in the hands of athletic department institutional members (e.g., administrators, coaches, staff) (Hatteberg, 2018; Southall & Weiler, 2014) and then obligated to *choose* to partake in athlete development opportunities should they deem them valuable. Such sentiment is perhaps no more illustrated than a comment made by Theresa regarding athletes' awareness of athlete development programming and services at her institution, "They [athletes] are saying, 'how long have you had this?'…umm, we've had this the whole time, but they have just really not taken the time to kind of like take the *blinders* [emphasis added] off."

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

In the sense of holistic athlete development, college athletics perpetuates social inequity as a system that mandates and cultivates athletic role engulfment and a salient athletic identity that makes the transition out of college extremely difficult. Athletic support staff that are ostensibly employed to assist in the holistic development of college athletes are often powerless to combat such detrimental components of athletic role engulfment and may be complicit in perpetuating such social inequities resulting from a lack of preparedness and development among the college athlete population. In addition, given that many athletic department staff were former college athletes themselves (Lumpkin et al., 2015), perhaps they have never been able to separate from their athletic role upon the conclusion of their athletic career.

Given that 21% percent of athletes in FBS athletics are Black (NCAA, n.d.c) and collegiate athletics have been conceptualized to serve as a form of affirmative action for colleges and universities given the propensity for special admittance standards to benefit athlete populations (Druckman et al., 2016), the under-preparedness of athletes to transition effectively and positively to a non-athletic role could be considered racialized in nature. The findings of this study indicate that institutional mechanisms foster and often require engulfment in the athletic role. Yet, the established detrimental components of athletic role engulfment are not actively mitigated by athletic department institutional members upon enrollment and the conclusion of athletes' careers. The collegiate athletics enterprise further entrenches athletes in an athletic identity for the benefit of institutional stakeholders (e.g., administrators, coaches, staff), but the steps taken to weaken a salient athletic identity and holistic development of college athletes are lacking.

Accordingly, we argue that collegiate athletics participation predisposes athletes for detrimental psychological effects for the primarily financial benefit of institutions and institutional members. However, limited to no resources are provided or mandated to assist athletes in their transition after their athletic experience. To this effect, college athletics serves as a detrimental psychological stressor antithetical to traditional values of higher education. Correspondingly, college athletic participation fails to provide adequate programming or resources to alleviate such psychological stress after an athlete's athletic career. Athletes end up the primary recipients of a system that uses their athletic abilities for institutional financial purposes but fails to prepare them for success outside of athletics. This system in which the pursuit of athletic revenue is of primary concern is endemic of the hyper commercialized institutional logic that permeates collegiate athletics (Corr et al., 2022b, 2023), especially at the FBS level. Athletes are commodified and used for their athletic ability, often for the sake of their psychological, psychosocial, and physical health. Such systematic perpetuation has been characterized as exploitative and disproportionately affects the significant number of Black college students who participate in intercollegiate athletics at predominantly White institutions (PWIs).

Interestingly, the use of infantilizing language (e.g., "kid") to refer to college athletes was pervasive throughout the commentary of participants in this study. As eight of the 10 participants identified themselves as women (i.e., eight of the athletic administrators overseeing athlete development at nine ACC institutional members were women), using infantilized language presents a potentially noteworthy finding and opportunity for future research. Given that male coaches are often tasked with serving as paternal figures for college athletes, such delineation may be drawn for female staff members in athlete development roles.

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