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# An Examination of Community College Black Male Student Athletes' Perceptions of Student Support Services and Identifying Methods for Improving Service Delivery

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# An Examination of Community College Black Male Student Athletes' Perceptions of Student Support Services and Identifying Methods for Improving Service Delivery

## **Abstract**

Black male student athletes' enrolled in community colleges are a vastly understudied population. Statistically, the success rate of earning an associate degree and transferring to a four year institution of higher education is dismal. The focus of this study was to capture the perceptions of Black male student athletes and student support services providers as they pertained to access, use, and delivery of services. Another focus of this study was to identify ways in which Black male student athletes and student support services providers could help to improve delivery of those services. Participants for this study included three Black male student athletes and three student support services providers who were part of the same urban community college. Within the framework of a multiple case study methodology, data collected for this research included, in-depth individual interviews, observations, and surveys. The data collected was analyzed and triangulated using cross case and descriptive analysis. In addition, several rounds of coding were used and findings revealed the major themes. Three prominent themes emerged from the data analysis and coding: the need to build collaborative relationships, the perceptions of racial bias, and the need for a liaison to serve as a link between Black male student athletes and student support services providers. In addition to common themes shared by most of the participants, the findings also highlighted areas where the perceptions of participants were in conflict. Participants also offered solutions they believed would help resolve perceived problems.

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An Examination of Community College Black Male Student Athletes' Perceptions of  
Student Support Services and Identifying Methods for Improving Service Delivery

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D in Executive Leadership

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost I thank God for all He has given me, all that has been taken away and mostly for all that He has left for me! There are so many to thank for assisting me on this journey. I thank my wife, Judith, for her tireless efforts through the years and for her gentle support as she whispered, “You can make it!” The Inspiration for all of the good that I have accomplished in my life came from my mother, Mozella. I thank my precious goddaughter Essence S. Slater, my supportive family, including my sisters Bobbie, Shae, Janet, and my brother Johnnie E. Richburg and the family’s matriarch, Lizzie M. Richburg. In addition, a very special person whose skills and dedication made this journey much less taxing, a big thanks to Mr. David Figueroa! And, to my teammates from group 2 aka “Eyes on the Prize”-Thank you!

Last but surely not least, I thank my dissertation committee, Jerry W. Willis, Chairperson, and Debra J. Thomas, Committee Member, for their very careful and patient guidance throughout this process. I count both of them among the very special people I have met on my life’s journey. They have influenced me in ways that are immeasurable. I salute you both for what you have taught and given me! Thank You!!

*“You can do and be anything you want, provided that you are willing to work for it.”*

*“Always remember to never let anyone think that you cannot do without them.”*

*“No one is better than you and you are not better than anyone else.”*

Mozella Richburg

## **Biographical Sketch**

Charles Richburg is currently a consultant and an adjunct instructor at the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Westchester, Inc. Mr. Richburg attended the College of New Rochelle from 2000 to 2004 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2004. He attended PACE University from 2006 to 2008 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 2008. He came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2011 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Richburg pursued his research entitled An Examination of Community College Black Male Student Athletes' Perceptions of Student Support Services and Identifying Methods for Improving Service Delivery under the direction of Dr. Jerry Willis and Dr. Debra Thomas and received the Ed.D. degree in 2013..

## **Abstract**

Black male student athletes' enrolled in community colleges are a vastly understudied population. Statistically, the success rate of earning an associate degree and transferring to a four year institution of higher education is dismal. The focus of this study was to capture the perceptions of Black male student athletes and student support services providers as they pertained to access, use, and delivery of services. Another focus of this study was to identify ways in which Black male student athletes and student support services providers could help to improve delivery of those services. Participants for this study included three Black male student athletes and three student support services providers who were part of the same urban community college

Within the framework of a multiple case study methodology, data collected for this research included, in-depth individual interviews, observations, and surveys. The data collected was analyzed and triangulated using cross case and descriptive analysis. In addition, several rounds of coding were used and findings revealed the major themes. Three prominent themes emerged from the data analysis and coding: the need to build collaborative relationships, the perceptions of racial bias, and the need for a liaison to serve as a link between Black male student athletes and student support services providers. In addition to common themes shared by most of the participants, the findings also highlighted areas where the perceptions of participants were in conflict. Participants also offered solutions they believed would help resolve perceived problems.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

The goal of this qualitative multiple (cumulative) case study was to capture and compare the perceptions of two groups, Black male student athletes and student support services providers in the community college environment. The study focused on how these two groups related to each other and how these relationships could be improved. Furthermore, another goal of the study was to identify methods for improving the delivery of student support services, and to identify ways that Black male student athletes could contribute to the improvement of the delivery of support services provided. The study took place on the campus of an urban community college located in the Northeastern United States.

According to Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, (2007) case studies are used when an investigator or researcher wants to examine a specific phenomenon or a social group. The focus of this study was to examine the menu of student services and how Black male student athletes perceived these services in relation to access, use and delivery. In addition this study sought to capture student support services providers perception of Black male student athletes use of student support services.

This was a significant and important study due to increased enrollments at the community college level, including Black male athletes involved in intercollegiate sports. Statistical data confirmed that each year approximately 70,000 students participated in

intercollegiate athletics at public community colleges in the United States (National Junior College Athletic Association, 2008).

Furthermore, a limited amount of institutional, statewide or national studies are available on both the degree attainment and persistence of Black male athletes to complete their studies at the community college level. Failure to give the proper attention to these areas can have negative ramifications on institutional and system-wide retention and graduation rates (Peterman & Matz, 2000). Several researchers' claimed that, when properly delivered, student support services could serve in the role to ensure the overall success of the Black male student athletes enrolled in community college (Harper, 2009; Storch & Ohlson, 2009; Culp, 2005).

Perhaps, many would be surprised of the academic achievement of Black male student athletes attending community colleges in spite of the stereotype that these students tended to fare poorly in their academic performance. Moreover, when compared to their non-athletic peers, Black male student athletes attending community colleges have a dismal academic success rate. However, Keim and Strickland, (2004); Kornspan and Etzel, (2001) confirm that Black male student athletes do well academically.

Community colleges have the opportunity to function as models for serving, supporting, guiding, and addressing the needs of Black male student athletes. Therefore, the central questions for this study were: (1) how do Black male student athletes describe their perceptions of the services offered by student support services as it pertains to access, use, and delivery of services in community college? And, (2) how do student support services providers describe their perceptions of Black male student athletes as it pertains to access and use of student support services in community college? To help

place the research problem and questions in perspective, this research was conducted on the campus where both groups carry out their daily activities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Harper (2009) contended that Black male student athletes enrolled in community colleges are a vastly understudied population. When viewed from a statistical standpoint, the success rate of earning their associate degrees and transferring to a four year institution of higher education was dismal. Further, researchers also assert that a large percentage of Black male student athletes in community colleges failed to transfer to four year institutions of higher education and eventually dropped out at a rate higher than the non-athletes (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

This high dropout rate was partially due to a lack of knowledge about which departments provided needed services, thus, causing information deficits. Often, these information deficits resulted from Black male student athletes' inability to navigate systems and their perception of racial bias when seeking assistance. For example, the student support services division was responsible for providing information, counseling and other relevant services to members of this group as well as to all students. However, the Black male student athlete's lack of knowledge about specific services such as tutoring, which is not a function of student support services, often caused their perceptions to be impacted negatively. Moreover, delays of this type could impact their academic progress and cause classes to be dropped. For example, which could impact their academic eligibility to participate in athletic events. Comeaux and Harrison (2007) and Culp (2005) stated, one of the primary objectives of student support services in community colleges was to help students to make a successful transition to four year

institutions of higher education. They further contended that the number of transfers for Black male student athletes paled in comparison, when compared to the general community college population.

Exploring the perceptions of Black male student athletes about how they access and use these services as well as capturing the perceptions of the student support services providers about Black male student athletes access and use of services could aid in improving the delivery of student support services. An expected outcome could be an improved understanding between both groups as it pertained to matters of academic development, cultural and social awareness. This exploration could also aid in improving the delivery of student support services to better assist Black male student athletes in reaching their primary goals of earning their associate degrees and transferring to a four year institution of higher education.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Grounded Theory is the theoretical framework used initially to guide this study and provide viewpoints from a theoretical framework perspective. With regard to further development of grounded theory as a theoretical framework, Glaser and Strauss (1967) contended that most behavioral researchers identified persons as units of analysis; however, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the incident or phenomenon under study could be described as the unit of analysis. Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (1967) offered grounded theory as a systematic methodology involving the generation of theory from data gathered.

A second theoretical framework that could be used to guide a study of this type is applied action research, “applied action research is grounded in a qualitative research

paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue” (Stringer, 2007, p. 19).

A third potential theory that could be used to guide this study was reference group theory. Reference group theory is rooted in information seeking research, and is applicable to special populations (Dawson and Chatman, 2001). To the outside observer, Black male student athletes in both two and four year colleges/universities could appear to be privileged and unhindered by the academic and disciplinary expectations of their nonathletic peers (Kissinger, Newman, Miller, & Nadler, 2011).

Historically, the term reference group theory was first introduced by Herbert H. Hyman in 1942. Hyman elaborated on the concept and explored some of its properties in “The Psychology of Status” (1942). Hyman’s primary objective was to understand the ways in which individuals ranked themselves in terms of their choice of a social group for comparison. When considering its most applicable tenets, reference group theory is currently used and applied in many academic and practitioner settings.

A few years later two notable social psychologists, Ruth Hartley and Muzafer Sherif, were motivated to continue research on reference groups and tested which foundational tenets of reference group theory supported their use. Moreover, Ruth Hartley and her husband, also a social psychologist, worked on multiple projects together throughout their careers testing and re-testing reference group theory on various groups in various settings.

Fifty-nine years later, Dawson and Chatman (2001) opined; reference group theory applies useful concepts to those who can best be described as information-seekers and are members of special populations and groups.

When viewed from a cognitive perspective as a fundamental process in the socialization as a special group, Black male student athletes in community colleges rate as a special group.

Harris and Harper (2008) argued that most research about Black male community college students athletes and non-athletes focused on enrollment, earning an associate degree and transferring to a four year institution of higher education. The use of reference group theory as a theoretical framework perspective for this study could help to further inform how the recognition of this special group is needed and could aid Black male student athletes' academic and athletic development, and is paramount to their success (Dawson and Chatman, 2001).

A recent initiative developed by the United States Department of Education (US DoE) and championed by the State University of New York (S.U.N.Y.) titled, A Commitment to the Future-Project Degree Completion, (2012) was designed to provide additional services to all students to improve the retention and graduation rates at the undergraduate and associate's degree levels. This initiative is a clear indicator that student support services providers and Black male student athletes in community colleges are therefore inextricably linked because of the stated goals of both groups. Recently, libraries, student support services providers, and other information providing organizations began to redesign, adjust, and create new methods related to new system designs. These new systems could engage in collaborative efforts to improve the delivery of services in a manner that makes it easier for students to navigate and obtain information. Such efforts could help to ensure that Black male student athletes along with the entire student body would be able to navigate the systems more proficiently and not

waste precious time trying to determine for example, which services are provided by student support services, the libraries and other information providers (Hyman 1942; Stouffer et al. 1949; Turner 1955).

Furthermore, the use of reference group theory as a theory applicable to this study, was rooted in the belief that reference group theory could best explain the key variables in a study about Black male student athletes' perceptions of student support services providers and the student support services provider's perceptions of Black male student athletes as it pertained to access, use, and delivery of services (Hyman, 1942 & Turner, 1955). By virtue of its applicable nature, reference group theory in the social sciences is of value precisely because it looks to fill one primary purpose, which is to explain meaning and the nature and challenges of a phenomenon. It is hoped that with the knowledge and understanding gained as a result of this study, researchers and practitioners alike could act in more informed and effective ways by understanding the perceptions of both Black male student athletes and the student support services providers in community colleges. After much consternation, the researcher allowed the guiding principles associated with grounded theory as outlined by Glasser and Strauss (1967) to guide this study and allowed the data to identify any theories that emerged as a result of the study's findings.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to capture the perceptions of two groups: Black male student athletes and the student support services providers at an urban community college. One anticipated outcome of this study was the identification of methods to improve the delivery of services to special populations, such as Black male athletes.

However, a lack of understanding of the cultural and social norms of the Black male athletes in need of could create a schism between the providers of services and those in need of services.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Black male student athletes describe their perceptions of the services offered by student support services as it pertains to access, use, and delivery of services in community college?

2. How do student support services providers describe their perceptions of Black male student athletes as it pertains to access and use of student support services in community college?

### **Potential Significance of the Study**

This research study provided a framework that could be used by community colleges to improve the delivery of student support services to the Black male student athletes. Furthermore, practitioners, researchers, and scholars can use findings of this study, to further improve the delivery of student support services and further inform the research in the areas of higher education and underserved populations (Harper, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

By developing a better understanding of the academic, cultural and social norms of both groups and improving cross-cultural understandings, community colleges could improve delivery of services, and increase both retention and graduation rates. By taking these suggested steps, college administrators and counselors could help to increase the campus visibility of underrepresented groups (Harper, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

## **Chapter Summary**

The need to improve relationships between Black male student athletes in community colleges and those entrusted with providing the vitally needed student support services is paramount to the success of the Black male student athletes and the institutions that serve them. Further, Black male student athletes in community colleges were often motivated to succeed both academically and athletically in hopes of transferring to four-year institutions of higher education. However, without a strong student support services program, these student athletes were less likely to graduate (Jenkins, 2006).

Furthermore, this study strived to capture the perceptions of both groups' understanding of their roles, expectations, and desired outcomes. To further support the validity and reliability of this study, an extensive review of the literature relevant to the outlined research problem and questions were explored in Chapter 2. Further support of the study was detailed in the research methodology section (Chapter 3) of this study.

To aid in ensuring the credibility and believability of the study, the researcher used a technique known as triangulation. Triangulation is defined as an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one perspective (Cohen & Manion, 1986). Using triangulation in qualitative research also may increase the credibility and validity of the results. Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, and Somekh (2008) contended that triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

Strong student support services programs at the community college level tend to aid in developing a more holistically sound student athlete and in some cases, served as models for four year institutions of higher education (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2008). The focus of this study was on capturing the perceptions of Black male student athletes and student support services providers as it pertained to access, use, and delivery of services. The study also focused on the quality and match of student support services available versus the services needed by Black male student athletes attending community college. This was a significant and important study because the participants in this study represent the large number of community college student athletes nationwide. Statistical data confirmed that each year approximately 70,000 students participated in intercollegiate athletics at public community colleges in the United States (National Junior College Athletic Association, 2008). The setting for this study was a large public university system in the northeastern United States.

Some researchers claim that when properly delivered, student support services served as a catalyst to ensure the overall success of Black male student athletes enrolled in community college (Harper, 2009; Storch & Ohlson, 2009; Culp, 2005). Moreover, much of the literature on student support services for community college student athletes pointed to the need for improved student support services. In addition, portions of the literature also reflected ways to improve delivery of support services. Without the

information and knowledge that could be gained from capturing the perceptions of Black male student athletes, there is a missing source of information that is essential to anyone interested in improving existing services or adding new services to the standard mix already offered by most community colleges.

Community colleges are viewed as colleges of opportunity, especially for the underprepared and underrepresented (Helfgot and Culp, 1995). Although, while community colleges altered the landscape of higher education, learning to negotiate the bureaucracy of higher education irrespective of the type of institution, is a challenge for some potential students, especially those from low-income or minority families (Evelyn, 2004). One resource for navigating the bureaucratic obstacles for Black male student athletes is student support services, and one source for understanding those services was done by capturing the perceptions of Black male student athletes about those services. Those student athletes were one source of information and the student support services providers was another source. By capturing the perceptions of both Black male student athletes and student support services providers, a better understanding of services offered could emerge.

Eitzen (2003) asserted that, a contradiction exist between intercollegiate athletics mission and philosophy when compared to that of many institutions of higher education. These differences or gaps appear to have been widened considerably over the past decade. In many cases, the institution's mission and philosophy differs from that of many of the student athletes. Therefore, to date little has been written about community college student athletes, Black or White. Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen (2007) argued that

from an academic standpoint, student athletes were more prone to academic failure and were straddled with being stigmatized intellectually.

The problems Black male student athletes in community college face in navigating the bureaucratic maze in higher education, is not limited to one specific area or one level of a higher education institution, the navigational challenges emerged in several areas. For example, tutoring is not a service offered in the student support services department, yet, it is easy to understand why the three Black male student athlete participants in this study, assumed that tutoring is a function of student support services and at the institution where this study took place, it is not. Because of the various programs and services that Black male student athletes must navigate, various problems occurred for them apparently because of a lack of understanding or empathy by the leadership in the student support services department (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Keim & Strickland, 2004). Oftentimes, “many faculty and staff members including some in student support services may hold stereotypes of student athletes as “dumb jocks,” who are “over privileged, pampered, lazy and out of control, and whose primary motivation to attend school is to participate in sports” (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996, p. 4). Therefore, another focus of this research was on how negative attitudes could influence both the quality and type of support offered to Black male student athletes by student support services providers and community college leadership.

Offering further support for why community college administrators and others in community college leadership should take a more active role in supporting the Black male student athletes’ success while attending community colleges is supported by Harper (2009). Harper (2009) made the following assertion, some community college

administrators could be guilty of supporting racial stereotyping and having low expectations for Black male student athletes to succeed. However, for some administrators Harper and Hurtado (2007) made the following claim, the pendulum began to move in favor of some community college administrators when it comes to ensuring that the student support services providers are taking a more proactive approach when working with Black male student athletes in their community colleges. Furthermore, some community college administrators are beginning to recognize the need to recruit and hire staff and consultants as athletic counselors who understand more of the cultural and social norms that can have a positive impact on Black male student athletes. The search for those who possess the skills necessary to better assist the Black male student athletes to reach their primary objectives of earning their associate's degrees and transferring to four year institutions of higher education should be paramount in the minds of all community college administrators (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). However, much more work needs to be done in this area. Most if not all community college administrators are usually concerned with one specific outcome variable, which is degree completion (Harper, 2009). Harris and Harper (2008) based on their research contended that, additional informational components necessary to create an ideal student support services program remain largely unexplored in the context of community college sports.

To the casual or outside observer, it appears that student athletes in general and Black male student athletes in particular, appear to be “privileged and unhindered by the academic and disciplinary expectations of non-student athletes,” however, this interpretation obscures the reality (Kissinger, 2011, p. 577). The persistence, academic success, and degree attainment of Black male student athletes at the community college

level is a topic that is missing from current literature. Furthermore, a limited amount of institutional, statewide or national studies are needed on both the degree attainment and persistence for this group. Moreover, it is imperative that student support services providers in community colleges along with community college administrators give the proper attention to the student support services providers in their individual colleges. Failure to do so can have negative ramifications on institutional and system-wide retention and graduation rates for community colleges (Peterman & Matz, 2000). The following topic areas those that the review of the literature identified as key areas that impact Black male student athletes in community college.

### **The Student Athlete Experience**

Student athletes are one of the most recognized populations on campuses throughout the United States and have been praised and scorned at various times. For example, Parham (1993) contended that, when Black male student athletes' maturation process is considered, it has been found that the athletes are confronted with the same and oftentimes more intensified age and stage developmental issues, just as his non-athletic counterparts are. Moreover, a baseline portrait of the student athlete's profile differed from that of their nonathletic peers. Researchers have found student athletes to be more prone to academic failures and occasionally encountered negative intellectual stigmatization as well (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, (2007). Further, unlike the nonathletic student in community college, the student athlete's profile was found to contain more stressors than the general student population. For example, they displayed higher rates of irritability, anxiety, and depression (Brewer, Van Raalte, Petitpas, Bachman, & Weinhold, 1999). In spite of these potential impediments, the Black male

student athletes in community colleges could help to ensure their success by gaining an understanding of the guiding principles of student involvement theory.

### **Student Involvement Theory**

Student involvement theory is defined as the amount of energy a student invests in his/her physical and psychological academic experience (Astin, 1999). Just like their nonathletic peers, Black male student athletes in community college must gain a better understanding of the foundational and guiding principles of student involvement theory. For example, by spending more time on campus, studying, and interacting more frequently with faculty and other students are actions that Black male student athletes in community college should take to benefit from the principles that guide those adherents to student involvement theory. Moreover, by replicating these practices and habits, Black male student athletes could begin to invest more fully in their academic success.

Adherents to student involvement theory contended that there are distinct advantages for using the principles that guide the use of student involvement theory over the often cited developmental theories. For example, by using and practicing the guiding principles of student involvement theory, Black male student athletes in community college could be aided in their efforts to succeed by directing their attention toward developing the motivation needed and practicing the behaviors needed to succeed (Astin, 1999). Moreover, by adopting the attitudes and behaviors that guides the practice of using student involvement theory is, the Black male student athletes could better absorb and process the information made available by the student support services providers. Furthermore, by practicing and adopting the attitudes and behaviors outlined in the definition of student involvement theory, Black male student athletes in community

college could have a method for combating obstacles and realizing their dream of transferring to a four year institution of higher education. As Astin (1999) asserted, a few of the most important requisites for practicing student involvement theory involves, spending more time on campus, studying, and interacting with fellow students, staff and faculty members, Black male student athletes could reap tremendous benefits academically and socially from this practice.

Harper and Hurtado (2007) contended that, Black male student athletes are often plagued by the information deficits that exist between them and student support services. Information deficits have been defined as areas where knowledge or services gaps exist. The frequency with which Black male student athletes practice principles associated with student involvement theory could help to alleviate many of their knowledge and information deficits related to services offered by student support services. Another benefit of interacting more on campus with fellow students, faculty and staff members as well as studying on campus will provide opportunities for building support networks. These supports could lead to finding answers to questions more readily from other members of the three groups aforementioned. The responsibility for eliminating most of the information deficits begins with community college administrators who must become more vigilant in their efforts to ensure that proper training is provided for student services providers who work with Black male student athletes.

Often times those assigned to work with and counsel Black male student athletes cannot identify with some of the challenges they face, on and off campus. It is for these reasons, that a large percentage of Black male student athletes in community colleges fail to transfer to four year institutions of higher education, and eventually drop out (Harper,

2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Unfortunately, the number of transferees to four year institutions of higher education from the Black male student athlete population, paled in comparison to the general community college population.

Edwards (2000) argued that, the dominant presence of Black male student athletes in high profile sports such as football, basketball, and track and field combined with the low graduation rates deserved further scholarly interrogation. Moreover, Hobneck, Mudge and Turchi (2003) also argued that, a large number of faculty members perceived that, Black male student athletes are usually lacking the academic skills to succeed. Furthermore, negative perceptions of this sort have penetrated the academic, social, and cultural milieu of many institutions and have had a devastatingly negative impact. Further, negative perceptions like these oftentimes contributed to how student athletes were treated in the classroom and placed their personal behaviors under an unfair spotlight (Jensen, 2007). In their study on the student athlete experience, Brewer, Van Raalte, Petitpas, Bachman and Weinhold (1999) argued that, student athletes more so than the general student population have been found to suffer from higher levels of irritability, depression, and anxiety. Moreover, Malinauskas, Cucchiara, Aebyy, & Bruening (2007) asserted that, student athletes also suffered eating disorders and often engaged in risky behaviors (i.e. gambling, etc.).

Harper (2009) asserted that, there are clearly knowledge and information deficits when it comes to scholarly research on Black male student athletes in community colleges and the much needed student support services. Harper (2009) further stated that, although much of the scholarly research available on Black male student athletes is somewhat negative, he also stated that there is no need to become disillusioned, because

not all research on Black male student athletes is negative. For example, the successful Black male student athletes should be praised for their ability to manage their time effectively and strive academically (Anyaso, 2007). Moreover, Simons, et. al. (2007) contended that due to their physical attributes and the discipline to perform athletically, many student athletes had the ability to distinguish themselves from non-student athletes and use the discipline to complete some of the more difficult academic task, all of which require a measure of discipline. Furthermore, at the community college level, athletic programs play a vital role in helping student athletes integrate into the fabric of the hosting institution (Kissinger & Miller, 2007). With the proper academic support, Pope (1996) asserted that student athletes could fare better overall than many of their nonathletic counterparts. Unfortunately, within the psyche of many of the Black male student athletes was an athletic identity construct and in some cases this identity construct reached a crisis level. In the following section the identity crisis of the student athlete is examined.

### **The Student Athlete Identity Crisis**

Most of the Black male student athletes in community college compete outside of the national athletic spotlight, the strength of their identity as an athlete was usually on par with the more gifted Black male student athletes who were on scholarship. Perhaps their athletic identity construct mentioned in the previous section can be linked to the fact that most community colleges rarely rely on the athletic department for institutional identity (Ashburn, 2007). A study conducted by Kissinger and Miller (2007) illustrated that the saliency of the athletic identity addressed some of the challenges community college student athletes faced. In a survey of 104 community college student athletes,

most of whom were Black, “the results showed that there was no more than one standard deviation above the midpoint of the instrument used” (Kissinger, 2011, p. 581). The results demonstrated that the student athletes, who participated in the study conducted by Kissinger and Miller (2007), identified more with being an athlete than a student. More specifically, the Black male student athletes on the freshman football team reported the highest score for identifying as an athlete first. The number of Black male student athletes who appeared to over identify with their athletic role as opposed to their binary responsibility as a student athlete was particularly alarming. Furthermore, their identification with their role as an athlete could impact their academic, vocational, and social development (Brewer, Boin, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993). Moreover, one of the most challenging obstacles faced by Black male student athletes in community college was balancing the demands of their athletic and academic responsibilities. Without the proper guidance from the knowledgeable professionals charged with providing student support services, some Black male student athletes reported having fears of failing in the classroom and on the field or court, of their specific sport (Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999).

### **Community College Transferees to Four Year Institutions**

The transfer readiness of some of the Black male student athletes in community college to a four year institution of higher education could be impeded considerably if the Black male student athlete is not properly prepared and counseled in a manner that promotes their readiness to transfer to a four year institution of higher education (Harper, 2009).

Moreover, Harper (2009) argued that transferring to a four year college or university was an outcome variable of interest for community colleges. Similarly, transferring community college students to four year institutions of higher education was a publicly stated goal and core function of most community colleges. Transfer readiness and the actual transfer rate remain among the most widely studied topics in community college research (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, Hagedorn (2006) noted, “students of color and those from low income backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by the sluggish nature of transfer, because the majority of these students who go to college will begin their postsecondary education in community colleges” (p. 224). And, with regard to the idea of transfer readiness, Black male student athletes, like other male students of color, are more likely to be affected by institutional underperformance when it comes to for example, providing strong student support services. Yet, the transferring of students to four year institutions is a major priority for community colleges. Many public four year colleges and universities rely more and more on community colleges to offer first time exposure to postsecondary education, especially for those who make up the majority of the underserved and underprepared populations. Many of the Black male student athletes in community college are usually members of one or both the underserved and underprepared populations. Because the student support services administrators, advisors, and counselors are all under pressure to improve their overall performance, the transfer readiness of members of the entire student body can be negatively impacted (Long, 2005).

Often, the unwillingness of some community college administrators to explore issues of transfer readiness in more depth can cause the community college itself to lose

out on some of the benefits available to them when Black male student athletes transfer to four year institutions of higher education. For example, when the transfer rate for all Black male community college students which generally includes a large number of Black male student athletes increases, the overall transfer rate for the community college increases as well (Long, 2005; Laanan, 2003). Furthermore, by increasing the number of Black male student athletes who transfer to four-year institutions of higher education, this action could also result in positive reputational gains for the community college.

Harper and Hurtado (2007) also found that some community colleges gain a reputation within minority communities for being racist. Further, a reputation of this type can affect the recruitment of Black males, athletes and non-athletes alike. However, Harper and Hurtado (2007) further argued that as community colleges help Black male student athletes actualize their goal of transferring to a four year institution, their reputation could improve within minority communities. For example, if a prospective Black male student athlete becomes aware of a certain community college that goes the “extra mile” to help its Black male student athletes transfer to four year institutions of higher education, prospective student would be more likely to share this information with his peers. Harper (2009) asserted that when the student support services providers do go the “extra mile” to ensure that Black male student athletes are provided with services that are easy to comprehend, the successful environment or culture of transferring is enhanced on community college sports teams.

### **Improving Delivery of Student Support Services**

Recent National Collegiate Athletic Association (N.C.A.A.) policy changes in 2008 resulted in an increase in the number and types of coursework required for

incoming community college student athletes hoping to matriculate to four-year institutions of higher education. These policy changes have increased the rigor and types of coursework and grade point averages (GPAs) student athletes must adhere to. Furthermore, the number and types of coursework changes have influenced four-year institutional eligibility for prospective student athletes and will likely result in continued growth in the enrollment of collegiate student athletes at the community college level. Community colleges continue to serve as a catalyst for underrepresented and underprepared students, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds who are motivated to earn a college education (Ashburn, 2007; Knapp and Raney, 1988). Moreover, community colleges made up more than 40 percent of institutions of higher education in the United States (Mumford, 2006). However, in many cases the Black male student athletes who wish to continue their athletic pursuits in four year institutions of higher education are compelled to use and access student support services.

As previously stated, a goal of this study is to identify ways and methods to improve the types and quality of student support services delivery in community colleges to Black male student athletes. Failure to provide quality student support services to Black male student athletes ensures that there is a strong likelihood that a large percentage of the Black male student athletes in community college will not graduate (Jenkins, 2006). An additional challenge faced by a huge segment of the Black male student athletes in community colleges is under preparedness. Unfortunately, many of the Black male student athletes in community college arrive on campus underprepared, often as a result of public school systems that are, according to many who are well informed, broken. Therefore, the student support services providers' vigilance in identifying those

Black male student athletes in need of various types of remedial work should be addressed more aggressively. Although the task of identifying those student athletes in need of remedial work appears at time to be daunting, yet, many community college student support services providers have performed well in the area of identifying and enrolling those in need of remedial work to stave off a high dropout rate identified by Harper and Hurtado (2007). However, when one takes into consideration that several of the student support services departments at some community colleges often outperform those offered at four year institutions (Keim and Strickland, 2004).

The question must be asked: Why are underprepared Black male student athletes in community colleges not receiving the support necessary? Perhaps those community college administrators whose community college student support services programs outperform some four year institutions of higher education are “connecting” with their Black male student athletes in a manner that produce desired outcomes. Or, is it just a matter of Black male student athletes selecting to enroll in community colleges that do not function as well as others? Perhaps it’s a matter of both and answers to such questions are likely to be more complex and multifaceted.

### **An Overview of Effective Student Support Services**

Major components of strong student support services programs have included, but have not been limited to; eligibility monitoring, academic advising, tutorial assistance, personal and career counseling, and mentoring (Gunn & Eddy, 1989; Lenz & Shy, 2003). Researchers such as Culp, (2005), Lenz and Shy, (2003), and Gunn and Eddy (1989) provided various definitions to describe and characterize terms most often used by student support service providers that are applicable to all college/university students. For

example, eligibility monitoring is generally defined as a method used by student support services providers to ensure that students remained eligible academically by making progress as outlined by the Satisfactory Academic Progress scale (SAP). All colleges and universities used some type of SAP scale or one that is closely related. These scale of monitoring helped guide the student support services providers in their counseling of students (Culp, 2005). Often, eligibility monitoring is tied directly to those students who relied on federal funding to pay for the cost of their education. Another key component in the student support services providers arsenal is, academic advising. Academic advising for community college students differ in many respects from the type provided by student support service providers at traditional four year institutions of higher education (Gunn et al., 1989; Lenz et al. (2003). For example, the general composition of the community college student populations were often predominantly first generation, commuter, underprepared and diverse in many ways including age, ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status. Providing academic advising for this population usually required focusing on the basics like, “what is a credit?” “What does it mean to be matriculated?” need citation here

Tutorial assistance is another of the responsibilities entrusted to some student support service providers. For Black male student athletes in community college this was an area that often required special attention. One example of a school that provides such special services is Monroe Community College in New York City. Monroe offers a special program that provides community college students with a series of workshops designed to aid all community college students to identify their needs academically and financially. Moreover, Monroe College as well as several other colleges and universities

student support services providers has one tool in particular at their disposal to aid those students in need of academic guidance and financial aid assistance. The tool is called the Academic Advising Atlas, which offers a variety of workshops and online resources that supports the advising process (Culp, 2005).

In addition to the Academic Advising Atlas tool, mentoring is also a tool that has many applications and characteristics. Pope (1996) argued that those who served as mentors especially for minority populations must focus their efforts on improving integration within the community college community. This type of integration into the community college community is critical to Black male student athletes in community college success. Although mentoring has received widespread attention in recent years, there is still no concrete definition or clearly defined role for those serving as mentors (Pope, 1996).

Much of the literature on student advisement used the term, academic advisor, it should also be understood how integral a role the student support service providers have in providing academic advising, in particular with regard to their relationships with Black male student athletes in community college. Oftentimes, other students serve in the role of academic advisor and perform these tasks for a reduction in their tuition or some other form of compensation to help defray the cost of their education. And, on other occasions the role of student advisor is filled by a registrar's office staff person, or by athletic coaches who often work with Black male student athletes. Regardless of who is designated to fill these roles, whether it is a coach or one from the registrar's office, the role is too critical to be left to another student to fill. Moreover, a certain level of

experience and maturity is required and the need to build relationships is critical for success with this population (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Reyes, 1997).

An often-overlooked source when it comes to academic advising is the qualified volunteer. According to Kornspan & Etzel (2001), the qualified volunteer possesses a certain level of empathy and has attained a level of formal education beyond the community college level. For example, the average first year Black male student athlete in community college may be a first generation college student and are often a representative of two groups: the underrepresented and the underprepared (Kornspan, et al. 2001; Reyes, 1997).

Glennen (1976) introduced a new form of academic advising he called as intrusive advising. This new form of academic advising emerged as an effective form of academic support for the student athlete, and the qualified volunteers shared in this new form of advising. Storch and Ohlson (2009), Heisserer and Parette, (2002), and Glennen (1976), contended that this new form of academic advising was premised on the academic advisor and the student athlete sharing the responsibility for academic accountability (Hagedorn, 2006; Thomas & Minton, 2004). Further, Kramer and Upcraft, (1995) asserted that the underprepared Black male student athlete was more likely to be in need of intrusive advising. Intrusive advising is defined as a method to elevate the level of responsibility for Black male student athletes by requiring them to provide upon request, a detailed account of his academic progress at scheduled intervals. This method of accounting enabled the intrusive advisor to identify any warning signs that emerged that could jeopardize the Black male student athlete's academic eligibility. Such accounting practices could help the intrusive advisor and the Black male student athlete

to identify any impediments that could prevent the student athlete from participating in school sponsored athletic events while ensuring that they maintained the required grade point average (GPA) that all student athletes must adhere to. In addition, by employing a progressive monitoring system where the student athlete and the advisor continuously plan, evaluate and examine progress at selected intervals throughout the semester, little time is left for the student athlete to “slip through the cracks” and jeopardize their academic and athletic eligibility. Moreover, the intrusive advising model described here is an approach that is especially needed in those states serving scores of thousands of students athletes (Kramer & Upcraft, 1995).

### **The Role of Counseling Professionals and Student Support Services Providers**

From a counseling advising perspective, it is imperative that professional counselors and student support service providers understand how counseling is perceived by many student athletes in community colleges in general and Black male student athletes in particular. Generally, there is a collective sense among Black male student athletes who equate accessing counseling services with being personally frail (Linder, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Delange, 1991). A goal of this study was to capture the perceptions of Black male community college student athletes as it pertained to access, use, and delivery of student support services and to help clarify why college and university counseling centers are often underused by student athletes” (Maniar, Curry, Sommers-Flanagan, & Walsh, 2001). Furthermore, Kissinger, and Miller (2007) asserted that many community colleges were limited in their ability to dedicate substantial resources to addressing the emotional and psychological needs of the general student population, as well as the needs of Black male student athletes.

Therefore, the role of the professional counselor becomes more critical to the overall student support services. For example, on rare occasions, the types of support needed by Black male student athletes such as, issues with family, personal matters and issues that community based services and resources offer outside of the community college environment, are areas that some, if not all of the traditional student support services providers are not equipped to handle. Such situations can cause those Black male student athletes who need additional types of support to be negatively impacted academically and athletically. When such situations arise, professional counselors such as licensed social workers and other specially credentialed professionals who are trained and educated to deal with sensitive issues of this type become critical to the Black male student athlete's overall success in community college. For example, on occasion some members of this group may be under some type of community supervision because of a poor decision made prior to their entering the community college and their desire to maintain a level of confidentiality may prevent them from speaking frankly with the traditional student support services providers. The nature of the credentialed professional counselor's position is such that anonymity and confidentiality will be adhered to as a matter of law and ethics and provides an environment where the student athlete can express their concerns with fear of being judged unfairly.

Although, the need for professional counselors to supplement the work of the student support services providers, both services are provided to benefit Black male student athletes' progress. The statements in the previous paragraph are not meant to imply that Black male student athletes in community college always need some sort of special services. Moreover, as stated earlier in this study, the success rate of graduating

and transferring to four year institutions of higher education for Black male student athletes in community college are comparable to the non-student athletes. To further support the positive outcomes attained by Black male student athletes, Anyaso (2007) praised all student athletes for their ability to manage their time effectively. Moreover, other researchers posited that the ability to prioritize their various academic and athletic responsibilities and “due to their physical abilities many student athletes can distinguish themselves more readily than others” (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007, p.578). Kissinger & Miller (2007) further stated that community college athletic programs play an important role in aiding student athletes to integrate more readily into the fabric of the institutional culture. Therefore, having professional counselors on hand to work with all student athletes in general and Black male student athletes in community college specifically is critical to their development as student athletes.

### **Chapter Summary**

Multiple qualitative case studies designed to explore the perceptions of Black male student athletes and student support services providers in community college as it pertains to access, use, and delivery of student support services are nearly non-existent. However, what is known is that because of the very limited number of studies done on these two groups, the success rate of Black male student athletes in community college for completing their studies and transferring to four year institutions of higher education is dismal (Harper, 2009).

Moreover, very few studies have actually examined the relationships between Black male student athletes and the student support services in community colleges as it pertains to their perceptions concerning the access, use, and delivery of supportive

services. Although, a few studies have been conducted that have had as their focus, Black male student athletes attending four year colleges and universities. In addition, a large number of those studies that have focused on Black male student athletes' perceptions of student support services, have been done for the most part on the four year colleges and universities where tremendous amounts of revenue is generated by the so called "athletically gifted" Black male student athletes. Yet, very few community college athletic programs generate the types of revenue that have a significant impact on funds going into the community colleges coffers.

Further supporting the researcher's contention that a very limited number of studies have been conducted on capturing the perceptions of Black male student athletes in community college and student support services providers as it pertains to access, use, and delivery of services are outlined in a study conducted in 2000. Peterman and Matz (2000) made the following observation, the persistence, academic success, and degree attainment of Black male student athletes at the community college level is a topic that is missing from current literature. They further stated that more research is needed at the institutional, statewide and national levels are needed on both the degree attainment and persistence for this group. In addition, it is imperative that student support services providers in community colleges along with community college administrators give more attention to the Black male student athletes enrolled in their colleges. Failure to do so can have negative ramifications on institutional and system-wide retention and graduation rates for Black male student athletes and all male students of color.

The literature is replete with evidence that suggest that stronger relationships need to be initiated and developed between Black male student athletes and student support

services providers in community college. Perhaps one reason for so few studies of this nature being conducted, can be traced to individuals and institutions who hold to a broad range of negative views and stereotypes about Black male student athletes at both two and four year colleges and universities. In 2011 one researcher made the following observation, to the casual or outside observer, it appears that student athletes in general and Black male student athletes in particular, appear to be “privileged and unhindered by the academic and disciplinary expectations of non-student athletes,” however, this interpretation obscures the reality (Kissinger, 2011, p. 577).

During the review of the literature for this study, study after study provided compelling evidence for the need for improved student support services in community colleges that has as its focus, Black male student athletes. Furthermore, several studies demonstrated how critical student support services are to the retention and graduation rates for all community college students. Moreover, previous studies conducted by researchers confirms that, strong student support services programs at the community college level tend to play a critical role in developing a more holistically sound student athlete and in some cases, served as models for four year institutions of higher education (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2008). Additional studies asserted that when properly delivered, student support services serves as a catalyst to ensure the overall success of Black male student athletes enrolled in community college (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2009; Storch & Ohlson, 2009). The existing literature confirms that further scholarly interrogation is needed to ensure that Black male student athletes in community college can improve their chances of graduating and transferring to four year institutions of higher education.

Furthermore, transfer readiness and the actual transfer rate remain among the most widely studied topics in community college research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Yet, more targeted research is needed, if Black male community college student athletes are to enhance their chances to graduate community college at the same or higher rate than their non-athletic peers. However, existing research confirms that if Black male student athletes are to continue their athletic pursuits and graduate, more access, use, delivery, and knowledge of existing student support services needs to be improved. In their current condition, many Black male student athletes in community college are disproportionately represented with those students who are part of the underserved and underprepared for college level academic challenges. In spite of these impediments whether real or imagined, Black male student athletes have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with the services that are so vital to their success.

The themes and trends that emerged during this review of the literature clearly indicate the need for identifying ways and methods for improving delivery of student support services. However, Black male student athletes must also bear some responsibility and become proactive when it comes to accessing, using, and becoming better informed about the services provided by support services. By practicing the guiding principles of student involvement theory, Black male student athletes in community college could find themselves better positioned to help themselves. For example, student involvement theory asserts that the amount of time and energy devoted to spending more time on campus, studying and interacting more frequently with faculty members and other students are ways that Black male student athletes could improve their knowledge of the plethora of services available to them on and off campus.

Furthermore, several Black male student athletes are often affected by what Kissinger and Miller (2007) identified as a student athlete identity crisis. A crisis of this type can cause the student athlete to over identify with their role as an athlete. This over identification as an athlete is often characterized by poor performances in their sport carrying over in the classroom. One of the ways Black male student athletes can combat these deficit laden performances, is to practice using the guiding principles of student involvement theory, the practice of this theory could help the Black male student athlete to realize that he has additional support systems at his disposal.

However, failure to consider the results and recommendations provided by this research study could have a devastatingly negative impact on Black male student athletes, and this negative impact could affect the overall retention and graduation rates for all community college students. Statistically, 40% of higher education institutions in America are community colleges. The question that must be asked is, are the higher education policy makers, community college and athletic administrators, and the leaders of student support services willing to make the needed adjustments to shore up their retention and graduation rates for the 70,000 plus public community college student athletes many of whom are often Black males and first generation college students in their families?

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

### **Introduction**

The goal of this qualitative multiple (cumulative) case study was to capture the perceptions of Black male student athletes about their use or nonuse of student support services. A second component of the study looked at the perceptions of student support service providers about the services available to Black male student athletes.

Additionally, the study attempted to capture the paid student support services providers' perceptions of Black male student athletes. One anticipated result of this study was the identification of methods for improving the delivery of student support services to Black male student athletes by the student support services providers.

Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, (2007) contended that case studies are used when a researcher wants to examine a specific phenomenon or a social group. A cumulative case study is used when there is more than one case involved (Willis, 2008). Multiple case studies are considered by some to require a different methodology in some fields than the methodology used in single case studies. However, Yin (2009) considered multiple and single case study “designs to be variants within the same methodological framework” (p.53). Furthermore, there are advantages and disadvantages inherent in multiple case studies. For example, an advantage of using a multiple, rather than single case design is that the evidence presented is often considered more compelling and the entire study is considered to be more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1983).

Moreover, the selection of a multiple case design could raise new questions. Yin (2009) offered another insight into multiple case designs, stating their use can be viewed as involving the conduct of multiple experiments. When a researcher is interested in identifying “universal” or broadly generalizable findings, the analysis of multiple case studies should be structured, according to Yin, so that one of two results can be realized; they confirm the findings of the other case studies or they produce contrasting results that highlight differences. Each individual case selected should either generate results that are similar, (also known as a literal replication), or, predictable, contrasting results that can be anticipated. This method is also known as a theoretical replication (Yin, 2009). Theoretical replication was not the foundational purpose of this multiple case study research. Instead, the goal was to use the data from all the case studies to develop an understanding of the issues and problems that might be associated with the provision of student services to Black male student athletes. Replication across cases was not the goal. Better understanding of as many potential issues as possible was.

Even if a multiple case study design was best suited for this study, there were additional decisions that needed to be made. The use of a multiple case study design can lead to a set of cross case conclusions, particularly when the nature of the research questions is rooted in how and why questions (Yin, 2009). Evidence collected for multiple case study designs tends to provide more compelling and robust results, unlike that collected for a single case study design.

### **Research Context**

The setting for this study was a local community college campus located in the northeastern United States; specifically in a borough of New York City. The college is

part of a large public university system. Both groups of research participants, Black male student athletes and student support services providers, participated in primarily open ended interviews (individual). All research and data gathering procedures took place either during the day or evening, depending on when it was convenient for participants.

### **Research Participants**

The participants for this study included three Black male student athletes and three paid student support services providers at the institution. The Black male student athletes were in one of their last two semesters before graduating with their associate's degrees. Moreover, the Black male student athletes all had aspirations of transferring to a four year institution of higher education. In addition to earning their bachelor degrees, all wanted to compete as basketball players on the Division I, II, or III level.

The paid student support staff participants had varying amounts of experience in their departments, one participant was fairly new to the department, another had between three to five years experience and the third had more than five years of service. Each staff member worked full time at the institution. The ethnic and gender make up of this group of participants consisted of two white females and one Black male.

Both groups involved in the study were volunteers and the researcher received support from those who supervised both groups, in this case the Vice President of Student Development and the campus Athletic Director. Furthermore, the V.P. of Student Development assisted in the selection of the student support services participants so that one had a vast amount of experience and two were newer staff members.

Because the study involved working with human subjects, the researcher submitted an Institutional Review Board Proposal application to the degree granting

institution. No IRB approval was required from the institution where the research took place; the Chief IRB Official from the host institution confirmed this in writing. Finally, the researchers' way of showing appreciation to the participants for the time they invested in the study, both groups of study participants were notified by the researcher that at the study's conclusion each would receive a small gratuity not to exceed \$25.00 in value.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Creswell (2009) noted that the qualitative data collection instruments most often used by qualitative researchers are observations, interviews, and audio-visual data. The data collection process used for this study included individual interviews that were recorded (audio only) along with researcher observations made during the interviewing process (Yin, 2009). During the collection of data, the researcher focused on some of the behaviors of the participants by assessing body language and other signs of discomfort and intensity expressed by the participants. If a participant was experiencing some sort of discomfort with certain types of questions, the researcher would redirect or restate the question in a manner to create a more comfortable atmosphere. Taking these steps helped ensure a more genuine response from the participants and reduced any discomfort the participant was experiencing.

The researcher had two primary responsibilities during the interviewing process. The first responsibility was to follow the line of inquiry as outlined in the case study protocol. Secondly, the researcher attempted to ask conversational questions in an unbiased fashion that served the line of inquiry. In addition to the use of individual interviewing and observations as data collection instruments, the third and final data

collection instrument used was capturing the participant's verbatim responses using audio recording devices. Taking this approach provided the researcher with several advantages for accurately capturing the participant's responses to interview questions. The careful handling of this phase of the data collection process, added a layer of reliability to the research study. Yet another advantage of using audio recording devices was that the researcher was free to focus on the topic and the dynamics of the interviewing process instead of focusing on note taking during the interviews. A final advantage for using video recording equipment as a data collection instrument was the unique opportunity offered for analyzing the interpersonal interaction occurring during interviewing (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

### **Individual Interviewing**

Although no universal standards or rules exist for conducting research interviews, there are a range of choices with regard to approaches and techniques that were helpful at varying stages of this study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Individual interviews presented several opportunities as well as challenges. For example, individual interviewees can be somewhat hesitant when interviewed one on one (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Therefore, the researcher began with questions that were "friendly" and those that posed no threats. This line of questioning is referred to as a Level 1 type of questioning (Yin, 2009). An advantage for using individual interviews as a data collection method allowed the researcher to have control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2009).

Moreover, the researcher was well aware that setting the "proper" stage for individual interviewing was critical to the types of responses and openness to the

questions. Therefore, the researcher used general small talk as an ice breaker to help make the interviewees as relaxed as possible. Once the researcher felt the interviewees were a little more relaxed and comfortable, the researcher defined the topic of the study, the purpose of the interview, why a recorder was being used, and most importantly, how the participant's contributions in the interview would aid the development of the entire study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Once the researcher felt the interviewees were comfortable, an interview guide (script) with topics related to the study was used to guide the interviewing process. Thematically based questions were used by the researcher when questions of "what" were involved and dynamically based questions were used to inquire about "how" the interviewee understood the topic of a question. Both thematic and dynamic based questioning is advocated as promoting a more positive interaction between the interviewer and the person being interviewed (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The participant's responses to questions determined how much, if any, probing was required. The researcher was also committed to being sensitive to both groups of individuals involved in this research study, and understood the moral issues involved as well (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

During the past 30 years, various methods and strategies for analyzing interview data have emerged, providing both experienced and novice qualitative researchers with a plethora of choices. The procedures for analyzing qualitative research data range from highly structured approaches, such as content analysis, to more open approaches, sometimes referred to as "holistic approaches that are similar to reviewing a play or

musical composition” (Willis, Inman, & Valenti, 2010, p. 318). Yin (2009) seemed to agree with the views of Willis, et al. (2010), stating that qualitative researchers have two general approaches to data analysis at their disposal, holistic and embedded analysis. Researchers can use the holistic analysis approach that involves studying the case study data in context, or an embedded analysis approach which involves breaking the data into small units or components and then drawing conclusions from those units and the relationships between them. Moreover, Willis, et al. (2010), asserted that organizing data is the first step in the data analysis phase of a study. Stringer (2007) and Yin (2009) both contended that data analysis is also a form of interpretation, which generally takes place after the data organization has been completed.

In this study, the data analysis included both holistic components and embedded components. A major part of the results chapter, which follows this one, consists of six case studies, one for each of the six participants. That segment of the results situates the views of each participant within the context of those individual participants’ background and experience. This aspect of the data analysis, as well as the next, was based on the general inductive approach.

The six case studies were written using the inductive and holistic approach. It involved reading and rereading the transcripts of data from each case and making notes in the margins of the transcripts that reflected initial impressions, tentative hypotheses, and possible themes and issues expressed in the interview. Furthermore, Thomas (2003) contended, that one advantage of using a general inductive approach to analyze the data is that it enables the researcher to condense raw data into a summarized format, establish linkages between research objectives and the summary (in this research, the case studies)

based on the researcher's multiple reviews of the raw text data. In this same process, the researcher began to develop themes that could be looked at across the case studies.

In the second major part of the results in Chapter 4 is a report of six themes that were dealt with in all, or almost all, of the case studies. The use of holistic inductive approach did, in this study, help to identify the frequent or significant themes inherent in the raw data without the restraints imposed by more structured methodologies, which is an advantage of a general inductive approach to data analysis according to Thomas (2003).

After getting a sense of, and working with, the data, the researcher put the information (raw data) into large categories using index cards to jot down the themes that most or all of the participants voiced. After compiling the responses most often expressed by the student support services providers on the index cards, the same process was replicated for the Black male student athletes. To further develop the coding procedures for the study, the researcher, with approval from both groups of participants, completed what Thomas (2003) referred to as categorical development. The next step the researcher used in the inductive coding process was to identify links or relationships with other categories. The researcher also took great care not to do what Yin (2009) warned against, which was to attempt to analyze data that was outside of the scope of the research questions. By continuing to refine and revise the category system, the researcher eventually developed themes (Thomas, 2003). In the final step of this process, the researcher identified the themes that were most dominant and apparent in the multiple case study data.

## **Memo Writing**

Two forms of memo writing, analytic and self-reflective, were used to document and enhance the data analysis process of this study. For example, the researcher identified some of the implicit words or thoughts expressed by the participants and interpreted them in more explicit ways. Further, by using the analytic memos, the researcher focused on questions that surfaced along with any emerging patterns expressed by the study's participants. Moreover, all short descriptors, known as in vivo codes expressed by the participants were documented. In addition, the researcher developed self-reflective memos to record any personal reactions to narratives presented by the participants' (Morrow & Brown, 1994). By following these procedures, the researcher identified assumptions and key phrases used by the study participants. The use of this process was helpful in moving to the first stage of coding, which was to identify main categories within the data (Charmaz, 2006).

## **Believability in Qualitative Research**

Over the past 20 years much attention has been given to the reliability, validity, and credibility (believability) of research findings, irrespective of the methodology used by researchers (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A strong and active debate has emerged around how qualitative researchers should establish the believability of their findings. For example, the hard numbers and probability values most common in quantitative research methodology caused many of the leading qualitative researchers to dismiss the whole idea of confirming credibility (believably) using the same approach as quantitative researchers by implying that, reliability and validity were properties of quantitative, and not qualitative research (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Leininger, 1994).

Other leading qualitative researchers took a totally different stance and suggested that new criteria for determining reliability and validity should be explored. Qualitative researchers who are in agreement with this approach, suggested that rigor be applied in qualitative research evaluation. By taking this approach, questions of reliability and validity could be replaced with more specific criteria and standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

To help ensure the believability of this study, the researcher used some of the verification standards developed by leading qualitative researchers, authors, and scholars. Included in the study were rich, accurate descriptions of the setting (naturalistic), research participants, and procedures used to collect and analyze the data (Yin, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, the researcher ensured that the parameters and boundaries of the study were well specified. Additionally, by specifying the steps and procedures taken to enhance the believability of the study added to the study's credibility and enhanced the external validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kvale, 1989; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Another aspect of this study that increases believability is the use of triangulation. While the individual case studies highlight unique and idiosyncratic aspects of each participant's perceptions, the themes described in the last section of the data analysis are the themes that emerged in all, or almost all, of the case studies. That they reflect shared perceptions adds to their believability.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 included a detailed description of the methodology used to guide this multiple case study, along with details of the components of data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, the rationale for the researcher's choice of approaches for analyzing the data was discussed and outlined, along with detailed descriptions of how each section of the chapter relates to the overall development of the methodology that guided this study.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Chapter 4 reports the findings from multiple (cumulative) case studies. This study examined the perceptions of three Black male student athletes at an urban community college about access, use, and delivery of student services. This study also examined the perceptions of three student support services staff at that same community college. In addition, this study examined the relationships and interactions between the two groups based on their expressed perceptions. For example, how often did the Black male student athletes access and use the services offered by the support services staff and what were the student perceptions of the manner in which those services were delivered? This study also captured the perceptions of the student support services staff relative to the Black male student athletes accessing and using the services offered.

Therefore, the primary research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do the Black male student athletes in community college describe their perceptions of the student support services providers' delivery of the services offered?
2. How do the student support services providers describe their perceptions of the Black male student athletes in the community college as it pertains to accessing and utilizing the services offered?

One of the researcher's objectives' for this study was to identify ways, means, and methods for improving the delivery of services to Black male student athletes, as well as identifying ways in which Black male student athletes could help student support services providers to better understand and to improve the delivery of services, for present and

future Black male student athletes. In an effort to bring balance and perspective to the study, the researcher also sought to capture the student support services providers' perceptions of how and with what frequency Black male student athletes access and use the services offered. The researcher also sought to capture the ways and methods by which the Black male student athletes could better inform the student support services providers' of their needs.

To capture the necessary responses to a set of interview questions, the researcher used in-depth individual interviewing, which involved the use of probes and requests for clarification when deemed necessary. This approach helped to provide more depth and breadth to the interviews. Each of the participants (four males and two females) self-identified as a member of one of the following ethnic groups: African-American, Jamaican-American, Jewish-American, and Puerto Rican-American. Moreover, the participants reported their ages ranged from 22 to 35 years. The next section of this chapter provides an introductory overview of each participant group, along with a case description of each participant. To protect the anonymity of each participant, pseudonyms were used and where necessary, general rather than specific descriptions of characteristics were used to ensure that individual participants in the study could not be identified.

### **Introductory Overview-Black Male Student Athlete Participants**

Based on their individual assessment of academic and athletic skills, all three student athlete participants expressed excitement about the possibility of graduating with their associate's degree and having an opportunity to advance to a four year institution of higher education. Each of the student athletes discussed his reasons for being a non-

traditional student and reported reasons for not applying to college immediately after completing high school. However, all three participants stated they had no regrets for delaying entrance to community college. One of the participants acknowledged that it is “Better late than never.”

The participants provided the following collective reasons for not applying to college immediately after high school. Most of the reasons were social or economic in description. A primary reason for the shift from continuing their education was to focus on issues with their families. Students shared that their need to identify full time employment opportunities and resolve parenting issues made the idea of going to school on a full time or part time basis a distant or even impossible option to consider. Although the researcher sensed there were other reasons for the delay in pursuing higher education, he (the researcher) did not push participants to reveal other reasons because he did not want to appear to be delving into topics the students seemed apprehensive about revealing.

Participants also gave an additional reason for not continuing. They felt they were not prepared for college. When asked by the researcher at what point did they recognize or feel they were unprepared to perform at a level expected of a community college student, each spoke about how they were promoted throughout high school, primarily because of their athletic skills. Each participant began their college careers at a time when most of their peers would have already earned their undergraduate degrees. Yet, in spite of these delays, each participant demonstrated a level of commitment to his academic and athletic development by virtue of his current status and approaching graduation from community college. Each participant was scheduled to graduate at the end of the spring

semester when they were interviewed. All remained eligible to participate in their specific athletic event as evidenced by their satisfactory cumulative grade point averages (GPA), which was maintained throughout their tenure at this community college. The participants reported their academic areas of interest were in computer science, sociology and “undecided.” When asked by the researcher about their academic goals beyond community college, the participants reported they had concerns and fears regarding the financial cost of higher education. The participants expressed the view that without some type of scholarship assistance or financial aid assistance, their academic and athletic aspirations could be in jeopardy. Further, each participant reported that to date, based on their research, there were a very limited number of opportunities in their sport, as regard to the number of athletic officials from four year institutions of higher education who were recruiting from their community college.

Two of the three reported having to address issues such as, academic under preparedness, parenting issues, and lack of adequate financial assistance. In spite of this situation, the two participants reported their aspirations to succeed academically and athletically at the next level, would force them to “buckle down” and perform at an acceptable level, at a Division I, II, or III institution.

One of the three participants stated the following, “I am not so concerned about participating athletically at the next level, no matter whether it is at the Division I, II, or III level. My main concern is to earn my degree so that I can help support my child and set a good example.” The two other participants expressed some apprehension about whether or not their current community college really cared about their athletic advancement opportunities once they graduated. However, when asked by the researcher

what evidence he had of support from his community college, one participant stated he had been told by his head coach and athletic director that he not only had the athletic ability to perform at a Division I institution of higher education, and, based on his current grade point average they also believed that he could perform academically. They further reported that with the proper guidance, counseling, and financial assistance their chances of realizing their goals are well within reach.

More detailed descriptions of the triumphs and challenges faced by the study participants will be presented in the individual case descriptions.

### **Introductory Overview-Student Support Services Providers Participants**

The three student support services provider participants all expressed enthusiasm about participating in the study. When asked to provide their reason(s) for volunteering to participate in the study, each stated they believed the service provided by their department was the cornerstone of success for students at their community college. Furthermore, they felt improving the service delivery to Black male student athletes would help to ensure a successful transition to four year institutions of higher education. Moreover, each participant also expressed a desire to gain a better understanding of the needs of the Black male student athletes, a group that was often under prepared to perform the academic tasks required at the community college level. The staff also expressed the belief that their remedial academic needs are often unmet because of time constraints based on the schedules that student athletes were required to keep.

The collective experience of this group of participants working in higher education was very broad, and each participant had specific areas of expertise. The participants' years of experience range from three to 15 years. Additionally, participants

reported having earned advanced degrees in disciplines such as public administration, licensed clinical social work, sociology and doctoral level academic counseling.

The support services staff described their day-to-day tasks. One participant reported her area of expertise and the focus of day-to-day duties were geared primarily toward helping students develop career planning skills and making transfer decisions to four year institutions of higher education. Another participant reported her day-to-day duties were geared primarily to providing counseling and mental health services. This participant was especially interested in changing the structure of certain programs within the student support services department. Furthermore, this participant had a special concern and wanted to restructure the program in a manner that would better inform the student athletes on how best to use the services. Another participant served as a senior counselor who focused daily on assisting first year students with their academic planning. Moreover, this participant reported being involved in a university-wide initiative geared toward improving opportunities and service delivery to Black male students in general.

This participant group reported being involved in all phases of service delivery in the student support services department and had, over the years, continued to develop methods to improve service delivery. Every participant reported high levels of commitment to change, and they identified areas that could be improved. They proposed changes they believed would help them become more effective as change agents for those they served. The three student support staff participants believed the Black male student athletes as a group could benefit greatly from the services offered by the department and could possibly gain more benefits from having a liaison serving to bridge the gap between them and the student support services department. One participant reported there

is a stigma of sorts that often prevents the Black male student athletes from coming forward and taking advantage of the many services offered. One suggestion was that a designated staff person with knowledge of the rigors of athletics and academics could be instrumental in helping the Black male student athletes' understanding of how student support services can help to meet their needs.

The following sections of this chapter provide case descriptions and the participants' responses to the interview questions. The researcher interviewed six participants, three Black male student athletes and three student support services providers- two women and one male. Each participant was guaranteed a high level of anonymity and is only identified using letters and numbers.

### **Individual in-depth interviews**

The in-depth individual interviews and the research questions that guided this study were focused on capturing the perceptions of both groups of participants about the services rendered, access frequency, and utilization of services, as well as the manner in which those services were delivered and received. To aid in capturing rich responses to the interview questions, the researcher used multiple probes, requests for clarification when needed, and also used what Kvale and Brinkman (2009) described as “the art of second questions” to add further depth and clarity to the initial interview questions (p.138).

The Black male student athletes were asked to give their perceptions of the services offered by the student support services department and the manner in which those services were delivered. In addition, near the end of each of the individual interview sessions participants were also asked to suggest ways and methods they felt

service delivery could be improved.

A similar approach was used for the student support services providers. However, in the case of the student support services providers, the researcher, throughout the individual interviewing process, sought to capture how often the Black male student athletes accessed and used the services offered and to identify ways and methods the service providers could improve the relationships, access, and utilization of the services. For example, the researcher asked the staff participants about perceived comfort levels of the Black male student athletes in that environment, and, if they attempted to access services did they feel the Black male student athletes fully comprehended how the services offered could aid in advancing their academic and athletic careers, especially with regard to transferring to a four year institution of higher education and career counseling guidance. These and many other questions of this type were what the researcher hoped to find answers to.

From the researcher's perspective, the Black male student athletes also had a role in advancing their careers, both academically and athletically, by being accountable to explore the many offerings of the student support services department. Furthermore, they also had a responsibility to help identify ways and methods they felt could help the student support services providers assist them. For example, what level of knowledge and understanding did they have about the many services offered by student support and how could these services have helped them advance their careers and realize their dreams. The following section provides a case description of each participant.

Open and frank discussions were also held with the student support services providers. They spoke of the frustrations they experienced in carrying out their day-to-

day duties. Although the challenges and aspirations of this group were more diverse compared to the Black male student athletes, they too had dreams and goals both in and outside of academia. They spoke of the challenges of raising families and being a first time parent, while providing professional services to a plethora of students presenting with a host of dreams, goals, and aspirations. Of course, each of the student support services staff members had been students at one point in their life's journey. As a result of those experiences, their level of identification and the empathic connection to those they served was apparent in their perceptions of their job and the students they assisted. The following sections provide case descriptions and individual interview responses from the three Black male student athletes, and three student support services providers.

### **Black Male Student Athletes Case Descriptions and Individual Interview Responses**

As previously indicated, all participants for this study will be identified by pseudonyms to help ensure their anonymity. The pseudonym SA, which stands for student athlete and an assigned number, will identify each student athlete participant.

SA1 reported that he was in his final year at this community college and was on schedule to graduate with his associate's degree at the end of the Spring semester. Based on his personal assessment of his academic and athletic skills, this student athlete expressed his excitement about the opportunity to attend a four year institution of higher education, hopefully at the Division I or II level. Recent conversations between the student athlete, the researcher, the school's Athletic Director and head coach suggested this student athlete possessed the requisites necessary to succeed at the next level, academically and athletically. Moreover, his leadership acumen was such that he was selected as a team captain and consistently demonstrated transformational and

transactional leadership skills. Furthermore, according to his head coach, he led by example in both academic and athletic settings.

When asked by the researcher to share some of his background, the participant spoke openly of the financial and social challenges he faced prior to enrolling in this institution. Although he stated he never doubted his ability to perform academically or athletically at the community college level, he felt there was a period between his high school years and his enrollment at this institution when his decision making skills led to poor lifestyle choices.

In addition, the participant discussed how he gained a personal sense of responsibility for his academic success and had few, if any, expectations from student support services. Moreover, he described himself as somewhat of a “late bloomer.” When asked to explain what he meant, he replied, “Let’s just say, I should have been in college sooner.” It was apparent the participant did not want to provide specific details surrounding the late bloomer comments.

However, the participant said he was very proud that he would soon have a college degree and believed he was on his way to realizing his dreams of participating at a four year institution of higher education as a student athlete. The following section provides the participant’s response to the interview question, along with probes, requests for clarification and discussions of what he saw as his responsibility to help student support services to help guide him to success.

The researcher began the interview by posing the following question, “What is your perception of the student support services at the college”? This participant replied, “Honestly I feel that the support services are so-so.” When asked to elaborate further, the

participant responded that he did not think they were great, but were not that bad either. When asked to further explain, the participant stated, there were some staff in the student support services offices that were willing to help and others more readily, it “seemed as if they are here for a pay check.” The researcher asked the participant to continue commenting on several topics related to services provided by the student support services department. The participant was exceptionally animated and outspoken when speaking about his feelings of being treated as “less than” by some of the staff, who were of Hispanic descent. The participant further stated that at times the services were offered by some who “gave a lot of attitude.” The researcher asked for clarification and the participant expressed strong feelings about the services he received, yet, he was careful to not paint the entire staff in the department with a broad and negative brush. Moreover, the participant stated strongly that he believed students of Hispanic descent tend to be treated better than others. The participant was asked to elaborate further on his perception of treatment by some members in student support services. He expressed feelings of being “put off” by some of the workers periodically; specifically, there were times when he needed assistance to renew his identification card or to obtain up to date financial aid information that he believed student support services were responsible for providing he perceived reluctance to provide assistance by the worker. When asked to give an example, the participant stated, “The way some staff members talked to me was not in a professional manner and tone.” When asked to identify what would he attribute the staff members’ behavior to and if he thought it had to do with anything else, the participant shrugged his shoulders. He also said, “It’s not all the workers that have that attitude, but it’s quite a few.” He added detail by saying, “I feel that a couple of them may do it to all

people, maybe they have a personal problem, or bad days. I don't know what it is, but regardless of whether you're having a bad day, once you come to work, that should be a whole new world. Like whatever you do at home, it should be different from what you do at work." The participant continued by stating, "I feel some may want to help others out based on race, not saying that they're racist or anything like that, let's say if it is a Hispanic worker, and a black male or a female asking for help." Further probing by the researcher brought this response from the participant, "We may not get the same response as a Hispanic student who asks the same Hispanic worker the same question."

To gain further insight into the participant's perception, the researcher asked, how often had he encountered this behavior? The participant responded that he has encountered this behavior quite a few times. The researcher asked the participant, what he did when he encountered situations like that and the participant responded, "I do not go to a supervisor or anyone in authority." When asked why not, the participant stated that he did not have the time or did not take the time to explore additional options. When asked about ways to improve student services, the participant responded, "maybe they're not showing us the right way to go about doing it or presenting it the right way." Even when prodded, the participant did not give any specific examples and used generalizations that had been mentioned previously. Furthermore, the participant's body language signaled to the researcher that it would be a good time to take a break. However, the participant said he was fine and was willing to continue the interview.

Although the participant failed to provide examples of the changes staff were attempting to make, he provided the following unsolicited response, "Before I say anything else, I would just want to, I would like to say that as a student athlete I'm not

looking to go to class and ask my professor just to pass me because I'm an athlete for the school. No, that's not what I'm asking. I'm going to go to class; I'm going to do what I need to do to get the grade that I need. But I feel that a lot of times they are not really an athletic school; it's not really into sports as another school would be. So we don't really get the help that we would need." The participant elaborated on his previous remark stating that athletes do not have a study time as a group. The participant was visibly frustrated when he talked about designated study time, or, the lack thereof. The researcher redirected his questioning to allow the participant to discuss that area of concern. Additionally, the researcher asked, "What is it about study time that seems to frustrate you so much"? The participant stated, "We would have to do that on our own time." The researcher asked, "Are there others available to help with your study time"? The participant replied in the affirmative, "we do have help from coaches and the athletic director; they are willing to help us to move on from where we are now, and to help us out. But we don't have other services that are willing to help us." Although, the researcher found these comments somewhat perplexing, he continued to encourage and probe the participant for further clarify. Moreover, it appeared to the researcher that the participant felt as if others had a perception of him as a student athlete that included expectations of him not having to earn his grades. The researcher stopped the interview and reminded the participant that he simply wanted his perception of the student support services providers and the services offered. After a brief interlude, the participant appeared to have a sense of relief and the interviewing continued. The researcher redirected the participant by asking him to describe other areas in support services he would like to see implemented, changed or improved. The participant stated that the

tutoring schedules should be changed. When the researcher asked why, the participant spoke of the challenges of being a community college student athlete. He spoke in an emotional tone about former teammates who fell off the team because they lacked the ability to do well academically. And, as a student athlete, he felt they should have more structured schedules for study time. When asked by the researcher to continue, the participant said he felt that most of what he has to do, he must do for himself. When asked to explain further, he stated that his coaches were always willing to help when asked, but the systems in place to support them were lacking organization and structure based on his perception.

In spite of those obstacles, the participant spoke glowingly about the good grades he was earning. Moreover, he was adamant about having worked hard and earning his good grades. He further stated that because of his hard work in his sport, his athletic performance statistics were good as well. Additionally, the participant was asked about the availability of individual and group tutoring services. The participant stated, “Yes, we do have tutors.” He went on to state, “the school does offer tutors for every program, and every class that there is in the school, but most of the time those tutors are only available during a specific time in which all students can’t make. For example, let’s say if a student has a class from let’s say 10:00 to 12:00, that tutor might be available from 10:00 till 12:00, but after 12:00 that tutor is no longer available when the student is free. So how can the student go to tutoring when that student already has a class and after his class, there’s no tutoring available for that class?” He further stated some student athletes had to go out of their way to find someone else who was willing to help tutor them. The participant further stated, “Tutoring, I feel, is a must. As I stated before, some student

athletes fell off of the team because they were not able to do the work and play sports.”

When asked if a liaison between the athletic department and student services would be helpful, the participant stated, “I believe it would surely help.” The researcher asked the participant what his reaction was to those students who had full time jobs, parenting responsibilities, and a host of other duties that they felt were important to them and did not have a liaison appointed for them. The participant countered by adding that those students with non-athletic responsibilities do not represent the college in their various activities and responsibilities.

In his closing remarks, the participant said he felt that in spite of the perception he expressed, he was optimistic and hopeful that his participation in this study could possibly help future Black male student athletes receive better treatment than he did and he believed strongly that the relationships between the Black male student athletes and student support services staff could be improved for both groups. This completes the summary of SA1’s interview responses.

The following section provides a case description and individual interview responses from the Black male student athlete participant identified as SA2. SA2 reported that he was in his final year and was on schedule to earn his associate’s degree at the conclusion of the spring semester. Moreover, the participant spoke of several pending major decisions he needed to make. For example, he hoped to identify a four year institution of higher education to attend, deciding along with the mother of his young child if he needed to apply to a school that was closer to home, determine if he would continue to participate as a student athlete or whether to focus exclusively on his studies. In addition, setting a good example for his young child was critical to him because of the

parenting deficits he experienced growing up. Although he was committed to eventually earning his master's degree, based on preliminary discussions with the mother of his child, if he felt she would support whatever decisions he would make with regard to applying to four year institutions, in or out of state. Furthermore, his commitment to being a father who was involved during his child's developing years was uppermost in his mind and he was cognizant of wanting not to cause any emotional pain or trauma to his young child by being absent. Based on several conversations with the athletic director and head coach, both expressed that the participant had maintained a level of consistency as it pertained to his leadership both in and out of the classroom. Moreover, the athletic director spoke glowingly about the participant's level of maturity and his willingness to do whatever was asked of him by his instructors and coaches. Further, the athletic director believed the participant could be a successful student athlete at the Division II or III level and was saddened by the fact that the numbers of scholarship offerings for student athletes of his caliber were limited. In spite of these obstacles, the participant stated that he was fully committed to succeeding as a student first and a student athlete second. His awareness of the variables associated with those decisions required him to seriously consider all options related to his ongoing growth and development as a student athlete. The following section provides the participant's responses to interview questions.

The researcher began the interview by asking, "What is your perception of the student support services here at the college"? He replied, "My perception is, basically, they're supposed to guide and support us in our journey throughout our time at this college. And, assist us with financial aid needs, as well as extracurricular activities such as sports and things of that nature. With probing he added, "Sometimes the student

support system likes to give us the runaround. They may send us to one, for instance, they might send us to one guidance counselor, which might send us right back to them. It's like, it's not directed specifically where we need to get. So it's like sometimes it's a headache because we're getting frustrated when we're trying to get down to something and we're getting the runaround and, then, we have to do everything on our own at times." When asked about possible reasons for this, he commented, "I had to do a lot of things on my own to get where I am at now." When asked what rating he would give student support services on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, he said, "I would give them, honestly, a four." He justified the rating by saying, "I have had bad confrontations with them." And then added, "Basically I just need to stay fulltime and stay on the basketball team and I have not been informed if I need to begin working toward a new degree, or, what's needed remain in a full time status."

When asked if he was on schedule to graduate at the end of next spring semester he confirmed that he was. "Yes, I am scheduled to graduate, however, I get different information each time I go to student support and they have not really been clear." Asked if he had had conversations with others who might be able to clarify what he needed, he was not optimistic. "I don't even know if it would help, will it affect me towards graduation if I could walk (graduate) in May or not?" I asked, "Have you approached your academic advisor about this matter?" and he responded, "No, right now I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place." Asked about anyone he could go to when student support services did not meet his needs, he added, "Yes, my backup plan is my athletic director, when things are not right, I have him make calls to his connections to see who he can speak to, [to] get me to where I got to go. But if I was to go to a student support

system, they're not telling me directly." I asked, "Is it your perception that you need more structured responses when you engage student support services and has your athletic director been helpful in providing that structure for you? He answered, "I just need to have specific answers to specific questions when I go to student support and they do not provide that for me. I have a lot of anxiety, but I'm trying to be proactive."

I also asked, "Do you believe that you should be treated differently because you are playing sports for the school" and he replied, "No, I feel as if I am being discouraged from playing sports." He also commented on his past experience in higher education. A while back I failed and was suspended for a while, I couldn't be in school for like two to three years, and now I'm getting back on my feet and I'm doing what I have to do; I still feel like I might not go anywhere, or I might end up not pursuing the degree." When asked why he felt he was being pushed out of the community college, he argued that "it was pretty regular" and indicated he knew of other students in the same situation. "A few times I saw other students who had bad attitudes and the student support staff did not handle it correctly."

When asked if he felt there were student support staff members who displayed bad attitudes, SA3 responded, "Yes, but most of the times it seemed to me that they just did not want to be bothered." He also added that "Another reason is basically because I'm African-American." In clarifying the remark he said, "Well, African-Americans and Latinos is basically the majority of that school. So you would think that since it's a lot of us you would be more for the people and pro-active and doing more things for us, but it feels like, for me, they're against me, and against us." In response to the question, when asked to clarify if SA3 was talking about all black males specifically, or just black male

student athletes, he replied, “Black males period and Black male athletes.” Similar to SA1, SA2 also discussed problems he had with scheduling because he was a student athlete. “It is frustrating being on a team and having to fit my schedule around others and if our schedule does not fit in with the tutoring schedules, we have to do everything on our own. And, I am limited to certain resources as well.” When informed that tutoring is not a part of student support services, SA2 acknowledged that he thought they were part of student support services. He indicated that investing time and effort in building a relationship with the staff would probably be helpful. “Well, for one, I could stop by to say hello and not stop by only when I need something from them.” He also felt this would be a useful approach for other student athletes. “Yes, I would encourage them to work on building relationships with the staff in that department and always keep in mind that as a Black male student athlete they are one of many students that the department must serve. And, I would encourage them to see someone like a liaison or someone who understands what it is like being a student athlete and understand what it’s like during the season with classes, practice, travel, and games.”

The following section provides a case description and individual interview responses from the participant identified as SA3.

SA3 reported that he was scheduled to graduate with his associate’s degree at the end of the spring semester. In addition, the participant spoke of his disappointment about not having been approached by recruiters from Division I, II or III institutions. As a transfer from a previous community college, SA3 admitted to having difficulty adjusting to the academic rigors of community college. While he was an African-American male, the participant was often mistaken for a Hispanic. When asked why, he replied, that his

physical characteristics and the spelling of his last name tended to give most the impression that he was of Hispanic descent. The researcher began the interview by asking, “What is your perception of the student support services here at the college?” SA3 replied, “To me it’s good, but I think everything could be better.” I followed up with, “Could the services offered through the student support services be improved? The participant responded, “Sometimes it’s slow, sometimes there are long lines, and sometimes they have attitudes.” I requested SA3 to describe or give an example of what he meant about having attitudes. He continued, “At times they hit you with words you do not want to hear, for example sometimes there is something wrong with my classes, financial aid, or whatever.” I followed up with, how do you handle such situations? “I often get an attitude.” I asked, what kind of attitude? “They may say something like, what do you want and make me feel like I am bothering them. All I am trying to do is figure out what I need to do to move on.” I followed up with, how often have you encountered these kinds of attitudes and have you tried using other strategies? “I start to get frustrated.” Other questions led to SA3 expressing the view that while student support services may have changed “a little” for the better, and then he commented “but they do not seem like they really wanted to help me.”

What needs to happen for your perception of student support services to change? SA3 offered several suggestions including “I think they need more tutors.” He further noted, “I felt like, why am I busting my ass to play for this school and they could not help with something like this?” SA3 was not aware that student support services did not manage the community college’s tutoring program, and when asked whether this made a difference in his perception of student services, he replied, “Well yes and no. Yes, tutors

help with mostly school stuff, but, sometimes they seem to know more than the people in the student support offices.” Participant SA3 perceived that the attitudes of the support service staff were not consistent. The environment was not welcoming.

When asked about things he could do to improve his relationship with student affairs staff, SA3 said, “Perhaps by stopping by when I am not in a hurry to get something from student support services and saying hello could be a good start to building better relationships.” When asked about ways student support services could improve relationships with Black male student athletes, SA3 replied, “I think they should hire more students and more people to help...I mean like hiring students to help with tutoring or working in the registration office or working to help around or make the process go faster.”

When asked what rating he would give student support services on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, he said, “I would give them a 6 or a 7, because like I said, it is a good support system. I just think they can tweak it and bring in more people to help.”

SA3 provided other suggestions, unsolicited, “I think they should hire advisors just for sports teams” He explained why he felt this would not be “special treatment” for athletes this way. “Not because we are special, just as a matter of convenience. As a student athlete I have to participate in practice, even on Sundays during the season and we have travel, games and things like that.” To the follow up question, I asked if student athletes should have their own advisors because participating in sports does not afford the opportunities you need to improve academically. He said, “Yes, it’s very challenging. However, a regular student who works and have family responsibilities have different

challenges than student athletes and that's the biggest reason I think we should have advisors assigned to us as student athletes, not because we are special. Besides, I believe that any student who has to work full time and raise a family probably feels the same kind of pressure that we do as student athletes. The difference is [that] I like playing sports, but students who have to work full time and raise families that is a big deal also.”

### **Student Support Services Providers Case Descriptions and Individual Interview Responses**

The three student support services provider participants will also be identified by pseudonyms SSP1, SSP2, and SSP3. The pseudonym SSP which stands for student support provider and an assigned number will identify each staff participant. The following are the case descriptions of the participants and their interview responses.

SSP1 reported that she had worked in the university's student support services department for the past three years. Her areas of expertise and the focus of her day-to-day duties were to help students develop career plans and make well-researched transfer recommendations to four year institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the participant reported that one of her reasons for participating in the study was to gain experience into studies of this nature and perhaps improve her proficiency in working with groups such as the Black male student athletes. She also has a desire to develop a plan to make individual tutoring more readily available for the student athletes in general and the Black male student athletes, in particular.

The researcher began the interview by asking, “What are your overall perceptions of the Black male student athletes as it pertains to their access and use of the services offered in your department?” She replied, “My overall perception is that they're hard

working and they have a lot to juggle.” I asked, “Would you clarify what you mean by hardworking and having a lot to juggle? Her response was, “They have to maintain a passing grade point average (GPA) in order to be in good academic standing and to maintain their eligibility to play sports.”

SSP1 said she had not developed any specific strategies for dealing with the Black male student athletes because “it never dawned on me until I met you (the researcher) how the students identify themselves as an athlete. I’m sure we’ve serviced them in one way or another, but we have never documented it.” SSP1 elaborated by saying, “We have thought about reaching out to the athletic department, however, the discussion was general in nature and no specific plan of action has been developed...we thought about possibly partnering with athletics and maybe do some career assessments, personality assessments, and that’s something that we want to do in the future.”

SSP1 further described the services offered, “Well, one of the personality assessments that we do here is called the Myers-Briggs type indicator -a personality assessment and not really based on academic performance, but focused on one’s decision making abilities. Understanding why people make decisions the way they do and why people do things the way they do, I believe that would definitely be an asset to a team of athletes because they will understand their teammates, why they do things a certain way.” I further inquired with SSP1 if she would talk more about her idea of partnering with the athletic department and how would this partnership help to improve the Black male student athletes access and use of student support services? SSP1 noted that “We have been partnering slowly with other departments such as the criminal justice program. In previous semesters we have worked with the students in freshmen-year seminars and the

other freshmen courses such as the Orientation and Career Development (OCD) course. We thought the students improved their overall performance. Therefore, we thought why not try it with student athletes as well and see if it helped the dynamics of the team and the student athletes' individual performances as well."

When asked if Black male student athletes had ever done anything to distinguish themselves when accessing the services offered in student support, SSP1 commented, "The few that I've met have been very open about the fact that they're on one team or another, but aside from that, no." A follow up question asked if these students seemed to expect "to receive preferential treatment this participant replied, "No, not in the four years I have been here." SSP1 was also asked how a Black male student athlete's request for faster services due to the need to get to practice, the response was, "Well, I would say, you're like every other student, I would give that response only because I am very aware that our office services everyone. However, I would definitely be more attentive to tailoring their résumés or a job application, a transfer application, to detail what they've done and show their leadership skills they have developed as a student athlete."

The second student services staff participant, SSP2, reported that she had served in K-12 public education and the past three years in higher education. Her day-to-day duties were focused on providing counseling and mental health services. In addition, her belief was that the department should consider restructuring the program in a manner that would better inform the student athletes on how best to utilize their services. Moreover, as a committed member of student support services, she is constantly seeking ways to improve service delivery. Along with serving in student support services, like most of her colleagues, she too has many interests and responsibilities outside of academia. Yet, she

felt strongly about the need to revamp many of the services and programs to better serve all students.

The researcher began the interview by asking, “What is your overall perception of the Black male student athletes here as it pertains to their access and use of student support services”? She replied, “We have very few referrals of student athletes, period.” She further stated, “Of the Black male student athletes I have worked with, I can actually think of only one or two off the top of my head, they were actually very engaged in school, very motivated, connected with the people in the athletic department and connected with some other people as well.” However, she added, “My perception is the lack of referrals may be caused by stigmas associated with coming in to counseling services...this is my assumption, however I don’t know this to be factual. For example, there’s a stigma among military and veteran students, so I would assume there’s maybe a similar stigma among all athletic students, Black males and otherwise.” She noted, however, that male athletes seemed to be more sensitive about the possible stigma.

When asked about the belief held by a few of the Black male student athletes that student support services favored Hispanic students over Black students, SSP2 commented, “Um, I wouldn’t be totally surprised, in the sense that I’ve heard from students that there are tensions in general between Black and Latino students. And, our student population is 70% Latino here, so I guess in that sense, the Black students are the minority, so I wouldn’t be totally surprised about that perception. However, I don’t believe that to be true...I don’t know the exact numbers, but the majority of the staff in student affairs, which is the division that student support services is located in, are African-American, or a very large percentage of the staff are. So it seems like just that in

itself would be surprising, but I'm not surprised about the perception of the students and I'm not quite sure where that comes from, other than the fact that the majority of students here are Hispanic.”

When asked if the few Black male student athletes had an expectation of receiving preferential treatment, she replied, “I guess not, because if they felt that they would receive preferential treatment, I guess they would be more likely to come in. However, I'll share a little bit of what I do know. Personally in my experience as a mental health professional, I think the best way to connect students is the handoff from a person that they trust to a person in student support services. And, if that connection is not there between the faculty and staff of the athletic department and the faculty and staff of psychological services or student support services, then students are not going to follow through. So at least in my perception, I think it's an issue of what are the preconceptions or what are the thoughts and feelings that the faculty and staff in athletic services have about our student support services.” This statement of a need for building more collaborative relationships between different elements of the community college was expressed in another comment. “Some of the staff especially the Black male staff members had reservations about psychological and mental health services themselves. Because if they don't feel confident in student support services, then they're not going to refer students and that trust needed is not going to be conveyed to the student.”

A number of SSP2's comments indicated she felt it was very important for staff and faculty who made referrals to student support services demonstrate to the student that they trusted the department and believed the referral would be helpful to students. She also described receiving a phone call from the New Director of Athletics about referring a

student to student support services. She noted, “It was the first time I ever got a phone call from the athletics department. He wanted to refer a student, and I could tell when speaking with him he sounded a little bit nervous, but he also seemed really concerned and really wanted to help this student. I thanked him for calling and suggested in the future we could work on trying to find some ways to make stronger connections between our departments.”

In the interview with SSP3, the participant reported that he had worked in the student support services department for the past six years. As a key member of student support services, his day-to-day duties were focused on working with and counseling first year students. In addition, he served as a classroom instructor and was recently granted tenure. In addition to his work here at the college, he is a primary contributor to a system-wide initiative geared toward helping Black males to begin and complete their college education. Several of his scholarly publications were geared to inform Black male students, traditional and non- traditional, about the many obstacles to college success and methods for overcoming them to achieve their desired academic goals.

When asked about his perception of Black student athletes, he said, “From a faculty point of view, I believe a lot of them are good athletes as far as their talent goes. Probably their academics are a little bit inferior. And, I think if they had stronger academics they’d be at other institutions. So I think they use this opportunity as a chance to come and strengthen their skills and still work on their academics, but I think they’re using this community college experience as a bridge to get to another institution.” When asked if he had developed specific strategies for working with the Black male student SSP3 said, “With the athletes, I don’t have a different strategy than with students who are

not athletes per se. I came across runners, basketball players, soccer players, and I just think a lot of it is about creating relationships. I think that's a unique or universal approach with all Black male students, whether they're athletes or not." When asked if it is more frustrating to work with Black male student athletes compared to other groups at the college, SSP3 said, "Yes I do...I think a lot of them have these hoop dreams. Some players have these dreams of only achieving or excelling physically and not thinking about their mental and academic abilities, and that supersedes their purpose of college from my perception. Furthermore, I just think that they need to shift energies elsewhere or, they can still have those dreams but I think it should be equally distributed because their physical capabilities can deteriorate, or are deteriorating each day."

When asked to respond to the fact that all three Black male student athlete participants said they felt that student support services favored Hispanic students, SSP3's view was, "I think they probably have their own personal experiences that probably clouded their perception before they got here, I think it's just like a halo effect...I think there's probably more opportunities for a Hispanic student to build relationships with other Hispanic faculty and staff, so it's that shared common bond that probably connects them. Or from the outside looking in, they develop this perception and think that it's favoritism or some type of nepotism going on based on race, but it's just based on familiarity and a kind of culture connectedness. But I don't think there's intentional favoritism being displayed. Moreover, I think African American student athletes need to create those same relationships because there's not that much difference between the two groups." When asked whether it was totally the responsibility of the Black male student athletes to explore and get a better understanding, both culturally and ethnically of groups

different than their own, SSP3 said, “I don’t think the onus should be placed on the student. The faculty and staff have to take the lead and help those student athletes, I think students don’t know better. That’s why they’re here and I think it’s up to us as leaders to create those relationships and be intentional in our relationship building. Students come from a point of ignorance and they come to college to gain awareness and we have to lead them in those areas.”

SSP3 responded in the affirmative to another question, do you believe that the Black male student athletes have an expectation of receiving preferential treatment? SSP3 said, “Yes, on this particular campus, to some degree. There’s a level of expectation when it comes to a lot of them...for example, their schedules have to be satisfied before 3:00 P.M. so that’s preferential treatment. Some would be inclined to describe this as a consideration being given, as opposed to them receiving preferential treatment.” This participant also felt some faculty made allowances for student athletes “...for them to attend games, practice, and travel.” However, SSP3 was more moderate when asked if similar considerations were made for students who worked full time, had childcare issues and other issues that meant they needed some level of flexibility to continue their education. SSP3 stated, “Actually these types of considerations are available to all students.”

When asked about services available to help the Black male student athletes to improve how often they access and use the services offered by student support services, SSP3 eagerly spoke about being involved in student life on the college campus. “One way is to become involved in student organizations, particularly BMI - the Black Male Initiative...an organization where Black male students of all persuasions can involve

themselves in and obtain the much needed support. They need to have a voice in BMI and could have a strong presence in that organization because they're their own fraternity to some degree. Another option for improving their perception and using student support services would be to get involved with the Student Government Board. There is no representation of athletes on the SGB. The team itself is a powerful force because they have large numbers. So if they use their numbers wisely, they could be a very powerful force to be reckoned with on this campus. I think their whole challenge is to get involved just beyond the one season sport." When asked how Black male student athletes knew enough about BMI and other organizations, SSP3 said, "I couldn't speak for the BMI coordinator, however, students in BMI have a presence on campus. I don't know what kind of direct outreach efforts have been coordinated by BMI. Furthermore, I don't know to what extent students know about the BMI existence. However, I do know when students go to a faculty extension or campus-wide sanctioned event, BMI is present there. And you know, maybe they don't know how to approach the folks to get membership information or find out what could be to their benefit, but they are available on campus and are visible." When asked by the researcher, if he agree with his colleagues who participated in this study, that to help improve the Black male student athletes' perception of student support services areas such as collaborative relationship building or assigning a liaison from the athletic department could lead to improved guidance and service delivery for this group, SSP3 stated, "Yes, I agree, however, I would add this caveat, they get to community college and yet for some reason they're not able to complete their studies, which means advancement of any kind, academic and athletic is out of the question to advance to a four-year school."

With regards to ideas about Black male student athletes' access and use of student support services, SSP3 made several comments: "One, they're underprepared and are probably ingrained in remedial courses with levels or layers of remedial courses. Further, some could be here for two or three semesters and not earn 10 college credits in over a year's time. Two, engagement or lack of engagement is a contributor to the negative perceptions they often have about student support services. Third, I don't think students are connected to the institution and the institution does a poor job of creating direct relationships as far as keeping students here. And four, the school fails to make it evident what students could get from this whole college experience." He also added, "One of the things we could have is pre-advisement." The researcher asked for clarification of how pre-advisement could contribute to changing their perception. SSP3 stated, "When it comes to advising students for the next semester, we could create a pipeline that provides them a streamlined process to get them with the early classes. Maybe if they had a presence within this building that would probably strengthen the relationships between our office and them. Perhaps identifying a person or representative liaison would be ideal." SSP3 also noted a potential barrier to greater collaboration across departments. "We tend to operate in silos in community college, or higher education period. Therefore, if we physically interacted more and provide linkages, greater opportunities for engagement and collaborative efforts could improve the relationships between the Black male student athletes and student support services." SSP3 continued, "When you think about major universities, you know, like the one I attended, I saw the exploitation of student athletes, especially among Black male student athletes and it's just a new form of slavery; the new Jim Crow. I always call it another way to get services and make the

school more attractive. And whatever happens as an output, especially when it came to Black male student athletes, if they made it to the pros, great. One constant is that the school is always benefiting from the gain of the individual. For example, the person may get 10% but the school is getting 90%, whether it's the athletes, whether it's the theater majors, whether it's the cheerleaders. 'School is a business.'"

### **Data Synthesis and Findings**

The data synthesis and findings from the six case studies led to the development of topics, themes, and perspectives that reflect more than the views of individual participants. The use of a general inductive approach for analysis identified six major categories or themes that represented the most widely shared perceptions reflected in the in-depth individual interviews with the three Black male student athlete participants and the three members of the student support services staff. The six major themes that emerged from the findings were, The Tutoring Issue, The Need to Build Collaborative Relationships, The Problem of Perceptions of Racial Bias, Services and Guidance, and Targeted Representation.

### **The Tutoring Issue**

According to the student support services participants, tutoring services was not the responsibility of student support services. Therefore, the Black male student athletes' lack of knowledge about the tutoring services and who was responsible for providing those services was an indicator that more education and guidance was needed to inform them of the services offered by student support services as well as other campus units. The lack of knowledge about a critically needed service like tutoring caused a great deal of frustration among the Black male student athletes.

The Black male student athletes lack of knowledge about such a critical service as tutoring demonstrated how additional themes emerging from this study are interrelated. For example, the lack of knowledge about one service such as tutoring provides a direct linkage to other themes identified such as the need for guidance, service knowledge, and supports the need for targeted representation or a liaison to work closely with student support services to better inform the student athletes and assist in navigating systems. Conducting regularly scheduled workshops and information sessions in collaboration with the athletic department could help to ensure Black male student athletes are informed where to go for services like tutoring. That leads to the second of the six themes.

### **The Need to Build Collaborative Relationships**

Each of the six participants spoke about the need for relationship building. When asked by the researcher how they would go about developing such relationships, a host of methods were offered. For example, SSP1 indicated there had never been an organized effort, to her knowledge, by student support services to reach out to the athletic department. However, according to SSP1, some progress had been made with reaching out to other departments within the school. She went on to cite one such effort on behalf of the students in the criminal justice program. Echoing the same sentiments relating to relationship building, participant SSP2 suggested one of the reasons a more sustained effort had not been made when it came to all student athletes hinged on the fact that a few of the Black male student athletes expressed to other students that they did not want to be stigmatized as being weak, which might happen if they used some of the services available in the student support services department. Participant SSP2 spoke about the

need for leadership in the athletic department to take the lead and refer the Black male student athletes to student support services. Moreover, SSP2 stated, “And if they (student athletics leadership personnel) don’t feel confident in student support services, then they’re not going to refer students and they’re not going to feel that they trust us and this is going to be conveyed to the student athletes.” One Black male student athlete participant shared that one of the reasons why it was hard for him to develop relationships in student support services was based on his perception of their attitudes. The participant went on to say, “Basically, they want to keep everything brief. They don’t want anybody in their faces. They want their day to just go by as smooth as possible.” Similar comments were echoed by the other Black male student athlete participants. Each cited occasions when they felt the student support services staff just did not want to be bothered. The essence of this theme is that relationships between Black male student athletes and student support services staff need considerable improvement and participants in this study felt one important way to improve that situation was to build stronger and more collaborative relationships between the athletic department and student support services. This might also address the next theme to be discussed, the perception of racial bias on the part of Black male student athletes.

### **The Problem of Perceptions of Racial Bias**

The perceptions of racial bias came up a number of times in the interviews of Black male student athlete participants. Although, the student support services participants did admit to understanding why the Black male student athlete participants could have perceptions of racial bias, they mostly offered explanations that rejected the validity of those perceptions. When told what the student athlete participants stated about

racial bias SSP2 stated, “I wouldn’t be totally surprised, in the sense that I’ve heard from students that there are tensions in general between Black and Hispanic students. When you consider that 70% of the student body is Hispanic, it’s not surprising that race is perceived as a factor by the Black male student athletes in relation to student support services.” The participant further stated, “I do not want to minimize the impact that class, culture and race could have on the Black male student athlete’s perceptions, however, I could easily see how they could have that perception.” SSP participants gave several possible explanations for student perceptions of racial bias in the department but virtually all of them pointed to issues other than bias in the department. For example, SSP3 stated, “From the outside looking in, it’s probably thinking that it’s favoritism or some type of nepotism going on based on race, but it’s just based on familiarity and a kind of culture connectedness.” SSP3 added, “I don’t think there’s intentional favoritism being displayed, I think African American athletes need to create those same relationships because there’s not that much difference between the two groups. This contrast with what one Black male student athlete (SA1) stated, “Then you have some [staff], I feel, who may want to help others out based on race, not saying that they’re racist or anything like that, let’s say it’s a Hispanic worker and a black male or a female asking for help. We [Black students] may not get the same response as a Hispanic student who asks the same Hispanic worker the same question.”

The perspective of the three Black student athletes about racism in the student support services department was clearly not shared by the three staff from that department who were interviewed. Each offered an explanation of the students’ perception that led away from rather than toward racism. For example, SSP2 said, “The

majority of the staff in student affairs, which is the division that student support services is located in are African-American, or a very large percentage of the staff is.”

This study focused on perceptions and there is no way to arrive at any “objective” truth about the question of racism in the department. What is clear is that Black male student athletes have one perception and staff tend to have another. If students are to successfully make use of the many services offered by the department, it is clear that this issue needs to be addressed. The suggestion, discussed earlier, that collaborative relationship building between the student support services department and the athletic department is one obvious way of addressing this problem.

### **Services and Guidance**

One student support services staff participant stated the lack of patience and knowledge about what the student support services staff provides, could impact the perception of Black male student athlete participants about the services. In addition, two student support services providers expressed concerns about why so few of the Black male student athletes actually accessed and used the services offered. For example, SSP2 stated, “Well, first of all, I have to just say that we have very few referrals of student athletes, period. And, that’s part of the reason why I’m participating in the study so that I can understand what’s going on and why we’re not getting those referrals.” SSP2 continued, “But of the students that I have worked with, which I can actually only think of one or two off the top of my head, the ones that I worked with were actually very engaged in school, very motivated, connected with the people in the athletic department and connected with some other people as well.”

In responses relevant to the question of low levels of use, two of the three Black male student athlete participants gave very candid replies when asked about their reasons for not accessing and using services more often. The participant SA2 replied, “Basically, if they woke up on the [wrong] side of the bed, because sometimes that leads towards attitudes towards the students, they don’t want to be there. They want to make everything, keep everything, brief. They don’t want anybody in their faces. They want their day to just go by, smooth, as smooth as possible.” Moreover, SA2 continued, “Or, sometimes, as I notice, I’ll wait on lines, lines will be very long, people have tons, millions of questions and it’s like, oh well you can speak to this person, but this person is not here, they’re in a meeting. I was told on several occasions that I could come back and then I’d have to wait on a line all over again.

The interview data about services and guidance clearly shows that there are substantial differences in the perceptions of the students interviewed versus the staff interviewed. A more detailed analysis of that data suggested a possible explanation. The three staff who were interviewed provided professional services to students and they typically defended the quality of the services offered. However, many of the criticisms made by the students were not about the quality of professional services. They were, instead, about the day to day information needs about services that involved joining a queue and asking for information or help that might take only a few minutes. Students complained about the time spent standing in line, the number of times they were told to go to someone else for help and finding that person was not available, or being given bad information or bad directions that resulted in students enrolling in courses they did not need rather than courses needed to graduate. These are common student complaints on

thousands of campuses that are voiced every year. It suggests that better staff training, an improved organizational structure, an analysis of staffing levels versus demand, and a focus on enhancing the quality of “customer service” might enhance student perceptions of the student support services department.

All three Black male student athlete participants’ perceptions were based on several visits to student support services and they felt they were either pushed aside or rushed to complete their business. When asked if they had developed strategies to address these situations, each participant stated they found alternatives for getting what they needed. However, the three Black male student athletes agreed the services provided by student support services were critical to their development and to their ability to make the transition to a four year institution of higher education. Access to quality services are important, but there is a related issue of guidance. Students need help navigating and interacting with student support services.

Although the three student support services participants stated they were willing to continue providing the guidance necessary for the Black male student athletes, all three Black male student athlete participants did not feel they were appropriately helped when they came to student support services. For example, when asked about the quality of guidance provided to them by student support services, SA2 responded “They like to give us the runaround. They may send us to one person, for instance, they might send us to one guidance counselor which might send us right back to them. It’s like, [we are] not directed specifically where we need to get.” The participant SA3 stated, “I had to do a lot of things on my own to get where I am now. Sometimes they just, they hit you with words you don’t want to hear at times. The student support person will say “what do you

want? [or] do this and do that” when you’re just trying to figure out what’s wrong with your stuff, you’re trying to figure out what’s wrong with your financial aid or your classes or whatever.” Perhaps the Black male student athletes lack of knowledge and understanding about how to properly navigate the various systems in place to assist them causes problems making guidance more difficult. However, said a different way, it means at least some staff in student support services lack the skills needed to guide students who need help on a different level than the staff member anticipated. While SSP2 said, “I think that the best way to connect students is the handoff from a person that they trust to a person in student support services. And, if that connection is not there between the faculty and staff of the athletic department and the student support services staff member, then students are not going to follow through. Of course this makes providing proper guidance difficult if not impossible.” While “the handoff” is certainly important, students did not complain about that. They complained about “the handoffs” within student support services as well as the frequent “round trips” that involved being referred to someone who simply sends them back to the person who made the referral. This suggests the need for a focus on the articulation of services within student support services that would make giving guidance and advice more effective, less time consuming, and more successful.

This idea was supported by SSP3 who said, “The faculty and staff have to realize that some students don’t know better. That’s why they’re here. I think it’s up to us to create those relationships and be intentional in our relationship building. Moreover, students come from a point of ignorance and they come to college to gain awareness and we have to lead them to where they’re trying to get to.” The need for internal changes in

the student support services department does not, however, eliminate the need for building inter-departmental links. That is the final theme to be discussed.

### **Identify a Targeted Representative**

The final theme that emerged from the interviews was the need to identify a targeted representative or a liaison from the athletic department to serve as the link between the athletic department and the student support services department.

Participants agreed that identification of such an individual could help to close the divide that currently exists between the Black male student athletes and the student support services department. Furthermore, the absence of a knowledgeable representative from the athletic department goes to the heart of most of the complaints raised by the Black male student athlete participants. The student support services participants admitted they had made no organized and sustained effort to connect with the athletic department.

Those participants, however, also noted that athletic department staff rarely tried to contact them. The lack of effort in the past, however, does not mean there is no willingness or interest. SSP2 stated, “Our offices reach out to other departments, why not try it with student athletes?” In addition, SSP2 suggested that the athletic department’s leadership could invite student support services staff in to provide workshops and acquaint themselves with the representative from the athletic department to begin establishing their relationship first. This effort could lead to the student athletes feeling more comfortable by having “one of their own” to provide the much needed information and guidance to improve access, use, and service delivery. Furthermore, to support her contention, SSP2 cited the following example, “I actually got a call from the AD and that was the first time I ever got a call from that department. Although, he sounded a little

nervous...he seemed to be really concerned and really wanted to help this student athlete.” The participant went on to suggest to the AD that they should try and find ways to make stronger connections between the two departments. Informal discussions with athletic department staff suggested they were also willing and interested in building a stronger relationship with the student services staff.

### **Summary of the Data Analysis**

It is clear from data synthesis and findings that one reason for the Black male student athletes’ frustrations with student support services were due to their lack of knowledge about the type of services offered by student support services. In spite of their frustrations they identified the services they felt were needed to help them to make informed decisions about their ability to transfer to four institutions of higher education and for some, continue their academic and athletic careers.

It is also clear, however, that another possible reason for the frustration lies within student support services. While common in higher education, the staff who interface with students on a daily basis to help with basic questions are, according to the students, not always helpful, friendly, or knowledgeable. Some possible reasons for this have already been discussed, along with possible solutions, but this is one area where the study may have raised more questions than it answered.

The researcher’s intention was to gain further insight into how both groups of participants could develop the types of relationships where the Black male student athletes could avoid the many frustrations expressed during the individual interviews and to determine what strategies the student support services providers could use to ensure that the Black male student athletes were well informed and understood better how to

capitalize on the services offered by their department. The lack of understanding of what student support services were and were not responsible for contributed to the Black male student athlete participants' confusion and frustration. However, as pointed out earlier, this same problem could be framed as a failure of student support services staff to work with students "where they are" instead of "where they should be." As one staff member put it, students come to the department because they need help and it is the responsibility of the department to figure out how to do that. On the other hand, the stigma attached to some student support services by some students may have been a factor in the Black male student athletes' failure to access and use the services. Reducing the impact for a machismo attitude toward asking for help might be accomplished, for example, through creating a position in the athletic department for someone who can provide student athletes a trusted link with student support services.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This study examined the perceptions of three Black male student athletes and three members of the student support services providers at a local urban community college. Specifically, the study sought to capture the perceptions of the Black male student athletes as pertained to their access and use of student support services as well as the quality and delivery of those services. Moreover, the study also sought to capture the perceptions of the student support services providers as it pertained to the Black male student athletes' access and use of the services offered in student support services. The analysis of the six participant interviews identified three areas where the participants generally agreed, where areas of conflict or disagreement existed, and potential solutions to problems was suggested by each participant that could lead to improved access, use, and delivery of services. The following section provides a summarized account and outlines the results of the data synthesis and findings of each of the three categories listed above in areas where the participants generally agreed, where areas of conflict or disagreement existed, and the potential solutions offered by the participants.

### **Relationship of Findings to Theory**

This research set out to identify ways, methods, and means to improve the relationships between the Black male student athletes and the student support services providers, all of whom are affiliated with the same local urban community college. The analysis of the six interviews identified areas where the participants generally agreed,

where areas of conflict or disagreement existed, and potential solutions to problems was offered by each participant hopefully leading to improved access, use, and delivery of services.

Both groups of participants had responsibilities that were germane to them. For example, after almost two years on campus, the Black male student athletes did not know that student support services were not responsible for providing tutors. Because of this knowledge deficit proponents of student involvement theory would suggest that they should have taken responsibility for spending more time on campus, studying, and interacting frequently with faculty and other students. Further, these types of efforts would require them to devote the proper time and energy to their own academic and psychological growth Astin (1999). The practice of student involvement theory is significant to them for the following reason, although the study's findings confirmed, based on their perceptions, a need for the Black male student athletes and the student support services providers to make the necessary adjustments to improve access, use, and delivery of services.

Some researchers theorize that when properly delivered, student support services can serve as the linchpin to insure the overall success of Black male student athletes enrolled in community college (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2009; Storch & Ohlson, 2009). Therefore, one way for the Black male student athletes to practice student involvement theory would require them to recognize the need to build collaborative relationships, and they did. In addition, each participant also agreed with the suggestions from the student support services providers that providing regularly scheduled workshops and information sessions would also help to improve the relationships between the two groups. A key to

these suggestions possibly producing more positive results could hinge on the assigning of a liaison with the ability to work with members of student support services by ensuring that scheduled athletic events would not conflict with student support services staff's availability. Arrangements of this sort could help to ensure that student athletes in general and Black male student athletes, in particular, could submit inquiries to the liaison in a timely manner, and the liaison could ensure that the services needed were congruent with the needs of the student athletes. By taking this approach, it could help to alleviate communication, information and knowledge deficits for the Black male student athletes about student support services offerings.

Moreover, it is likely that the four additional themes that emerged during the data analysis could possibly be addressed in a more organized and practical manner. Further, the four remaining themes such as the tutoring issue, the problems of perceptions of racial bias, guidance, and services could help to change the perceptions of the Black male student athletes and the student support services providers as it pertained to access, use and delivery of student support services. In addition, the potential for lessening the impact where conflict or disagreement existed could become be minimized considerably or eliminated altogether.

The data analysis of the data confirms that both groups of participants offered similar solutions to possibly eliminate the impediments that they perceived to be major stumbling blocks to improving the access, use, and delivery of student support services. Moreover, all study participants identified similar situations that were in need of attention. Furthermore, both participant groups spoke about how important it was to build collaborative relationships and how assigning a targeted representative or liaison to work

with student support services could help improve access, use, and delivery of services. Although, the four remaining themes that emerged from the data synthesis and triangulation, all seemed to have a correlation with building collaborative relationships and assigning a liaison to serve as a conduit to work directly with the student support staff.

All three of the student support services participants expressed a willingness to provide information workshops that would better inform the student athletes of the most effective ways to use their services. In addition, the student support services providers agreed that by making the commitment to provide information workshops and working with a liaison, could demonstrate how important collaborative relationship building and having targeted representation in the form of a liaison could be to improving the student athlete's knowledge of what student support services offered. The data analysis confirmed that the Black male student athlete's lack of knowledge may be the reason for their sporadic use of the services offered. However each student support participant agreed that a more concentrated effort would be made to better inform the Black male student athletes how to maximize their use of the student support services offerings using information workshops as the vehicle to inform the student athletes.

### **Implications of Findings**

This research set out to identify ways, methods, and means by which the relationships between the Black male student athletes in community colleges and the student support services providers could be improved. However, without the Black male student athlete's cooperation, such efforts on the part of the student support services providers could be viewed unfairly as "window dressing." Furthermore, Harper (2009)

asserts that due to existing information deficits, groups like the Black male student athletes are often part of the underserved groups on community college campuses when it comes to student support services. Although, the researcher generally agrees with Harper's (2009) assertion, student involvement theorists' contentions must be factored in as part of a formula for improving the delivery of student support services. Failure to accept shared responsibility on both the part of the Black male student athletes and/or the student support services providers could have catastrophic results for the Black male student athletes. It is for reasons such as these that a large percentage of Black-male student athletes in community colleges fail to transfer to four year institutions of higher education, and eventually drop out (Harper, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The data analysis also confirms that much more research is needed that has as its focus, ways and methods to better understand and improve Black male student athletes' abilities to not only increase their access and use of services, but to improve their knowledge about what student support services offer and how they can be aided in reaching their two most important goals of earning their associate's degrees and transferring to four institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the study's findings also indicate that because of the various systems that Black male student athletes must navigate, problems may occur because of a lack of understanding or empathy by the student support services providers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Keim & Strickland, 2004).

Another focus of this research was to identify additional barriers such as the negative or stereotypical attitudes and behaviors projected toward Black male student athletes by those in higher education leadership positions. Such attitudes and behaviors could negatively impact the improvement of relationships between the Black male

student athletes and the student support services providers. Wherever such attitudes and behaviors exist, they must be eliminated to create a culture and the proper environment for improving the relationships between the Black male student athletes and student support services providers. How such attitudes influence both the quality and the type of support offered to Black male student athletes is also a focus of this research. Other researchers who have focused their research on Black male student athletes in community college have reported that, often “many faculty and staff members (including college counselors) may hold stereotypes of Black male student athletes as “dumb jocks,” who are “over privileged, pampered, lazy and out of control, and whose primary motivation to attend school is to participate in sports” (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996, p. 4).

The implications of this study’s findings could assist community college leaders in developing the types of policies and programs that could better inform and assist for example, community college administrators, athletic officials, counselors, and professional development specialists in identifying the challenges faced by the Black male student athletes on their campuses. Furthermore, it is apparent to the researcher, based on the frank responses from the Black male student athlete participants that, not having a “go to person” from the athletic department contributed to their lack of knowledge about what the student support services providers could and could not provide for them. The evidence for the need to have targeted representation or a liaison was confirmed by the researcher who conducted multiple analyses of the interview data. One example is found in responses from all three of the Black male student athlete participants who stated that, they did not realize that student support services was not responsible for providing tutoring services. Clearly information deficits of this type of

could be rectified, simply by having a representative from the athletic department to inform the student athletes who was responsible for providing such critical services as tutoring. Of equal importance for policy makers, community college administrators, and athletic officials is the need to create a system that is comprehensive, yet one that is easily discernible for all student athletes in community college.

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

A limitation of the study is that it was based on interviews of three Black male student athletes and three student support services provider participants at one community college. Naturally, other studies at other community colleges, and at more than one community college, are needed. On the other hand, a strength of this study was the use of in-depth interviewing as a method of collecting data on perceptions of student support services at the community college level.

### **Recommendations**

- Professional Practice Recommendations

The data analysis and findings in this study identified the steps necessary for improving the relationships, access, use, and delivery of student support services between the Black male student athletes and student support services is, the need to build collaborative relationships and to have a designated staff person from the athletic department to serve as a liaison for the Black male student athletes. Once the designated representatives have opened the lines of communications with the student support services providers, a service model should be developed to ensure that information workshops and other tools for providing assistance can be conducted at regularly scheduled intervals with the athletic department to provide the necessary assistance to all

student athletes. Because athletic events are usually scheduled at annual intervals, the athletic department representative could work with perhaps a designated member of student support services to ensure that the information workshops and other tools for assisting can be used in a manner that do not conflict with athletic events or pre-scheduled student support services events.

By working closely with the leadership in both departments and establishing an effective model to address the needs of the student athletes should not require any major revisions to the functioning of either department. One way to change the negative perceptions held by the Black male student athlete participants toward student support services could increase the frequency in which they access and use the services.

- Specific Recommendations for the Researched Community College

To help alleviate the problems of perceptions of racial bias expressed by the Black male student athlete participants, the student support staff along with the assigned liaison from the athletic department could positively impact the perceptions held by the student athletes. Although the majority of the population at the community college where this study took place is Hispanic, by instituting the recommendations outlined previously, the perceptions of racial bias could be reduced or eliminated altogether.

- General Recommendations for Community Colleges

One of the limitations of this study was that it took place at one community college, perhaps a similar study using multiple community colleges would produce similar results. Therefore, by reviewing the operating procedures of community colleges with similar demographics could reveal that Black male student athletes in those colleges may have similar experiences. For example, Harper (2009) contends that due to existing

information deficits, groups like the Black male student athletes are often part of the underserved groups on community college campuses when it comes to student support services. In addition, other researchers have made similar claims when it comes to Black male student athletes enrolled in community colleges. For example, other researchers contend that a large percentage of Black male student athletes in community colleges fail to transfer to four year institutions of higher education and eventually drop out (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Therefore, the chances that similar barriers exist between Black male student athletes and student support services departments in community colleges across the nation is highly likely. To ensure that high quality of services for all groups that have been designated as a “special population or group” such as veterans, lifelong learners, and first generation college students to name a few are receiving the attention warranted, periodic reviews of policies and procedures could help such groups to succeed and make a successful transition to four year institutions of higher education. After all, most community colleges’ mission statements are usually designed to provide quality services to their entire student body.

- Higher Education Policy Recommendations

Higher education leadership begins with the policy-decision makers. Therefore, ensuring that all of its student body is served by the student support services or other names that these bodies are known by goes well for the entire community college system. Failure to draft appropriate legislation and policies to address the needs of its entire student body could lead to a total or near total collapse of the entire community college system.

With tuition costs skyrocketing practically on a daily basis, higher education policy-decision makers, now more than ever, will be required to assess and evaluate on a regular basis how well their student support services are functioning. Moreover, the willingness to address the needs as they arise, could help to ensure financial solvency among other things. In addition, the correlation between sound student support services practices and maintaining a vibrant enrollment policy are dependent upon each other provide the key to ensure long term success. After all, community colleges are consumer driven and as such need to make sure that their “customers” are satisfied. This objective can be accomplished without impinging upon the integrity or quality of education provided at the community college level.

- Recommendations for Researchers

Although a limitation of this study is that it was based on interviews of three Black male student athletes and three student support services provider participants at one community college. Naturally, other studies at other community colleges, and at more than one community college, are needed. On the other hand, a strength of this study was the use of in-depth individual interviewing as a method of collecting data on perceptions of student support services at the community college level.

Moreover, statistical data confirms that each year approximately 70,000 students participate in intercollegiate athletics at public community colleges in the United States (National Junior College Athletic Association, 2008). With the recent rise in tuition cost and other factors, the 70,000 has probably increased to 85,000 or more since 2008. Therefore, by replicating this study or exploring other areas of the relationships between Black male student athletes, could very well reveal that perceptions such as those

expressed by the participants in this study could reveal similar or very different patterns in other community colleges. Moreover, the literature reviewed for this study confirms that, oftentimes student athletes such as the Black male student athlete participants in this study are the first members in their family to pursue education beyond high school. Further, community colleges are viewed as colleges of opportunity, especially for the underprepared and underrepresented (Helfgot and Culp, 1995). Statistical data and one of the study's participant's from student support services confirms that, a large percentage of Black male student athletes currently enrolled in community colleges are in need of some type of remedial work and often fail to accumulate 10 college credits in an entire school year. Therefore, those and many other reasons are why the Black male student athletes in community colleges should be studied along with the on campus support systems that in theory are designed to assist and help to ensure their transition to four year institutions of higher education. Furthermore, such efforts could help to negate or totally eliminate the impact that the failure to get a college education can cause and thereby create additional strains on the economic, criminal justice and social service systems in America.

Further support for further research on Black male student athletes in community college is offered by Harper (2009) who contends that Black male student athletes enrolled in community colleges are a vastly understudied population and as such, should invoke more scholarly interest and research by academicians, social justice advocates, and lay persons alike. In addition, as other researchers have stated, one of the primary objectives of entire community college systems is to help students to make the transition to four year institutions of higher education. Yet the number of transferee's for Black

male student athletes pales in comparison, when compared to the general community college population (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Culp, 2005).

Unfortunately, a stereotypical attitude toward Black male student athletes still exist and is quite prevalent in some circles more than others. However, administrators, educators, policy makers and a large portion of the general public continue to hold onto such antiquated views about Black male student athletes in particular. Although, to the outside observer, student athletes in both two and four year colleges/universities appear to be privileged and unhindered by the academic and disciplinary expectations of their nonathletic peers, however, this is not the case. (Kissinger, Newman, Miller, & Nadler, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

A summary of the most salient features of each chapter are presented and conclude with the author's reflections and summary of the most important results of this study, which focused on capturing the perceptions of the three Black male student athletes and three student support services provider participants as it pertained to access, use, and delivery of services by the providers. Furthermore, the study identified ways, methods, and means for improving the delivery of those services. The following sections provide a brief overview of how each chapter contributed to the development of this study.

Chapter 1 offered a compelling rationale for the need to pursue a study of this nature. Along with the chapter's introduction, the additional components of the chapter focused the purpose of and the potential significance of the study. The research questions were presented along with the theoretical rationale and the chapter summary. Chapter 2

provides a topic list of the literature that was reviewed for the study. The researcher examined the works of multiple scholars and theorists whose research and theoretical writing focused on Black male student athletes in community and four year colleges and universities. Moreover, most of their studies focused on the relationships between Black male student athletes, college administrators, and student support services providers at both the community and four year college levels. Much of the literature on student support services for community college student athletes points to the need for improved student support services.

However, other portions of the literature support ways to improve delivery of these services (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In addition, the literature review also confirmed that strong student support services programs at the community college level tend to breed a more holistically sound student athlete and in some cases, could serve as models for four year institutions of higher education (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2008). Without the information and knowledge that can be gained from capturing the perceptions of the Black male student athletes, there is a missing source of knowledge that would be very helpful to anyone considering how to improve existing services or adding new services to the standard mix already offered by most colleges.

Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology used along with a brief summary of the components used in this qualitative study. The rationale for using a multiple case study research design was based on the populations from which the study's participants were selected and followed the suggestion offered by Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, (2007) who asserted that, case studies are used when a researcher wants to examine a specific phenomenon or a social group.

The data collection process used for this study included individual interviews that were recorded (audio only) along with researcher observations recommended by (Yin, 2009). Further validation for using a multiple case study design was confirmed by (Willis, 2008) who made the following assertion, a cumulative case study design is used when there is more than one case involved. The participants for this study were selected from two participant groups who occupied the same local urban community college campus. One participant pool was comprised of paid staff members from the student support services department. The second participant pool was comprised of Black male student athletes. All participants were interviewed on the campus of the community college where they are affiliated. Although the researcher did not use all of the participants who met the study's criteria because of time constraints, those participants who were selected were given a pre-study survey that was completed and returned to the researcher prior to the start of the individual interviews.

From a theoretical framework perspective, the researcher used components of grounded theory as the data collection method. Creswell (2007) refers to this qualitative research approach as being grounded in the data. In other words, the absence of a specific theoretical framework allowed the collected data to emerge and "tell the story" of this study to a degree. After synthesizing the data, color coding along with a Microsoft word program was used to organize and analyze the data. Creswell (2009) and (Yin, 2009) asserts that there are four primary elements to research design, (a) the researcher's role, (b) data collection procedures, (c) data recording procedures, (d) data analysis and interpretation. These four elements, along with measures being made to ensure the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study aided the researcher by providing a

basis along with a solid foundation for exploring, developing, and formulating this research study and the research questions that guided the study.

Chapter 4 reports the study's findings that resulted from the data synthesis and analysis, and answers to the research questions. This qualitative study sought to determine what the perceptions of the Black male student athletes were toward the student support services providers, as it pertained to the access, use, and delivery of student support services and how they were impacted as a result of their perceptions. In addition, the study also sought to capture the perceptions of the student support services providers as it pertained to the Black male student athletes access and use of those services.

Next the researcher triangulated and cross checked to conduct a thorough analysis of the data. The researcher used two different methods of analysis. The first method used was cross analysis, which included several reviews of the raw data collected during the in-depth individual interviews and the second method used was a descriptive analysis. By using these two methods of analysis, the researcher discovered that both methods lead to the same results. Each of the Black male student athlete participants as did the student support services participants spoke frankly about their perceptions as it pertained to the access, use, and delivery of student support services.

The researcher's intent was to gain a broader insight into the impediments that impacted both the Black male student athletes and the student support services providers as they perceived them. Furthermore, six major themes emerged from texturally rich data that were collected, the researcher's primary objective was to identify what worked well

and what did not for both groups of participants as it pertained to accessing, using, and delivering services.

The six major themes that emerged from the data analysis were; (1) The Tutoring Issue, (2) The Need to Build Collaborative Relationships, (3) The Problem of Perceptions of Racial Bias, (4) Services, (5) Guidance, and (6) The Need for Targeted Representation.

One of the study's findings revealed that the Black male student athletes' information and knowledge deficits related to the services that were offered and those that were not by student support services had a direct correlation to the other themes that emerged from the study. In order to resolve issues of this type, the offer to provide in-depth informational workshops by the student support services staff to the athletic department's assigned representative first and then to the Black male student athletes could aid in eliminating a great deal of the information and knowledge deficits held by the Black male student athletes.

Chapter 5 concludes with an outline of the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the recommendations for Professional Practice, Specific Recommendations for the Research Community College, General Recommendations for Community Colleges, Higher Education Policy Recommendations, and Recommendations for Researchers all based on the study's findings. The implications of the findings also reveal that, in spite of the general perceptions expressed by the Black male student athletes as it pertains to accessing and using the services provided by student support services, if efforts are made to make changes and in some cases slight adjustments, the services could become a vital tool to help meet their primary objectives of earning their associate's degrees and transferring to four year institutions of higher

education. However, the student support services providers disagreed with some of their perceptions as it pertained to racial bias. However, they did agree that more attention should be given to the athletic department in general and the Black male student athletes in particular. The student support services providers did agree that by providing informational workshops and working with a liaison from the athletic department could alleviate many of the impediments that help to create some of the general perceptions expressed by the Black male student athletes.

Of the six major themes that emerged from the study, with the exception of tutoring, the remaining five themes appear interrelated. For example, by having targeted representation or a liaison to work to build collaborative relationships finding some common ground to resolve the differences as perceived could also address the other themes that emerged. If the proposed workshops began by focusing on services, it stands to reason that proper guidance would be a natural outcome of the efforts to improve collaborative relationship building spearheaded by the assigned liaison in conjunction with their counterpart from student support services. Such efforts could develop into a win/win situation for the Black male student athletes and student support services. After all, all participants have a vested interest in the each other's success.

The limitation of the study is attributed to the fact that the study was conducted at one local urban community college which impacts the ability to generalize the results. In addition, the perceptions of these Black male student athletes and the student support services providers may not be applicable to other community colleges Black male student athletes and student support services providers. Because of time constraints, the

researcher was not able to reach all prospective participants who met the study's selection criteria at the community college where the study took place.

In summation, the researcher makes four additional recommendations with those outlined in the recommendations section of this chapter. The four additional recommendations for improving the access, use, and delivery of student support services to student athletes in general and Black male student athletes in particular are; (a) assign an individual to serve as a liaison between the athletic department and student support services, (b) provide workshops at various intervals for student athletes factoring in their practice time, games, and travel schedules (c) establish a review schedule to be managed by the liaison and hold all student athletes accountable for providing "timely" request for services, and (d) student support services providers and the liaison could schedule regular meetings at the beginning and end of each semester to insure that the established outcome are met.

Strong student support services programs at the community college level tend to breed a more holistically sound student athlete and in some cases, could serve as models for four year institutions of higher education (Culp, 2005; Harper, 2008). Furthermore, community colleges are viewed as colleges of opportunity, especially for the underprepared and underrepresented (Helfgot and Culp, 1995). In addition, because of the various systems that Black male student athletes must navigate, problems may occur because of a lack of understanding or empathy (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Keim & Strickland, 2004). Therefore, if the Black male student athletes and the student support services providers were to make the effort to build collaborative relationships and take advantage of the recommendations suggested, the possibility of reversing this trend is

highly likely. Failure to make the recommended adjustments contributes to the creation of yet another sub-culture of individuals destined to become reliant on already over loaded social service systems. Moreover, when considering the well documented history of this society's treatment of young Black males, it is not surprising they a great number of them end up in the prison system, fathering numerous children out of wedlock, and contributing to perpetuating the cycle of dependence that plagues many young Black males today. When every opportunity to bring about positive outcomes for any one group in this society is neglected, at some point in time, that entire society pays a heavy price. The question that needs answering is, are we willing to make the effort to improve the support services already in place in community colleges, or would we like to pay for their time on welfare or in the prison systems? The difference can be as simple as this, would we as a society rather pay or invest in the elevation of a group that heretofore has been neglected or minimized by society's structures?

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## Appendix A

### Pre-Study Survey (Student Support Services Providers)

1. Is your work here at CUNY your first experience working as a student support services professional? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
2. Using one word responses: What do you feel/believe are the three most important functions of your position  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Which of the “special populations” (i.e. Black male student athletes, first generation Latinos, Older student, etc.). do you or have you had the **most** success with?  
Please write in your response \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Which of the “special populations” do you or have you had the **least** success with?  
Please write in your response \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Do you have strategies that allow you to help the many students you encounter?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Developing \_\_\_
6. How often do you get frustrated with those students who do not seem to “get it?”  
100% 50% 25% 20% 15% or less (Please circle your response).
7. How long have you served as a student support services professional?  
0-12 Months \_\_\_ 13-24 Months \_\_\_ 36 Months & Above \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you Agree or Disagree with the following statement: The assistance I provide to students who are part of a special population benefit greatly from my efforts  
Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_
9. If called upon I would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher in an individual and group setting? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
10. I understand that there are no right and wrong responses when being asked to give my “Perceptions” of the special populations I work with? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

*Please provide your responses by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.*

\*\*As a student athlete at Bronx Community College what is your “Perception” of the services provided by the Student Support Services Department?

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	
				1. I understand how the student support services department operates?
				2. The student support services department can assist me with any problem I may have that relates to my academic progress?
				3. When/If I am having problems with understanding assignments given by my professor, the student support services department can help me?
				4. There is no right or wrong response when I give my “Perception” of something/someone?
				5. If I am having difficulties with my financial aid, the student support services department can assist me?
				6. If I am having problems with a class, my head coach and/or the athletic director are two of the people I can go to for assistance?
				7. Since I began taking classes here, I have relied on the student support services department a great deal?
				8. As I near graduation, the student support services department can help me to prepare to transfer to a four year college/university?
				9. If I have difficulty understanding how the student support services department can help me?

				10. Since I have been a student here, the student support services department has helped me with most of the situations that I need assistance?
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