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Encroachment: College Athletes' Experiences with Identity Development as Affected By Media Representations of Social Justice Demonstrations

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ENCROACHMENT: COLLEGE ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES WITH IDENTITY

DEVELOPMENT AS AFFECTED BY MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL

JUSTICE DEMONSTRATIONS

BY

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the master's degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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This thesis is dedicated to Grandma Pat. You taught me to dream, and your love

encourages me to pursue those dreams every day. May you continue to rest peacefully in

the arms of Jesus.

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CONTENTS

COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

IOC- International Olympic Committee

LPGA- Ladies Professional Golf Association

MLB- Major League Baseball

NBA- National Basketball Association

NFL- National Football League

NHL- National Hockey League

NPF- National Professional Fastpitch

PGA- Professional Golf Association

WNBA- Women's National Basketball Association

WTA- Women's Tennis Association

ABSTRACT

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This study was conducted to understand how communication and identity are experienced by Black university athletes in asking about their experiences and how they gauge mainstream media portrayals of Black NFL athletes making verbal or physical statements about or in protest of social injustice, racism, and inequality in America. I interviewed five university athletes identifying as Black/African American or Mixed-Race using media representations of Black NFL athletes' protests since the NFL has dominated mainstream media headlines regarding recent athletes' protests, especially in connection to the Black Lives Matter social movement. I also used several theories to interpret the data after collection, including Communication Theory of Identity, Social Identity Theory, Threshold Identity, and Cultural Identity Theory.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ATHLETES' PROTESTS IN THE MEDIA

In October of 2020, Sebastian Coe, Olympic gold-medalist and International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, spoke out about athlete activism saying that he is in full support of someone "taking a knee" on the medalists' podium during the 2021 Tokyo Summer Olympics. His personal statement contradicts the official IOC stance on the subject (Demyanenko, 2020). This is only one of the many examples of athlete activism and support of that activism that we see happening across America and around the world today.

While Coe spoke out on an international front the National Football League (NFL) is doing its best to fight for change here at home. In 2020, it launched its "It Takes All of Us" campaign for social justice. Players are wearing approved phrases and names of victims of racial violence on their helmets and cleats (Nam, 2020).

Given these recent iterations of media coverage about Black athletes' protests, this study explored how the media represents Black athletes' protests against racial injustice in the United States, particularly university athletes' experiences with those media representations and how they communicate their identity. To do so, this first chapter outlines the reigniting of the Black Lives Matter movement and recent increase in athletes' activism, along with the history of social justice protests in American sports. Next, I state the communication problem, explore the background of the problem, and discuss the purpose of this study. I conclude with defining key terms. Overall, this chapter shows the significance of media coverage of U.S. Black athletes' protests, arguing the need for a better understanding of how such media coverage is experienced

by Black university athletes and intersects with their ongoing identity development as athletes, citizens, and Black Americans.

Introduction to Social Justice Protests

The pondering of the word "protest" might bring several images to mind. Some of those images may be categorized as peaceful or religious, while others are grueling and exhausting. Regardless, the prevalence of protests and demonstrations, particularly in response to racial injustice, has increased since 2013. Most recently, these protests and demonstrations against racial injustice in the United States have made their way into athletics (Boswell, 2020; Guardian News and Media, 2020). Athletes are continuing to protest for social justice in America. In this section, I first describe the current Black Lives Matter social movement and recent increase in athletes' activism.

Shortly after the May 2020 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, an ongoing Black Lives Matter movement regained leverage, soaring through Minneapolis before spreading to cities across the nation. Almost five months later, Jacob Blake was injured at the hands of a law enforcement officer in Wisconsin (Morales, 2020), sparking the recent Milwaukee Bucks playoff protest (Helin, 2020). The Bucks refused to play their playoff game in protest of Blake's death, causing the National Basketball Association (NBA) to reschedule multiple games (Goldman, 2020). The Detroit Lions of the NFL then decided to cancel their practice, followed by nine more teams from the league cancelling their practices (Waszak, 2020). Major League Baseball (MLB) postponed three games on August 26th, 2020, as players chose not to play in protest of the incident in Kenosha, WI, while more games were pushed back the next day because of the league's decision (Braziller, 2020). Before the 2020 Summer Olympics were

rescheduled for 2021, the IOC was already looking into ways to protect freedom of expression for athletes given the recent rise in activism (Tominaga, 2020).

The recent increase in activism is not the first occasion on which we have seen such demonstrations. Black Lives Matter gained some traction in 2013 when three women took to Twitter with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in response to George Zimmerman's acquittal after the murder of Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager, in Florida (*Herstory*, 2019). The movement became more mainstream when riots emerged in Ferguson, MO after the August shooting of teenager Michael Brown by Darren Wilson (The New York *Times*, 2014). One Ferguson-related boycott was developed by members of the University of Missouri football team in Columbia, MO (Jaschik, 2015).

As noted above, the death of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked another wave of athletes' protests to raise awareness of racial injustice in the United States. These athletes continue to use their public platform and celebrity status to express concern and improve awareness of racial injustice in the United States, with the goal of persuading U.S. citizens to act on the issue. To better understand Black university athletes' experiences with media coverage about such protests, one must understand the recent resurgence of Black Lives Matter and Black athletes' protests considering the long history of such protests in the United States.

History of Social Justice Protests in American Sports

These athletes' protests of racial injustice are not a new phenomenon in the United States. The Civil Rights movement engulfed American society in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was merely the beginning of a much larger struggle. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 only guaranteed Black citizens the right to vote and left out various other freedoms

that were granted to White Americans (Glass, 2007). The Montgomery Bus Boycott, restaurant sit-ins, the March on Washington, Selma, and several other occasions occurred during the first chapter of the fight. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 were only the end of the beginning of a larger social movement to raise awareness about racial injustice against Black Americans in the United States (Davies, 2017).

As competition is a vital part of American society, it is not surprising that the Civil Rights movement quickly bled into amateur and professional sports. Before the Civil Rights movement, Jackie Robinson broke the modern color barrier in the MLB when Branch Rickey brought him to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, following Moses "Fleet" Walker's 1884 Toledo Blue Stockings run (Alexander, 2016). Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) helped propel the Civil Rights movement by opposing war and violence after defeating Sonny Liston in 1964 and converting to Islam. His "fight outside the ring" was dedicated to civil rights and social justice (Obama, 2016). As more athletes began to protest racism in America, two San Jose State University track stars decided to have their own demonstration. In probably the most famous of early athlete activist moments during the Civil Rights movement, Tommie Smith and John Carlos each raised a black-gloved fist during "The Star-Spangled Banner" while standing on the medalist podium following a race (Peniel, 2017).

Protesting racial injustice and inequality is a root that runs deep in not only the heart of American sports, but the foundations of Communication and Media Studies as academic disciplines. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) helps us understand how athletes and citizens think about themselves and their struggles with racial injustice. This communication theory will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Two but is especially

relevant to this study, as I seek to understand how, if at all, Black university athletes'

experiences with media coverage of Black athletes' protests against racial injustice in the

United States shapes how they communicate their identity to others. The athletes of today

have continued to build on the foundations of protests laid by Moses Walker, Jackie

Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Sonny Liston, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and many more

that filled the gap between 1947 and the present day (Hartmann, 2019). Each major sport

has athletes protesting racial injustice in the United States, of which I highlight a few

recent historical examples for each major league sport.

In the NBA LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, Carmelo Anthony, and Chris Paul

have been the biggest advocates of activism against racial injustice in the United States.

James even received the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP) Jackie Robinson Sports Award for "achievement in athletics and contributions

in the pursuit of social justice, civil rights and community involvement" (McMenamin,

2016). Wade, Anthony, and Paul have combined efforts to create the Social Change

Fund, which invests in communities of color through criminal justice reform, policy

solutions, and more (Smalls, 2020). They have used their positions and funds as celebrity

athletes and citizens to raise awareness of the need for social justice and policy change

for increasing opportunities for all Black Americans.

The NFL has seen impressive efforts from Anquan Boldin and Malcom Jenkins,

who went to Congress to fight for the restructuring of the U.S. justice system (Dodson,

2017). DeSean Jackson also made a statement by wearing cleats resembling crime-scene

caution tape, but instead of receiving positive feedback, he received a nearly $6,100 fine

from the league (Goldberg, 2017). The NFL is probably most famous in this realm for the

kneeling Colin Kaepernick. He was a quarterback in San Francisco when he first started

kneeling during the National Anthem in 2016 to protest against racial injustice in the

United States (Boren, 2020). The NFL continues to grapple with Black Lives Matter and

its stance as an organization when it comes to addressing racial injustice against Black

Americans in the United States. Many players and teams have chosen to stay in the locker

room during the National Anthem or kneel on the field as Kaepernick did. Most recently,

the NFL decided to play "Lift Every Voice," otherwise known as the "Black National

Anthem" before every game during the first week of the 2020-2021 season (Belson,

2020).

Protesting racial injustice in the United States has not been limited to male

athletes. Serena Williams has led the charge in the world of professional tennis (Martin,

2018), followed by Naomi Osaka who, in each round of the U.S. Open, wore a new face

mask with the name of a Black victim of alleged law enforcement or racially motivated

violence (BBC, 2020). The tennis court was not the only place with female activism,

though, as the entire National Professional Fast pitch (NPF) Scrap Yard Dogs softball

team cleaned their lockers and walked away from the sport after a racially insensitive

tweet was published by their general manager (Hays, 2020).

These are just a few more recent historical examples of athletes' protests against

racial injustice in the United States. As time goes on, protests, athletes, and perspectives

will continue to change. The problem, however, remains constant. There are gray areas in

considering communication and identity as they intersect with media coverage about

Black athletes' protests against U.S. racial injustice. This study hopes to fill that gap.

Americans have come a long way toward recognizing the dual role of the athlete-citizen,

but protesting, especially from a professional athlete, is still not seen by many Americans as acceptable. I next turn to the statement of the communication problem, and how the study will address that problem.

Statement of the Problem

Multiple patterns occur throughout the communication problem of media misrepresentations of Black athletes, let alone when those athletes are depicted as taking a stand for social justice. The communication problem this study seeks to address is the role of communication and identity in how Black university athletes experience media representations of athletes' protesting against racial injustice in the United States. Throughout the push for social justice, Black athletes have been misrepresented and depicted in the media through dominant media representations in three ways: 1) through comparisons to White athletes; 2) through stereotypes and a denial of Black athletes' credibility; and 3) through the frame of disapproval for Black athletes' exercising of their rights to free speech and protest as American citizens.

Comparing Black and White Athletes

The first pattern seen in mainstream media representations of Black athletes is the continuous comparison to and categorization from White athletes by the media, which communicates inequality. White athletes are often referred to by play-by-play announcers, color commentators, and analysts as strategic, intelligent, mentally tough, and other intellectual adjectives, while their Black counterparts are referenced as athletically tough and able but lacking the intellectual part of the sport (Rada, 1996). Cranmer et al. (2014) notes that two frames are often applied to college and professional athletes. The "brawn" frame refers to the physical aspect of sports and is often a

descriptor of Black athletes, while the "brain" frame refers to intelligence and strategy and is often a descriptor of White athletes. Such a misrepresentation is important in considering the role of communication and identity for Black university athletes and the experiences they have in interacting with such media representations. If college athletes are seeing their professional athlete role models in the media as unintelligent or as lacking strategy, that may have an impact on how they conceptualize and communicate their own identity.

The first example of this misrepresentation in comparison to white athletes is seen through Tiger Woods. When Woods is winning, his golf ability is talked about highly, but there is no mention of his strategic ability or intelligence. When he makes a mistake and tumbles down the leaderboard, the first thing referenced is his lack of intelligence in the previous shot (Tyler Eastman & Billings, 2001). Along with this phenomenon connected to losing, there is the media portrayal of these Black athletes when they are successful. When they win, they are just athletes who won. When they lose, the conversation shifts to the athlete's "Blackness" (Billings, 2003). Again, such media representations are important when considering the purpose of this study and its goal to understand how such communication is experienced by Black university athletes as they consider the ongoing development of their own identities.

This phenomenon of comparing Black and White athletes was also seen in the media portrayal of Sonny Liston in the 1960s. The media first portrayed him as an issue. He even had an anti-segregation clause in his television contracts, preventing networks from showing his fights to segregated audiences (Vogan, 2018). However, when Muhammad Ali converted to Islam and walked through uncharted territory, the media

renovated Liston into a spectacle. Before Ali, Liston was the outsider. He was deemed

reckless and dangerous. Ali's conversion to Islam gave the media a pathway to transform

Liston into an acceptable American boxer, because he was no longer the most unique or

controversial Black athlete in the sport (Hutchison, 2015).

The last example is found in the NFL. In 2003, Rush Limbaugh made some rash

comments about Eagles Quarterback Donovan McNabb. He said that there must be some

"social concern" in the NFL for a Black quarterback to be as successful as the white

quarterbacks, so McNabb got too much credit for the efforts of his team. McNabb was a

three-time Pro Bowl player at that point in time (Hartmann, 2007; Mercurio & Filak,

2010). Such media representations of Black athletes in comparison to White athletes have

consequences for how we understand the intersection of communication and identity,

especially in this study.

Stereotyping and Denying Credibility of Black Athletes

The second pattern of media misrepresentations of Black athletes differs slightly

from the first, which is the media stereotyping the efforts of Black athletes in general.

Black athletes are typically dubbed as more aggressive. In 2014, NFL player Richard

Sherman called himself "the best corner in the game" during a post-game interview. He

proceeded to make a comment about the "sorry receiver" Michael Crabtree (who is also

Black). Social media was outraged, referring to Sherman as having characteristics of

aggression, bullying, domination, and cruelty (Kahn, 2016; Page et al., 2016). Another

example can be found in the movie *The Blind Side*. Bineham (2015) discussed the

intricacies of the story in which Michael Oher plays left tackle for a Christian high

school. Oher is quite literally plowing through these smaller athletes, and everyone

portrays him as a beast. His mother then has a conversation with the coach, telling him that Oher tested in the 98th percentile in protective instincts. This perspective is completely different than the previous one. Using common Black stereotypes such as "aggressive" or "bullying" in media representations of Black athletes has consequences, especially in considering how Black university athletes might experience these representations in the development of their identities as Black athletes and American citizens.

The final example of this is seen through the breaking news of Tiger Woods' extramarital affairs scandal in 2009. Woods describes himself as Blasian or Cablinasian, to encompass both his father's Black roots and his mother's Thai descent, but that has not been as widely accepted in the media. The media first expressed a poor opinion of Woods' sexual desire by linking that to Blackness, and then using the created Blackness to deem him a criminal, comparing him to the late Kobe Bryant who also had an affair, but was accused of rape, which Woods was not (Washington, 2015). Along with the pathology, there were many jokes that emerged at Woods' expense. These included: "Tiger's name should be changed to Tiger's wood," and "Is it true that Tiger is playing around? Yeah, he's doing 18 holes" (Brown, 2010, para. 18). Woods' Asian background was also used against him by discussing the stereotype of Asians being bad drivers, concluding that as the reason he got into an accident in November of 2009. Washington (2015) noted that Woods' Blasianness worked out for the media's use. Woods was discredited and stereotyped through the news of his extramarital affair. The discrediting of a Blasian athlete may affect university athletes who are mixed race, as the one-drop rule (anyone with Black descent is automatically Black) prevails.

Disapproval for Black Athletes' Right to Protest

  The third and final pattern of media misrepresentations examines the disapproval for protests by Black athletes and more recently, entire organizations. One example is LeBron James and the NBA. During a 2018 interview with Laura Ingraham, he started to talk about U.S. politics. Ingraham referenced the occasion, saying, "It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid $100 million a year to bounce a ball. Keep the political comments to yourselves. ... Shut up and dribble" (Fourney & Brown, 2018). This comment implied that James' job is to play basketball, not share his opinions or concerns on political matters as a Black American and U.S. citizen. This is blatant disapproval for an American citizen's support of protest because he is a professional athlete.

  This can be contrasted by examining the on-field actions and off-field displays of Tim Tebow, a White American quarterback who revolutionized politics and Christianity in the NFL, despite performing quite poorly for a while. Hawzen and Newman (2017) discuss this further, stating, "What is striking is how difficult it is to think of an example where poor sporting performance was of such cultural and political significance," (p. 20). They go on to talk about Tebow's celebrity status and how it reshaped how we evaluate good moral standing in America. (Hawzen and Newman, 2017). These comparisons are completely opposite of how Black athletes' expressions of politics are viewed in sport.

  In assessing these patterns of the media's disapproval of Black athletes' rights to protest and freedom of speech, one can find arguments such as "stick to the sport" or "I would rather not see politics in my sports" (Emmons, 2020; Thompson, 2017). What fans of such sports, and especially white American fans of such sports, may fail to remember

is that these athletes are U.S. citizens, too. Black athletes represent this country on local, regional, national, and international levels. They have a right to speak their opinions as well as represent their organizations.

Overall, media misrepresentations of Black athletes are problematic. Black athletes are depicted in the media as aggressive, athletically but not intellectually sound, and more concerned with speaking their mind than doing their jobs. It is because of these denunciations that they have chosen to exercise their rights as citizens of this nation to protest racial injustice, racism, and inequality in the United States. The communication problem that this study examined is how these dominant media representations of Black athletes, particularly in protesting racial inequality in the United States, are experienced by Black university athletes. This study provided insight regarding the intersections among communication, identity, and media representations of Black athletes' protests in the United States.

Background of the Problem

Misrepresentations of Black athletes and their complicated roles as athletes and citizens have consequences, especially in this study, which investigated how communication and identity can be understood in the context of Black university athletes' interactions with such dominant media representations. Misrepresenting these Black athletes and their statements can affect how non-professional university athletes think about their own struggles with racial injustice and the protesting of such injustice through agenda-setting on both the first and second levels (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Ghanem, 1997). With agenda-setting comes media framing (Weaver, 2007). Second, social

movements and protests also have a long history within communication research, especially in understanding recent Black athletes' protests as part of the Black Lives Matter social movement, which connects to the Civil Rights movement. Finally, in order to complete this study, I explore literature that intersects communication and identity, including the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 2005), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Although Chapter Two will explore these theories in more depth, this section introduces these theories as they intersect with race, sports, and the media, to provide the background of the problem.

Agenda-Setting and Framing in Media Representations of Black Athletes' Protests

Agenda-setting theory has been around since the early 1970s (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The central argument of agenda-setting scholarship is that the media help guide what issues or newsworthy items viewers pay attention to. It is important to research agenda-setting itself as well as media usage of it because people identify with what they see in the media. If the media are promoting the significance of certain issues over others, citizens may focus on issues they might not have otherwise thought about (Edy & Meirick, 2019). Focusing on these different issues can then impact how people think about issues that they do actually encounter on a day-to-day basis. This is crucial to the research study because if Black university athletes identify with what they see in the media, they may communicate their identity to conform with what is presented as acceptable.

When it comes to media frames, there are some more dominant than others in regard to Black athletes. Lewis et al. (2020) examined sportscaster comments on National

Signing Day from 2015-2018 (42 hours of coverage) about athletes. 86 percent of the comments were made about Black athletes, and 90% of the time they referred to the conditions of their childhood as well as their physicality. Another common frame is the "White Savior" phenomenon. This is depicted in multiple movies such as *The Blind Side*, *The Help*, and *Glory Road.* This concept outlines the idea that Black people in many different situations were able to get out of that situation or advance their social status only because they had the help of a White person with a higher socio-economic status than them (Hutchison, 2016; Murphy & Harris, 2018).

Social Movements and Protests as Communication

Another section of literature that is key to understanding the background of the problem is understanding social movements and protests as communication tools. Social movements themselves are a method of communication (Sanderson et al., 2016), especially when interwoven with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When the media represents athletes in a certain way, citizens who identify with that team, sport, or athlete may feel differently about themselves or that team, sport, or athlete. Horn (2013) described social movements as "forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands" (p. 19). Andersson et al. (2017) noted that youth "live in media" rather than simply use it (p. 14). Anything that is shared on social media can be perceived as being a characteristic or belief of the sender, immediately influencing their identity. Anytime something is posted or shared, that sender is communicating something to the world. In the same way, social movements are communicating a message of their oppression or need for change. Sowards & Renegar (2004) argued that, at least in the case of third-

wave feminism, social movements function as a consciousness-raising effort. Third-wave feminists sought to make the movement resonate with them.

Just as third-wave feminists made their movement their own, current Black Lives Matter supporters are attempting to do the same. The fight for racial equality dates back to the Civil Rights Movement, but it has shifted in perspective. House (2018) discussed how social media was pulpitized to aid the Black Lives Matter movement by Bishop T. D. Jakes, a Black minister of a 30,000-member megachurch in Dallas, TX. Historically, prayer has been a tool used to call for social change, and Jakes did that too when he was asked to pray with no preparation at the close of Michael Brown's funeral. Jakes communicates the need for social change by bringing the movement to his millions of social media followers as well as his thousands of churchgoers.

On the field, Colin Kaepernick is most famous for kneeling during the National Anthem. Edwards & Thorpe (2019) examined the aftermath of that decision through Heider's Balance Theory, claiming that those who view Kaepernick as an athlete will disagree with the protest due to its misalignment with the responsibilities of an athlete, while those who view him as a Black man will support the protest because it aligns with his community's history. Kaepernick communicated his grievances with the status of social justice, and it was interpreted in different ways by different members of the public.

Understanding Theories of Communication and Identity

Finally, I discuss several key theories that illustrate the intersection of communication and identity through discussion of: Communication Theory of Identity, Social Identity Theory, and Cultural Identity Theory. First, Communication Theory of Identity can be broken into four sections, or layers. The personal layer is concerned with

self-perception, while the relational identity layer develops from others' perspectives, interactions with others, and identities based on relationships. The enacted identity layer proves that communication itself is identity through interaction with peers, and the communal identity layer is how one experiences identity as part of a collective, among a group (Hecht et al., 2005).

Second, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988) are older theories that are still important when conceptualizing communication and identity in today's society, particularly in analyzing the intersection of a Black university athlete's navigation of their personal identity in contrast with being a representative of a sport or organization. Identifying with others based on social status, jobs, education, and other cultural perspectives can have an effect on how people see themselves and others in and out of their groups, including their sport and the organization that they represent through that sport.

Bringing these three sections of the background of the problem together, understanding agenda-setting is vital to exploring college athletes' descriptions of how the media represents professional athletes using their rights to speak and protest. One must understand Black athletes' protests within the frame of social movements as communication. Agenda-setting can impact the effects of social identity theory and cultural identity theory in athletes when they see these depictions of those professional athletes with whom they identify. It is important to continue to research the effects of agenda-setting due to the consequences it has through affecting citizens' daily lives, especially in connecting to how they communicate their identity and navigate their personal identity with the identities and representations of their sport and organization.

Purpose of the Study

With this understanding of the key theories and literature that provide the background of the problem, I now turn to the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to understand how communication and identity are experienced by Black university athletes in asking about their experiences and how they gauge mainstream media portrayals of Black NFL athletes making verbal or physical statements about or in protest of social injustice, racism, and inequality in America. I used media representations of Black NFL athletes' protests since the NFL has dominated mainstream media headlines regarding recent athletes' protests, especially in connection to the Black Lives Matter social movement.

Division I athletics can dominate the university atmosphere and often include athletes who are hoping to become professional athletes upon leaving the university. Because of university athletes' strong connection to professional athletes as role models, they are an appropriate sample from which to draw participants to learn more about how Black university athletes navigate communication and identity as they experience these media representations about Black athletes protesting against racial injustice in the United States. To measure participants' descriptions of and perspectives on statements about or in protest of social injustice, racism, and racial equality in America, I conducted interviews with at five college athletes on an American university campus. I provided more detail regarding my methods, context, and procedures in Chapter Three.

Definitions

In this section, I described definitions vital to this study. The definitions include the following: implicit bias, media, microaggressions, protest, social justice, racial injustice, and racism.

Implicit bias was defined as the concept that people can act on their own stereotypes or preconceived notions without intent, or be unaware of those actions (Brownstein, 2019). Media was defined as mainstream media, or MSM. This included networks like ESPN, ABC, and NBC. Media representations will be defined as representations coming from such media outlets (not social media). Microaggressions were defined as exchanges, both verbal and nonverbal, which are "put downs" or misrepresentations toward Black Americans (Pierce et al., 1977). Some examples of microaggressions include assuming someone has certain characteristics due to their ethnicity, or assuming someone is or was previously a criminal based on their appearance. They stem from implicit bias (Friedlaender, 2020). Protest, which was interchangeable with demonstration and statement for the purpose of this study, was defined as a method of using one's voice in a democracy. Forms of protest can vary from large gatherings or demonstrations to job-strikes (Broussard, 2019). Any demonstration, physical or verbal, referenced in this study was referred to as a protest.

Social justice was defined as the goal of eradicating any inequitable conditions that obstruct development of individuals, families, and communities (Ratts, 2009). An example of racial injustice or failure to achieve social justice can be seen when money continues to stay out of Black communities, as those communities become poor and a negative domino effect occurs regarding their academic institutions, employment opportunities, and positive development of individuals (Kuehl et al., 2020). Racism was

defined as any beliefs held of superiority of one group's culture or characteristics over another (Clark et al., 1999). Racism becomes systemic when it influences the structure of a society due to its rich history (Noguera & Alicea, 2020).

The chapters to follow include a literature review in Chapter Two, focusing on agenda-setting and framing as functions of the media, social movements as a communication tool, and theories of communication and identity, particularly cultural identity theory as it relates to misrepresentations of athletes protesting for social justice in America. Chapter Three outlines the context, methods, and procedures for the study, as well as possible limitations. Next, I turn to Chapter Two, which provides more in-depth analysis regarding the background of the problem and what we know about media representations of Black athletes' protesting against racial injustice in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The arguments made in this chapter are significant to the study because they provide the background of the problem and insight into research in communication and media studies about Black athletes' protests against racial injustice and how those protests are depicted in mainstream media. As introduced in Chapter One, several patterns of misrepresentations of Black athletes shape the context of this study. These patterns include constant comparison of athletes of different races, stereotyping athlete abilities based on race (Rada, 1996), and disapproval for Black athletes' protests and involvement in social movements (Mirer, 2018).

Beyond insight into these media representations, this chapter also explores communication and media studies research about agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and media framing (Entman, 1993). Since these mainstream media depictions of Black athletes are influenced through agenda-setting and media framing, these theories were to the study. Second, social movements have a long history of being studied in communication research, and the insight from that research, particularly about Black Lives Matter, was vital to understanding how Black university athletes might experience media representations of this social movement today.

Finally, exploring communication and media studies research about the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 2005), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988) played an important role in contextualizing this research study, since I directly asked Black university athletes about their experiences and how they communicate their identity as Black Americans, citizens, and athletes. Understanding all of these theories and concepts

in relation to one another was vital to this study about how Black university athletes navigate communication and identity in their experiences with media representations of Black athletes protesting against racial injustice in the United States.

Specifically, this chapter discusses agenda-setting and framing as functions of the media with emphasis on first and second-level agenda-setting, further examining how these theories intersect with race, sports, and media in our current society. I then discuss social movements as communication and the intersections with race, sports, and media, particularly with the Black Lives Matter social movement. Thirdly, I explain theories of communication and identity, especially the Communication Theory of Identity, Social Identity Theory, Cultural Identity Theory. Lastly, I outline the research questions for this study.

<div align="center">Framing Black Athletes' Activism:</div>

<div align="center">Agenda-Setting and Framing as Functions of the Media</div>

Agenda-Setting Theory was defined by McCombs and Shaw (1972), stating that the media has an influence on the public by promoting stories to which viewers should pay the most attention rather than presenting each segment with equal attention paid to every issue. Agenda-setting can be broken down into two levels. First-level agenda-setting focuses on the importance of the issues (Weaver, 2007). These are the specific stories being reported. Cohen (1963) discussed media effects, stating that the agenda-setting function implies that the news media determine for the viewer "not what to think… but what to think about" (p. 13).

Second-level agenda setting can be defined similarly to the media frame. Entman (1993) defined the media frame as choosing aspects or segments of a certain news story

and promoting them as more significant than the rest of the story. In that way, the media

frame dominates how a viewer can be expected to interact with a particular news story.

Similarly, second-level agenda-setting is described by both Ghanem (1997) and

McCombs (2005) as the relevance of attributes of each story. Weaver (2007) pointed out

that as similar as they are, framing uses broader processes, such as moral convictions,

than second-level agenda setting. Edy & Meirick (2019) discussed the effects of agenda-

setting on the average citizen's life, stating that agenda-setting by the media broadens

perspective rather than narrows it by shifting attention to events and concerns that do not

typically affect that citizen's day-to-day routine.

Media framing and agenda-setting have most recently been used to impact

citizens' perceptions of race at the intersection of race and sports (Billings & Angelini,

2007). One of the most common examples of this can be seen in interviews conducted by

journalists with athletes. Journalists used listening-based questions, which are easier for

the athlete to respond to and are open-ended. More often than not, though, their questions

make an assumption and lead the athlete to a specific answer. This is one example of

agenda-setting by the media in sports (Eljand-Karp & Harro-Loit, 2020).

Another example of agenda-setting by the media in sports is in the amount of

coverage and the depth of said coverage given to male divisions of a sport over female

divisions of the same sport. The first example is golf. The Professional Golf Association

(PGA) is given mid-to-late afternoon and primetime coverage, while the Ladies

Professional Golf Association (LPGA) is given morning coverage, with some afternoon

coverage taking place on a less popular channel (Bowes & Kitching, 2019). This concept

is mirrored in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) The WNBA

season is much shorter than the NBA, and the airtime is almost non-existent. One actually

has to dig through the guide on the television to find a WNBA game or even highlights

during the season. In 2009, SportsCenter spent 1.4% of its main coverage airtime on

women (Messner & Cooky, 2010).

Agenda-setting intersects with race through the "White Savior" phenomenon.

Moore and Pierce (2007) along with Stoddard and Alan (2006) described "White

Saviors" as individuals who liberate people of color from underprivileged circumstances

under the impression that those people cannot save themselves. They are also described

as "redeemers of the weak" (Vera & Gordon, 2003). In 1966, Texas Western College

(TWC), now the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), played as an all-Black

basketball team and defeated the all-White University of Kentucky. Hutchison (2016)

noted that TWC did not become a "media spectacle" until the game was over, and they

had won the National Collegiate Athletic Association championship. Suddenly, TWC

players were "speedy" and Kentucky players were "smaller," which enforces racial

stereotypes in regard to athletics. Hutchison (2016) also pointed out that TWC Coach

Haskins, who was white, decided to start and play five Black players at the last minute

because of the defense posed by Kentucky, not to be symbolic or make big gains in the

race world, which, when depicted as the latter on the big screen, can promote historical

inaccuracies. These falsehoods are also lifted up through the idea that Haskins started

recruiting Black athletes. TWC recruited athletes of color as early as 1956, while Haskins

did not begin coaching there until 1961 (Schultz, 2014). Regardless, journalists framed

their stories through this lens and an epic tale was born. The 2006 film *Glory Road*

followed the novelizing theme, creating a "White Savior" story in which Coach Haskins

"guides downtrodden subalterns to their promised land and purifies a nation in the process" (Hutchison, 2016, p. 164).

This phenomenon continues in *The Blind Side*, the story of Michael Oher, a nomadic, teenaged ward of the state of Tennessee who was taken in by Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy. Bineham (2015) discussed the inaccuracies and appropriations seen in the film as compared to life. Just like Coach Haskins from TWC, The Tuohy's and every other White person in the film are made to be saviors. The film makes it seem as though Oher could not succeed without their help. It shows Sean Jr. training him on the football field as well as Leigh Anne scurrying onto the field to give advice on his blocking techniques, neither of which actually happened. Oher actually knew how to play football most of his life (Rodesiler & Garland, 2018), but that was contradicted by the film's framing of the Tuohys as "White Saviors." A few scenes later, we see a streamline of Southeastern Conference coaches coming to talk to Oher and his family about playing college football. They all want to help him, as they should, but failing to identify his difficulties as race-related exhibits a post-racial mindset, which simply was not and still is not the case (Bineham, 2015).

Agendas and frames can also appear in news articles and game reports. The day after the St. Louis Rams' "hands up, don't shoot" protest, the in-house reporter's article talked strictly about the game with no mention of the protest. The reporter said their job is to report about football and nothing else (Mirer, 2018). This absence of protest is also a part of the media frame of Black athletes' protests against racial injustice in the United States.

Various branches of the media use agenda-setting. Agenda-setting can happen in pre- and post-game interviews, unequal airtime in certain sports, as well as through movies on the big screen. Many people see things in a different way than the way in which they exist in life due to agenda-setting and media framing. In the next section, I explore how social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, function as communication.

Social Movements as Communication

As mentioned earlier, social movements can function as communication itself. Social movements are not always all verbal. Physical demonstrations and body language can communicate messages as well. In 2015, five Black St. Louis Rams (now the Los Angeles Rams) players came out of the tunnel with their hands locked in representation of "hands up, don't shoot," after the death of a teenager in Ferguson, MO and the violence that ensued. It was not long before the "Boycott the St. Louis Ram" page erupted in opposition. Sanderson et al., (2016) analyzed Facebook comments and tweets with the hashtag #BoycottRams to see what themes would emerge from the disagreeable fans. Several themes did in fact arise, including renouncing fandom, punishment commentary, racial commentary, general criticism, attacking other group members, and presenting the "facts" of the case. Renouncing fandom was the most popular theme, with 249 occurrences out of 995 (24.4%). The social media platforms were used for the management and venting of social identity threats. Such comments become part of how a social movement is communicated to a broader society.

Cizek and Logan (2018) investigated social movements as communication further through a study that analyzed Facebook comments on Ben & Jerry's page after the ice cream company announced their support of Black Lives Matter in 2016. They found that

identity intersects with politics and power when it comes to communication about social movements. Some followers were concerned that Ben & Jerry's was using its platform to share personal views, even though those very same followers are using their own social media presence to emulate their own personal views. Ben & Jerry's was really employing Corporate Political Advocacy, a business ethics concept described by Wettstein and Baur (2016) as verbalizing support for a group of people or values, usually intending to persuade customers or patrons to do the same. This comes with the knowledge that some constituents and stakeholders will reject this part of the business' identity. This could also be true in relation to college athletes. They may excel on the field, but as soon as they voice support for something with which their fans may not agree, support for the athlete may plummet. Better understanding this tension between an athlete's individual or personal identity and how that athlete describes themselves as a representative of their sport or organization, in terms of their identity, is a key part of this study.

A social movement directly related to sports is the *Sports Illustrated* series from 1968, "The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story." The series ran in their magazine for five weeks and has since been deemed "socially responsible" journalism, as the Civil Rights movement was no longer separate from the sports section of society (Smith, 2006). Singer (2006) dove further in-depth on socially responsible journalism, claiming that Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism and Nerone's Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) are the foundations for the concept. Berry and Nerone (1995) stated that SRT is a motivator that pushes media outlets to report "raw material that citizens need to govern themselves" (p. 75). Sartre (1999) discussed the idea that without predestined human nature, it is up to each human to decide their positive or negative existence based on their actions. These

theories combine to create the concept of socially responsible journalism, in which journalists can control their reputation and serve the public accordingly by incorporating existentialism and SRT.

As socially responsible journalism is a tool for journalists, political activism is a tool for citizens that can be used to communicate the necessity for change as well as unify a group of people to fight for that change (Shaw, 2001). If journalists communicate that raw material, citizens will then be able to govern themselves free of outside influence. That is exactly what Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, did when they organized the "first major national demonstration against the Vietnam war" in 1965, (Gitlin, 2003, p. 21). Public college and university student enrollment doubled in the United States between 1960 and 1966 (Gitlin, 2003, p. 239). While the movement itself was large, its social base was a miniscule part of the country as a whole. The communication of the movement, and in larger part, the movement itself, was radicalized due to the narrowness of its social base.

Along with the SDS movement, the previously mentioned protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos is comparable to the protests of today. Hartmann (2019) noted three similarities between the 1968 activists and the activists of today: racism as the central focus, current social issues, and a focus on statements rather than tangible goals. These elements of media framing are important to consider when looking at the current Black Lives Matter social movement in connection with its history to the Civil Rights movement.

Like Smith and Carlos, other Black athletes set a precedent for the athletes of today. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, formerly known as Lew Alcindor, was a staple of the NBA

in Milwaukee through the mid-70s, and then in Los Angeles through the 1989 season. When interviewed by Roger Kahn, a writer for *Sport*, Kahn asked Abdul-Jabbar what he felt his role was in the "Black struggle," noting that he cannot just play anymore. Some of his college teammates went to Mexico City in 1968, but he refused to go, saying that he did not want to get wrapped up in anything controversial at that time. Abdul-Jabbar was an early example not only of NBA activism, but of communicating a strong position by literally staying out of the conversation, even when the conversation was brought to him (Goudsouzian, 2017). This example shows the negotiation and tension among the different layers of identity, as experienced by Black athletes who participate in activism against racial injustice.

Athletic protests are not always demonstrated by athletes. Forst (2017) discussed Denasia Lawrence's Black Lives Matter protest during the National Anthem in 2016. Lawrence sang the National Anthem before a basketball game, kneeling while she performed. Forst described the intersection between identities through the framework of Threshold Identity (Keating, 2012). Threshold Identity occurs when one strives for similarities across differences due to multiple identity facets that rival each other. This can be understood in the context of Colin Kaepernick or any other Black athlete. Part of their identity is their race, ethnicity, and culture, and they feel that those are being disrespected, so they want to fight for that. However, other people may perceive that fight inappropriate because of athletes' other identities as employees of their organizations or representatives of their sport. This study will interrogate those tensions and how they are experienced by Black university athletes, in considering how athletes communicate their

concerns about racial injustice in the United States and connect that concern to a particular social movement of Black Lives Matter.

Theories of Communication and Identity

Because the purpose of this study was to explore the intersections of communication and identity for Black university athletes, as they experience media representations of Black athletes' protests against racial injustice in the United States, this section outlines a few key theories of communication and identity, including the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 2005), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Taken together, these theories provide the theoretical framework for understanding how Black university athletes must navigate tensions across multiple facets of their identity, especially in considering how they experience media representations about Black athletes' protests.

The Communication Theory of Identity was developed by Michael Hecht and colleagues to portray individual constructions of identity based on past experiences. Hecht et al. (2005) described Communication Theory of Identity in four layers: personal, relational, enacted, and communal. The personal layer regards one's self-image and perspective of themselves. The relational layer has three parts. One will determine a sense of identity based on others' perspectives, then advance that identity through relationships with others, and lastly, those relationships construct their own identities. Enacted identity is depicted identity and can be communicated through interactions with peers, justifying communication itself as identity. Enacted identity can also be nonverbal, such as wearing a necklace of the cross to communicate one's Christian faith and

identity. Finally, communal identity is how one experiences their identity through considering how that identity is held by the group of which one is a part. It is the collective identity by which a certain group feels accurately represented (Hecht & Lu, 2014).

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel & Turner (1986), implied that individuals experience collective identity based on their being a part of a group. Identity is shaped not only by experiencing a group with similar beliefs, but by feeling accepted and approved by those group members (Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018). When people compartmentalize the environment around them through the lens of group alignment, social categorization takes place (Stets & Burke, 2000). Ethnocentrism, defined as holding beliefs and behaviors that favor the in-group (Neuliep & Speten, 2007), can also be found in between the lines of SIT. Neuliep et al. (2005) emphasized that ethnocentrism should be viewed as a continuum with two ends. The first end is where ethnocentrism becomes a good tool for one's in-group being under fire, to build solidarity amongst members of the in-group or collective identity. The opposite end poses a threat as the likelihood of people seeing their way as the only way can lead to extreme ethnocentrism and dislike toward others who are members of an out-group.

Finally, Collier & Thomas (1988) developed Cultural Identity Theory (CIT) to depict the processes individuals use to derive cultural group identities. Culture is defined by Fixmer-Oraiz and Wood (2017) as "structures, institutions, practices, and/or activities that reflect and uphold a particular social order by defining certain identities, values, and patterns of behavior as natural, good, and important, while defining other identities unnatural, bad, or unimportant" (pp. 28-29). This means that culture can be a variety of

different concepts such as clothing, ethnic background, customs or traditions, foods, music, hairstyles and other nonverbal communication. An individual's identification with a cultural group can be significant across different contexts. One example is that a Black identity is less important if everyone around someone is Black, but for the only Black student in an entire high school, it matters so much more to their identity development that they are Black (Littlejohn et al., 2017).

Another level of CIT becomes prominent when investigating the differences between the general public's view of one's identity, and that individual's perspective on their own identity. As mentioned earlier, Richard Sherman made headlines after his post-NFL-game interview in 2014 (Page et al., 2016). He was immediately depicted as angry, but that anger went undefined and unsourced. Sherman sees himself as a player who has overcome racial and developmental struggles to be on that field, while the public sees him as entitled and aggressive (McClendon, 2015). Shpigel (2014) noted that Sherman's coach, Pete Carroll, made comments approving of Sherman being himself but also needing to bring his player back in bounds. These are completely different identities related to culture.

Identity can also come from clothing, and the NBA's Russell Westbrook is a great example of that. In 2013, he wore what some would call a "flashy" outfit to a press conference. Westbrook is known for wearing animal prints and other flamboyant patterns. Through this, he creates his own identity, just as any regular citizen would with what they wear. However, the media and the public have referred to him as the "Kate Moss of the NBA," comparing him to the British fashion model (Shapiro, 2013). This is important in terms of the research study. If college athletes feel that their peers and

community determine their identity or ascribe particular characteristics to their cultural identity, they may be driven away from creating or avowing their own identity and instead fit into the mold of what is deemed acceptable in the eyes of the public.

As previously mentioned, existentialism is the concept that people create their own identity, and that appears through athletes as well. Colin Kaepernick, famous for #takeaknee, has created a cultural identity for himself as someone who is standing up for social justice after he struggled through the long history of injustice with other Black people (Boren, 2020). Citizens who primarily see Kaepernick as a Black man are likely to agree with that expression of his identity and support his right to protest. However, citizens who see Kaepernick as the former NFL quarterback for the 49ers are likely to be disapproving of that identity and criticize him for it (Edwards & Thorpe, 2019). Thus, Black athletes who protest must balance their identities as Black Americans, U.S. citizens, and representatives of their sport and/or sports organization.

Research Questions

Agenda-setting and media framing illustrate how media representations can be influential in garnering people's attention (or not), especially in considering the issue of U.S. racial injustice and Black athletes' protests. The social movement of Black Lives Matter has been studied by communication researchers and illustrates the importance of studying social movements as communication. Specifically, media representations of this social movement illustrate the tensions faced by Black athletes as they navigate their freedom to protest as individuals with their larger role as representatives of a particular organization or even sport at large. This tension between individual and organizational or sport-levels of collective identity is of interest to the study, which seeks to understand

how Black university athletes navigate and communicate about their identity in relation to Black Lives Matter and Black athletes' protests against racial injustice.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Cultural Identity Theory (CIT) intertwine to serve as the theoretical foundation for the research questions for this study. CTI begins the process of identity with individuals constructing identity based on interpersonal experiences and how they navigate those experiences across different levels of how they communicate that identity to others. SIT describes the process of one's identity developing based on group experiences, especially considering the shared characteristics of an in-group. CIT then expands upon communal identity with highlighting group representations. Sometimes, a group's media representation of their identity can be perceived differently by different groups or people, depending on the person or group interacting with that media representation. For example, a Black American or athlete will likely interpret Kaepernick's #takeaknee movement differently than a White American or sports fan. These concepts are vital to understanding how Black university athletes describe and communicate their own identity based on their experiences with media depictions of Black athletes who protest against racial injustice in the United States.

Based on the exploration of this aforementioned literature and theoretical foundations, I developed three research questions for this study:

RQ1: How do Black university athletes describe media depictions of Black NFL athletes making verbal or physical statements about or in protest of racial injustice, racism, and inequality in America?

RQ2: How do those descriptions of media representations of Black athletes' protests shape Black university athletes' communication about their identities as athletes, U.S. citizens, and Black Americans?

RQ3: How do those experiences with media representations about Black athletes' protests shape Black university athletes' perspectives on mainstream media and the roles of agenda-setting and framing?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study was conducted to examine the experiences of Black university athletes with the media and media representations of athletes during Black Lives Matter demonstrations through the lenses of Agenda-Setting, Media Framing, Communication Theory of Identity, Social Identity Theory, and Cultural Identity Theory. This chapter will outline the methods used to conduct this study, including sections related to the procedures, setting, sample and sampling, instrumentation, data analysis, and limitations. I conclude the chapter by reiterating the importance of the study and its purpose of further understanding the connections among media representations of Black athletes' protests and how Black university athletes experience those representations in how they communicate and understand their own identity.

Procedures

In order to examine the research questions previously determined in Chapter Two, this study followed a mixed-methods research design. I used quantitative methods with an introductory survey developed and distributed through QuestionPro, which I have access to through my university, but focused primarily on qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews with participants to follow-up the survey. Qualitative methods allowed me to dive into the deeper meanings and realities of these Black university athletes' experiences (Frey et al., 2000).

I sent each quantitative survey through the participants' email, after they reached out to me through email to express interest. Those participants with whom I was already acquainted did not need to reach out to me through email first, as I already have their contact information due to our relationship. Each participant clicked on the link and

answered the questions in one session, one week before their qualitative interview date. I

conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews, meaning that the questions prepared

before the interviews were asked, but probing questions were sometimes developed on

the spot in order to specify the participant's answer (Frey et al., 2000). Each interview

took place over Zoom and was recorded for accuracy. The data collection process took

place over the Spring 2021 semester. Interviews did not affect each participant's class

schedule, as they happened at times specific to each interviewee's preference. Through

using Zoom and allowing the participant to determine the interview date and time, it

allowed them to choose the most comfortable location for the interview and allowed them

to more freely discuss their experiences with navigating their identity as a Black

university athlete in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Before beginning the interviewing process, University Institutional Review Board

approval was obtained with approval number IRB-2102008-EXM. I let the interviewees

know the topic of the interview, but not the specific questions. Each interview took 25-45

minutes. I interviewed each participant individually so that they may speak their mind

without worry for others' opinions (Frey et al., 2000). Zoom automatically transcribed

the interviews upon recording them; however, I reviewed the transcripts and revised them

for accuracy before reviewing them as data.

Setting

This study took place at a Midwestern, public, four-year university with 77% of

students receiving full time education. The university is the largest university in its state

and has 19 NCAA Division I sports including football, men's and women's basketball,

volleyball, and wrestling. 87% of students are White, while 4% are international students,

3% Hispanic, 2% Black, 2% two or more races and 1% identifying as Asian (SDSU,

2020). The city in which the university is located has a population of about 25,000

citizens. Of those citizens, 90.3% are White, 3.78% Asian, 2.12 % Black or African

American, 1.31% Native American, 0.49% other, and 0.03% Native Hawaiian or Pacific

Islander. The city's median age is 24.3 years old (World Population Review, 2020).

These interviews were conducted on an individual basis over Zoom due to the

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic happening at this time. Each interviewee chose their own

space, while I will reserve a small meeting room on the university campus. This allowed

them to increase their overall comfort level (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002), especially in

describing their experiences with racial injustice, protest, and how that might affect how

they communicate their identity.

Sample and Sampling

The sampling plan used for this study was a mix between convenience and

snowball sampling. I chose convenience sampling due to the large population of Black

athletes at this Division I university, as well as the time limitation of conducting the

research amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Etikan, 2016). I know several of the university

athletes from having them as former students in the classroom, so convenience sampling

allowed me to have access to the population of Black athletes at this university. Snowball

sampling was also chosen due to the inaccessibility of the population (Naderifar et al.,

2017). As noted above, the university is majority white. By asking the sample of

participants who might be other Black university athletes who might be interested in

sharing their experiences about Black Lives Matter and being an athlete, I could increase

the accessibility of my study to more possible participants. My recruitment goal was to

interview 10 individuals who meet the criteria of being a Black/African American university athlete on this specific university, Midwestern campus. I interviewed five. Each participant was 18 years of age and enrolled full-time at the university and active on an athletic roster at the university.

Instrumentation

Two measurement instruments were used in this study. The first was a Likert Scale survey. Statements about athletes, Black Lives Matter, and mainstream media were included on the quantitative survey (see Appendix). Each participant ranked each statement based on its truth according to their lives and experiences as Black university athletes. Participants' responses to the quantitative survey provided insight into their likelihood to pay attention to or dismiss any statements or demonstrations involving professional athletes' and Black Lives Matter, support or not support those demonstrations, keep up with that athlete, team, or organization after their demonstration(s), and their perceptions of trustworthiness of mainstream media. The survey was conducted online one week before each interview is scheduled.

Sample statements included statements about Black Lives Matter demonstrations in sports, and participants' feelings when encountering professional athletes' protests about racial injustice. Scale options included: (1) Definitely true, (2) mostly true, (3) somewhat true, (4) neither true nor false, (5) somewhat false, (6) mostly false, and (7) definitely false.

The second measurement instrument used in the study was the individual interview protocol (see Appendix). One week after the survey was taken, I met individually with each participant over Zoom, an online video-communication service.

This platform was beneficial because the interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed for efficiency. I reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy before analyzing them as a data set.

Each interview was semi-structured and consisted of 11 open-ended questions. The questions were asked in a funnel format, beginning with simpler questions and closing with more specific questions about participants' experiences with Black Lives Matter, their involvement (or lack of involvement), and their connections with particular groups or communities. I did this because starting with broad questions and closing with more specific questions allowed me to get to the root of the participants' experiences, much like peeling back the layers of an onion (Matsumoto et al., 2015). The questions were derived in part from the theories being examined in the study. A pilot interview was done to confirm that the questions are relevant to the information I am seeking. Sample questions included: (1) Tell me about the first time you heard about Black Lives Matter. How did that make you feel? (2) How, if at all, do you identify with the Black Lives Matter movement? If you don't, why not? (3) Which Black Lives Matter demonstration do you remember the most? The questions I ask were derived from the theories being used to analyze the answers, as discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data in multiple stages. First, I categorized each survey answer according to the statement about which it was answered. Following that process, I read through each transcription in order for me to become familiar with the data. After reading through each transcription, I recorded themes that emerged through each interview to prepare for a thematic analysis of the interviews and surveys. The code words themselves

did not have to appear; a theme emerging synonymous with the code word was used. Using reporting patterns allows for more detail to be pulled from the interviews. This process helped me to understand more depth of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I analyzed the transcripts using Tracy's (2013) two-phase iterative analysis, which will help to pull themes from each interview. I and another coder read through each transcript independently and recorded common themes. After doing so, I used constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2006) to discuss my findings with the other coder. This allowed me to compare my codes with theirs and modify them over time.

I used inductive and deductive analysis during the study. Braun and Clarke (2006) described inductive analysis as correlation between interview questions and emerged themes. Deductive analysis is portrayed as the data falling into a theoretical mold. Some of the survey and interview questions were derived from the frameworks of Agenda-Setting, Framing, Communication Theory of Identity, Social Identity Theory, and Cultural Identity Theory. These methods were used to help determine whether or not the questions I asked got to the root of athletes' experiences and how they communicate about their identity, as well as what those experiences are in relation to Black Lives Matter and media representations of Black athletes' protests against racial injustice.

Validity in this study was increased through the process of member-checking. After I analyzed both the quantitative and qualitative data, I communicated those findings through contacting the participants to verify that the data representations and themes that I found were accurately depicting their contributions from both the surveys and the interviews. This ensured that I have accurately represented the participants' experiences

in my study, particularly since I am interested in the intersections of agenda-setting and framing, social movements, and how Black university athletes communicate their identity in relation to these issues (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Upon that confirmation through member-checking, I secured the information on a password-protected server.

Limitations

As with any study, there are some possible limitations. First, the sample was small, but saturation of themes was achieved when participants' answers to the interview questions began to have commonalities in comparison to previous interviews (Saunders et al., 2018). A small sample on a Midwestern campus may produce vastly different results than a large sample on a Midwestern campus, or a large sample on a coastal or southern campus in the United States. Another limitation is that athletes who play sports other than football were involved in this study. Some athletes may not have as many experiences with NFL athletes in the media because that is not their sport. However, NFL athletes are fighting the same fight for social justice and have broad media reach. The following section will outline the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this study, I surveyed and interviewed over Zoom with five Black/Mixed Race university athletes about their experiences with social justice, Black Lives Matter, and their identity. The participant field included one first-year student, two second-year students, one third-year student, and one graduate student. There were two who identified as female and three who identified as male. The participants are active members on university volleyball teams (two), football teams (two), and track teams (one). This chapter will outline the results of the survey and interviews. Due to the low number of participants, the survey data is intertwined with the interview findings in order to better illustrate and support the results. The survey measured participants' attitudes on Black Lives Matter demonstrations and trust in the media. Thematic analysis was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black university athletes describe media depictions of Black NFL athletes making verbal or physical statements about or in protest of racial injustice, racism, and inequality in America?

RQ2: How do those descriptions of media representations of Black athletes' protests shape Black university athletes' communication about their identities as athletes, U.S. citizens, and Black Americans?

RQ3: How do those experiences with media representations about Black athletes' protests shape Black university athletes' perspectives on mainstream media and the roles of agenda-setting and framing?

Each research question will be presented in these sections: *Media Depictions of Social Justice Statements* (RQ1), *Communication about Black University Athlete Identities* (RQ2), *Perspectives on Agenda-Setting and Framing* (RQ3).

Media Depictions of Social Justice Statements

RQ1 focused on participants' descriptions of media representations of athletes when they make statements or demonstrate on behalf of the fight for social justice and racial equality in America. Participants described controversial reactions fueled by uncertainty, danger, and fear surrounding whether it is socially acceptable to support the movement.

Controversy and Uncertainty

The first theme that emerged was that of controversy with underlying uncertainty. Comments about controversy fueled by uncertainty were made seven different times, with each participant mentioning it in some form at least once. Participant 1 started off by saying, "I kind of took it personally. Like, yeah, Black lives matter. Why does this have to be something controversial?" This quotation supports the theme of controversy because the participant felt that the fact that Black Lives Matter had to be developed in the first place is a problem. Participant 2 echoed the sentiment, stating, "It's great to have your own people fight for you, but then to think, there are actually people out there who think 'No, I don't believe in that, I don't think you should have equal rights,' and that just hurts as you're growing up." In the same way as the first statement, this statement also supports the theme of controversy because it shows two of the biggest viewpoints surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. The first is the goal and mission of Black Lives Matter, to minimize and eventually eradicate the level of Black

deaths at the hands of authority. The second is the opposite, the argument that Black deaths at the hands of authority are no more important *right now* than any other death, regardless of race or ethnicity.

The fifth participant spoke along similar lines, citing their experience at a private Catholic high school. Their concerns surrounded the ways in which the movement was being communicated, as their friends at school likely did not have similar racial experiences or tensions when growing up as the participant did. They said, "Growing up going to a private Catholic high school that had tuition, I grew up with kids who didn't experience what I experienced, so I wanted to make sure we were spreading awareness in the right way." They struggled to communicate about the movement in its early stages because they wanted to make sure they were communicating about it in a way that would inform and not ostracize their classmates, especially since they may have already felt ostracized to some extent due to struggling with the intersection of their Catholic background and identity as a Black person, which came up in multiple participants' responses. These statements speak to the controversial and fear-invoking nature of publicly supporting Black Lives Matter. As young, Black Americans, they are unsure of how to feel and worried that their friends and family may feel differently if they choose to support the movement.

It is evident that these university athletes initially felt unsure of what to do with the ignition of the Black Lives Matter movement. The first three times controversy came up, it was in terms of identifying with the movement to an extent, but tentatively doing so in order to not disrupt peace in their social and at-home lives. The fourth time it was mentioned, it was about only supporting the "pure-hearted" movement (Participant 3) and

making sure not to support the rioting and looting. The final three times it was

mentioned, it was by the same participant. They first discussed how they identify with the

movement and the ways in which some people support it at home but not in public. They

next spoke about losing support, as there are standards on the way one carries themselves

as an athlete in America. Finally, they discussed controversy in their organization, and

how it seems the athletes want to be informed and unite more than the coaches, stating

that the coaches may "feel forced [to support athletes who support BLM]" (Participant 2).

It is clear from the data that these athletes see controversy in all aspects of their lives:

with their family, with their peers, and with their teachers and coaches. Black Lives

Matter has affected these athletes in controversial ways, provoking uncertainty about how

their public support of this movement might be negatively perceived by others.

Conditional Support of BLM due to Danger and Fear

  A few comments that were not made quite as often concerned conditional support

of the movement based on the dangers and fears that are associated with media depictions

of BLM protests, speaking out, and being leaders in the fight for social justice in

America. Athletes tentatively supported the movement because of the real danger and

fear they felt or perceived *others* might feel toward them, in part due to balancing their

multiple identities as Black Americans, U.S. citizens, and athletes. This subsection will

include separate paragraphs outlining comments about both danger and fear.

  As mentioned above, conditional support emerged through undertones of danger.

Participants discussed tentative agreement with the movement but then explained that

others might not support it in the same way out of fear from others. Participant 2 shared

their thoughts on how people support the movement, saying, "So I think I identify with

[BLM], um, up to a certain point. I feel like some people don't want the attention to it, so they say they support it but in public they really don't, because some people just don't know how it feels [to support BLM and to be Black in America]." This participant referred to the fear that people around them may not support the movement in the same way that they do. They also touch on people's lack of experience with being Black in America. In the interview, this participant was referring to the stories we see on social media about a Black man being pulled over and having to get out of the car for having a taillight out, or people crossing to the other side of the street when a Black man is walking home from work in a hooded sweatshirt. This is a reference to the fear that people have when encountering Black people, but also what it feels like to be feared based on discrimination. This participant felt as if other people diminish the value of Black Americans' experiences by assuming that they have or have not experienced certain aspects of racism or discrimination in their lives. Participant 5 added to this experience with support for the movement. They detailed their protest experience, saying, "It was dangerous, and I never knew what was going to happen. I was nervous because I didn't want anyone to do anything to me or any of my friends simply because we were supporting different things." This statement ties in with the implications from the first statement in this paragraph because it discusses how nervous the participant was about supporting something with which their peers may not have had experience. Finally, Participant 2 cited a fear of cancel culture, saying "They'll cancel me if I'm not careful. Should I fight for what I believe in and risk my job? Or I'll just stay quiet." This statement speaks to the concept that saying something politically unsettling could cost this athlete their job, which rings true in the society in which we live today. The data

reveals that the participants feel a moderate (at minimum) amount of fear associated with the BLM movement. Some of this is in regard to protesting while other fears concern acceptance and social status with their peers and other people around them. The next subsection will outline the dangers that emerged in the interview data.

Some participants also offered a different kind of conditional support, speaking about the different subdivisions of the movement that are pushing forward varying agendas. They support the "pure-hearted" movement (Participant 3). They were talking about those people who are really out there peacefully protesting rather than looting and destroying. This conditional support of the "pure-hearted" movement indicates a fear of other variations of the movement that may rely on dangerous methods such as destroying property and looting stores, which are often depicted in media representations of protests associated with BLM. Participant 4 explicitly spoke about the fear of getting hurt, stating, "I'm not going to be out on the side of the road and putting myself in danger. I didn't want to be in danger if something were to go down" [a dangerous scenario occurring]. They made it clear that being involved in protests makes them feel that they could be in physical danger.

It came out in the data that some Black university athletes feel uncertain about anything related to the Black Lives Matter movement, especially when it comes from mainstream media, due to the controversy it causes and the fear and danger that are often associated with media depictions of the movement. It is important to recognize that these comments were the initial responses to how the participants feel about the way Black Lives Matter has been seen, as well as their feelings and thoughts on their role in the movement. The survey data matched the interview data in that participants reported a

lack of trust in the media when reporting on racial issues due to the ways in which the media covers the issues. These controversies and fears affect how they communicate their identity, because they are attempting to figure out who they are and succeed in their lives while encountering people and situations with the potential to barricade their right to a serene, equal existence in America.

Communication about Black University Athlete Identities

RQ2 asked participants to examine the impacts that media representations have on the development of how they communicate about their identity. To review, three different identity theories were used as the framework for this study: Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 2005), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988). CTI focuses on individual constructions of identity based on past experiences, through the four layers of identity (personal, relational, enacted, and communal). These theories shape the themes that emerged in relation to how Black athletes described and communicated their identity.

Themes that emerged from the interview data included the following: a) feeling compelled to take on leadership roles and igniting unity through that process; b) speaking out and starting conversations; and c) discussing hope, empowerment, and change through social support for their identities. Uniting others through their leadership became a key method of enacting their identity as athletes. Speaking out became a method of enacting their identity as U.S. citizens. Finally, emphasizing hope and empowerment through change became a method of enacting their identity as Black Americans who see BLM as part of a longer history of social movements oriented around racial equality in America. Participants were only able to navigate all of their identities through social

support, which serves as an important resource for participants feeling able to freely share and communicate their identities to others.

Leadership

Despite being uncertain about the level of controversy they might find themselves in when supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, the participants expressed leadership in working toward racial justice seven different times, causing it to emerge as another prevalent theme, especially in connection to their identity as athletes. Two types of leaders emerged: community and athletic.

While the personal layer of identity was expressed scarcely and cautiously through the controversy and uncertainty discussed above, the relational, enacted, and communal layers of identity emerged more boldly below through participants' descriptions of how they were leaders in their communities. Two participants spoke about enacting that special example of leadership for their communities. Growing up in areas affected by under-resourcefulness or other factors, they talked about "making it out" through athletics (Participant 4) and earning higher degrees because their "family grinded, worked hard, and sacrificed" for them (Participant 5). Participant 3 echoed those statements, stating that they have leadership qualities, and people in their hometown look up to them. These comments show that the participants feel they are leaders, whether they wanted that title or not. This also speaks to the relational layer of CTI (Hecht et al., 2005). Athletes expressed this layer through relationships with their families in this data. Their families are part of how they communicate to others who they are and enact leadership in their communities.

The second dominant type of leadership to emerge in how athletes communicated about their identities as athletes was specifically through athletic leadership, whether that was on their teams or as leaders on campus. Participants describing themselves as leaders makes sense because in America, we train our athletes to be leaders. That starts at a young age. We teach our athletes to be different by excelling in the classroom as well as through excelling in their sport, and also spending time serving in the community, whether that be through a religious organization or some other community group. Participant 2 spoke to this phenomenon of athletic leadership, saying, "I have to carry myself differently because I'm an athlete." It is clear that these athletes feel the pressure to be leaders and step up to do so. This also allows them to express their identities as athletes through being leaders. They are incorporating those leadership qualities not only into their personality, but their identity itself, both as athletes and "regular people" when they go back to their home communities away from campus.

Unity

Unity rose out of the interview data as another theme. While not mentioned as much, it lies underneath some of the other themes and is still important as it intertwines with leadership. In fact, participants' leadership became a way to unify others, particularly their fellow athletes, coaches, and sports teams.

In response to a question about what each athlete's team and organization has done well and can still do better, Participant 1 stated, "We're all educating each other." Participant 3 took that further and said, "It's important to keep having more unity." Finally, Participant 4 spoke about their organization, saying, "We're all on the same page and we all want to be unified. We're always being interactive and attending speeches. I

think it feels like everyone is on board." All of these comments reiterate the need for unity of their teams, which may be an underpinning of their leadership both in their communities and in their athletic leadership on their teams and on campus. The inclusive language of "we" also indicates a strong sense of that communal layer of identity (Hecht et al., 2005) when analyzing how they communicate their identity in relation to their teams.

It is important to see this through the lens of the theories of identity. As mentioned above, this is another way in which the relational layer of CTI comes out. These athletes are sharing part of who they are with their peers and coaches. This can also be seen through SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). There is always going to be the in-group (we) and the out-group (they), but what these athletes were trying to present is the idea that everyone can be the in-group, regardless of race, when considering the identity of their athletic team as a communal layer in communicating who they are. The volleyball team can all be the in-group. The football team can all be the in-group. These athletes feel that unity is important, across all platforms and teams that represent the university.

Speaking Out

The second-most common theme that emerged from the interview data was speaking out, which was mentioned 10 different times. Within the theme of speaking out, I discuss how athletes spoke out to navigate identity tensions, personally spoke out, and saw an increase in their coaches speaking out about BLM and racial injustice.

First, speaking out was a powerful method of enacting identity as U.S. citizens, particularly in considering the importance of the First Amendment in shaping our identity

as Americans. Speaking out became a method for participants to navigate tensions in their identity. Participant 3 stated, "Being raised by a White family with Christian beliefs was different from me. I got to college and there were people who looked like me, but their background was totally different. I believe in God, but also obviously am Black, so I really felt like I needed to say something to make a change." Black Americans face a unique identity struggle when they have identity ties to a fundamentally liberal movement of Black Lives Matter while also having ties to a religious, generally conservative lifestyle or belief system. This participant found their identity in the middle of the two, as a young Black American who clings to their Christian background while also supporting social justice and equality in society, as derived from and deemed appropriate by their faith. These identities often conflict with each other.

As if that is not hard enough, participants' identities can become even more jumbled when one goes to college and leaves home and one's family for the first time. Not having those ties to the ways in which one grew up could have several different effects on their identity due to the communal layer that faith communities uphold. Faith communities (as well as athletic teams) provide a sense of community and belonging for people, and that can be seen in this interview data. When Participant 3 stated, "I got to college and there were people who looked like me, but their background was totally different," they are speaking to the difficulty of navigating changes in identity or confronting tensions with one's identity when away from family, traditions, and core beliefs for the first time. Finally, Black athlete identities, millennial identities, and U.S. citizen identities also conflict with each other. As a citizen, everyone has the rights to free speech as well as peaceful assembly. As a millennial, that identity already conflicts with a

large part of the U.S. population, as that large part of the population is older. Having

grown up in different times, they typically have different viewpoints. Finally, as a Black

person as well as an athlete, one has many different experiences from the older

population, especially the older White population. These identities come together and

conflict for these reasons.

Navigating identity can be very difficult for athletes, as they are trying to do their

job in their sport while also living serene and fulfilling lives as American citizens. This

theme also came out both in participants stating that they felt more comfortable speaking

out themselves, but also saw a rise in conversation from their coaches and organizations

since the death of George Floyd in May 2020.

Athletes spoke out primarily from a space of personal awareness and the need to

share their voice, enacting their identity as U.S. citizens who have the First Amendment

right of freedom of speech. Participants 3, 4, and 5 all talked about personally being

people who tend to speak up when they see something is wrong, and even more so when

they can see that someone is being made uncomfortable. Participant 3 cited a sense of

authority that they have begun to feel since the reigniting of the Black Lives Matter

movement, stating, "I feel a sense of authority to speak my mind more than I used to. The

awareness and giving everyone a voice is important, bringing it to the forefront of

everyone's mind." Participant 4 said, "I'm somebody who will speak my mind when it

needs to be spoken," while Participant 5 echoed with, "I like to speak out when I can and

make people aware of certain things whether it's BLM or racial [awareness] in general,

or even not racial [awareness]. I speak up when I think something is wrong and I see

people are being made uncomfortable." All of these participants' comments reflect a

personal commitment to speaking out, emphasizing a need to share their voice and to enact their rights as U.S. citizens who have the freedom of speech.

Participants also spoke out from the perspective of being athletes who have a platform beyond that of the average U.S. citizen. Participant 2 said, "We've worked our whole lives to get to the biggest platform, when something like this happens, I'm going to use that big platform. It doesn't matter what people think; you have to stand up for what you believe in." This is a great example of the tension between who this athlete is as a person (e.g., personal layer) and who they are in the larger group (e.g., communal and relational layers), being their team or their university. This is the enacted layer of CTI. These athletes are American citizens with the freedom of speech to share their beliefs and their needs, regardless of their membership on their athletic teams and representation of the university. Participants are enacting their identity through speaking out as well as through taking on those leadership roles mentioned above. Along with this, the survey data supported the idea of athletes enacting their identity through speaking out, as all but one participant reported that they think athletes should continue to demonstrate on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

While athletes certainly felt compelled to speak out on a personal level given the platform of their athletic team, many participants noted that they had also seen support from their coaches speaking out. Participant 1 stated that their coach has been starting more conversations as well as fostering more opportunities to start those conversations, rather than the athletes having to create those opportunities themselves. It was also discussed that teams around the campus are sharing ideas and talking to each other in order to better disseminate their message to the general public. A specific example of this

came from one participant: "If I talk to someone from a different team, they're like 'Hey, this is what our team is doing...'" (Participant 4). Athletes on the campus are interacting and sharing ideas in order to bring them to their coaches and ultimately create more unity within the university, across the different athletic teams. It is important to remember that there is a larger movement of awareness sweeping across the country. Some of that is igniting things like "cancel culture." Nonetheless, it is making organizations and universities aware of its student and student-athlete needs and desires when it comes to discussions about race and racial injustice.

These statements show that Black university athletes are becoming more comfortable speaking out about their feelings and concerns related to the Black Lives Matter movement, and in some cases, even feeling compelled to do so, thanks to the facilitation of conversation by their coaches, organizations, and universities, and the platforms upon which speaking out is made possible. This theme of speaking out exemplifies these participants' identities as U.S. citizens who have the right, regardless of the organization or university they represent, to speak out and share their opinion.

Hope, empowerment, and change were words that were explicitly mentioned 12 different times throughout all five interviews. I will break those up into specific sections to better relay the interview data. All of these themes related to participants' describing their identities as Black Americans, especially in connecting BLM to other social movements that worked toward racial equality and justice.

Hope

Though Participant 5 was the only one to explicitly mention the word "hope" more than once, it is still important to include, as it will intertwine with the other themes

of empowerment and change. Participant 5 described the movement as a "beacon of hope." They stated, "It's a movement that looks to give a voice to Black America that has basically had their voices stripped from them for their entire presence throughout the history of this country. Most importantly, to me, it's a beacon of hope. It's a hope that one day we can all live a life where I'm not looked at differently for my skin or my name, anything that relates to me being Black." They also discussed being a "symbol of hope" to their community in terms of not needing to go the same direction in life as everyone else. This draws on the history of Black people. This participant is letting their community know that they can be whatever they want to be, and they do not have to fall victim to historical inequities.

Empowerment

Four of the five participants specifically used a form of the word "empower" (empowered, empowering, empowerment) at some point during their interview (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5). Through their participant in their sport or through the larger social movement of BLM, participants felt included and empowered as Black Americans. Participant 1 said, "It's giving me empowerment to be like no, this is done." They referred to the movement giving them the confidence to take a stand against racial injustice. Participant 3 stated, "It's easier to be empowered with support," after discussing the support they received from their siblings and parents. Participant 4 stated that they felt ugly growing up because they looked different than their peers. They stated that their place of support (Participant 4) was their sport, but now that the Black Lives Matter movement has taken off, they feel empowered and confident in themselves, saying, "Back in the day, I didn't like who I was. I thought I was ugly. I thought nobody

liked me. I was pushed to the side pretty much. I felt like I wasn't Black enough for the Black kids. I was too Black for the white kids. I just didn't really know who I was. I just stuck to myself. Volleyball was my real, true outlet. I loved going to practice" (Participant 4). For this participant, they navigated their identity as a Black American only positively once they became involved in their sport and realized that BLM is a movement that supports all Black Americans. This idea hearkens back to the "Black is Beautiful" campaign of the civil rights movement and connects BLM to other historical social movements that unified Black Americans and empowered participants of those movements to work toward social change. Finally, Participant 5 touched on a very important concept. They stated, "It gives them a sense of empowerment and a voice." They went on to discuss the way that BLM gives a voice to "people who have had theirs [their voices] suppressed for so long." This participant dug into the true empowerment that BLM allows for victims of racial injustice.

Change

The final way in which participants described how they communicate their identities as Black Americans was through noting the importance of social change. Participant 1 discussed that the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement is to make known the issues of social justice and racial inequality and warrant the need to make a change in society. This connects to conceptualizing social movements as communication – the importance of social movements in communicating change for the society at large.

This emphasis on change also hearkens back to the fight for racial equality in the civil rights movement. Participant 5's statement about "not being looked at differently for anything relating to being Black" resonates with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I

Have a Dream" speech. Dr. King stated his dream of a country where Blacks and Whites could be seen and treated equally in the United States. The civil rights movement is an important precursor to BLM as a social movement and solidifies one's identity as a Black American. Participant 5 echoes that history of the civil rights movement here. They continued to say, "I just wish America would change." Participant 4 echoed that leadership theme as mentioned above, stating, "I just want to change the world for the better." The hope and empowerment of BLM for these participants coexists with the goal of social change. Participants explicitly noted the importance of changing society so that all Black Americans are treated equally, unknowingly connecting or referencing different historical social movements such as the civil rights movement to the work toward social change that is at the center of BLM.

Social Support

A final theme that emerged was social support experienced by participants as they navigated their different identities as athletes, U.S. citizens, and Black Americans. Participant 3 commented on it being easier to feel empowered when their siblings, family, and friends are supporting them, stating, "I have a lot of brothers and sisters that are in support of [BLM]. It's easier to speak my mind and see change happen. It's easier to be empowered with [their] support." This also speaks to the relational as well as communal layers of identity. It is easier for these athletes to embrace their identities as athletes, U.S. citizens, and Black Americans when they have the support of those around them, whether that be their friends, family, teammates, or coaches. An important part of being able to communicate their identities to others is through this social support.

These statements really delve into what these athletes consider to be the heart of the movement of Black Lives Matter. Participants have hope for the future, feel empowered through BLM and others' supporting their identity as Black Americans, and see the movement as part of a longer historical struggle for social change for increasing equality for all Black Americans. This was reflected in the survey as well, when three participants responded with "definitely true" to statements about feeling empowered when athletes demonstrate on behalf of social justice. They see this movement as the beginning of a better life for those to come after them, and that is so different than how so many people see this movement or how the media depicts BLM as a social movement. It is clear that these athletes are motivated to speak and hopeful that their voices be heard and received without judgement but instead support from others.

Perspectives on Agenda-Setting and Framing

The final research question, RQ3, asked how participants reflect on their perspective of the mainstream media through the roles of agenda-setting and framing in the context of social justice demonstrations and Black Lives Matter. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) suggests that the media has an influence on the public by promoting stories to which viewers should pay the most attention rather than presenting each segment with equal attention paid to every issue. First-level agenda-setting denotes the prevalence of the issues (Weaver, 2007), while second-level agenda-setting is closer to Entman's (1993) definition of the media frame, which promotes certain aspects of a particular story as more important than the rest of the story. Themes that emerged to support the analysis of participants' experiences with mainstream media were a) distrust of the media; and b) exhaustion of media coverage

about BLM that focuses on different facets of it being connecting to negative behaviors such as looting or destroying property.

Distrust

As with any large social movement and looking at how it is communicated to the public, participants of that movement fear that the goal of the movement may be misrepresented to a negative effect in the media. There is also an implication that this happens because of negative events or occurrences associated with the movement. Multiple participants echoed this claim of distrusting the media, both in the interviews and the survey. I outline below how participants described the role of agenda-setting in distrusting the media, as well as how participants saw media frames at work in distrusting the media.

In analyzing the interviews, participants described the media as setting an agenda when reporting on BLM but also that other citizens are performing those actions in order to give the media that angle through which to frame BLM. Participant 2 stated, "People saw what we were doing and the progress we were making and started messing it up and making us look bad on television. Like 'Oh, you wanted a change and now you're looting a Target!' [store]." Participant 4 furthered this statement, saying, "The media just mixes everything up, so some things aren't even BLM involved, it's just crazy people [not advocates of BLM] trying to do whatever they want." Both of these statements emphasize that participants distrust the media, and specifically take issue with out the media sets an agenda by associating BLM with people's negative behaviors or affiliating BLM with those who are not actually representative of the movement.

Aside from first-level agenda-setting, framing (second-level agenda-setting) also emerged from analyzing the interview data. One participant spoke of wanting "our story to be real and authentic" (Participant 3). They concluded by saying that the media can skew or overemphasize negative aspects of BLM on a regular basis, and the participant does their best to be critical of the negative media frame of BLM protests, events, and media coverage. In the survey, less than half of participants answered positively about trusting the media on several different occasions, including when reporting about athletes, when reporting about athletes and BLM, and reporting in general. It is clear from the emerging themes that these Black university athletes feel that the media does set agendas and negatively frame their reports about BLM, which makes these participants distrust the media's coverage of BLM. This media coverage of BLM complicates these athletes' ability to communicate the multi-faceted components of their identities in response to public and media depictions of BLM.

Exhaustion

Finally, exhaustion also emerged as a theme in considering media agenda setting and framing of BLM. One participant really delved into being tired of the same things happening over and over, both the events and the media coverage of those events. They stated, "We're tired of everything that's going on and that like the racial inequality is just, it's gotten way out of hand. I really don't know where to start (Participant 1)." Participants seem exhausted both regarding the need for BLM due to continued deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police as well as feel exhausted by its coverage in the media. Participant 3 said, "Often times, things in the media can be skewed or over emphasized." The media sets the agenda for BLM through how it chooses to cover the

movement but primarily uses a negative frame, which participants described as exhausting.

Conclusion

Throughout the coding process, many themes emerged from the interview data. RQ1 included a discussion of the themes of Controversy and Uncertainty, as well as Danger and Fear when analyzing how Black university athletes experienced media depictions of BLM. RQ2 included a discussion of the themes of Leadership and Unity; Speaking Out; and Hope, Empowerment, Change, and Social Support. Participants described their identity as athletes through uniting their teams through their leadership, explained their identity as U.S. citizens through the power of freedom of speech in speaking out, and articulated their identity as Black Americans through discussing how hope, empowerment, and change can relate to other historical social movements that preceded BLM as a social movement. Ultimately, it is through the social support of their families, friends, teams, and other communities that they are able to enact and communicate the various sometimes competing parts of their identities as Black university athletes. Finally, RQ3 included a discussion of the themes of Distrust and Exhaustion when analyzing how participants described how they view media representations of BLM. I analyzed the use of both agenda-setting and framing of BLM in the media, based on participants' descriptions. Participants have experienced some tension in communicating about their identities since the reigniting of Black Lives Matter and the death of George Floyd in May 2020. Some of these tensions are invoked by the media through agenda-setting and framing while others are a product of the

nationalization of the movement and its landscape. In the next chapter, I discuss the

implications of these findings, as well as limitations and future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study described the issues of how the media compares White and Black athletes, stereotypes Black athletes, and often depicts a disapproval for Black athletes' right to protest. The purpose of the study was to understand how Black university athletes describe media depictions of athletes and Black Lives Matter, communicate about their identities based on those experiences, and describe agenda-setting and framing as methods used by the mainstream media when depicting BLM as a social movement.

In this chapter, I first discuss the findings of the analysis of the interviews and surveys through each RQ from Chapter 2. I also explore theoretical/methodological and applied implications for this research study. Specifically, I consider the theoretical implications for the different theories of identity and for agenda-setting and media framing, as well as possible methodological implications based on my use of mixed methods in this study. In terms of applied implications, I also posit what this study means for how Black university athletes communicate about their identities in society and offer implications for how the media depicts social movements such as BLM. Next, I articulate limitations of this research study. Finally, I conclude with areas for future research.

Discussion of Findings through the Research Questions

This section will be organized by each of the three research questions. The categories are as follows: *Media Depictions of Social Justice Statements* (RQ1), *Communication about Black University Athlete Identities* (RQ2), and *Perspectives on Agenda-Setting and Framing* (RQ3).

RQ 1: Media Depictions of Social Justice Statements

As presented in both Chapters 2 and 4, participants felt as though mainstream media depicted athletes and Black Lives Matter as a negative social movement, portraying Black athletes as more concerned with politics than their sport or job as a professional athlete. Ingraham (2018) discussed the LeBron James incident with the reporter silencing him and instructing him to do his job, as mentioned above. Participant 2's statement in Chapter 4 directly relates to that, as they said they feared losing their job due to verbally supporting BLM.

Participants described feeling uncertain about the ways in which they could support and communicate about Black Lives Matter with their peers. They talked about the controversy surrounding the movement. This relates to the disapproval for their right to protest as discussed in the Statement of the Problem in Chapter One. Just as Fourney and Brown (2018) talked about LeBron James being told to "shut up and dribble" by a reporter, these athletes feel that they are also perhaps not silenced, but certainly are more hesitant to express explicit public support for BLM in part because of this media discourse. Through their descriptions of controversy and uncertainty, we can see that participants simply want their voices to be heard. As some of the participants discussed, being an athlete provides a large platform. They want to use that platform when it is given to them to fight for their right to be who they are without putting themselves in danger.

Along with wanting to be heard, these athletes want to be able to speak out and be heard without putting themselves or their families, teams, or organizations at the risk of being physically, emotionally, or financially hurt. They discussed dangers and fears associated with support of the movement as presented in Chapter 4. Cancel culture is one

concept participants associated with fear. These athletes fear that they will lose their spot on the team for something as pivotal and important as fighting for equality in America. Aside from that, putting themselves in danger throughout being involved in protests.

RQ 2: Communication about Black University Athlete Identities

As discussed in Chapter 2, CTI, SIT, and CIT are the lenses through which I chose to examine Black university athletes' communication about their identities. Several themes emerged as outlined in Chapter 4, including the following: a) leadership and unity as pivotal to participants' identities as athletes; b) speaking out and starting conversations as essential to participants' identities as U.S. citizens; and c) hope, empowerment, change, and social support as important to participants' identities as Black Americans, connecting their experiences to previous historical social movements. Each of the four identity layers of CTI (Hecht et al., 2005) appeared in my analysis of the data, although with varying importance and frequency.

The personal layer of identity was scarcely mentioned but came through in other ways in the interview data. These athletes were initially afraid to promote their viewpoints outside of simply stating that they conditionally support the movement with the explanation that they have concerns with the dangers and fears that are connected to this controversial social movement. The one participant who really dug into the personal layer discussed their self-perception (Hecht et al., 2005) when they were young in terms of their racial identity and the lack of support they felt as a child. They felt ugly and stereotyped, like they did not fit in with the white kids or the Black kids because they were Black but raised with traditionally white values.

The personal layer of identity (Hecht et al., 2005) was also depicted throughout the themes of leadership and speaking out. Those concepts require one to take charge of who they are, and the participants mirrored that in the interview data. Multiple participants discussed starting conversations on their teams and within their organizations. Some also discussed the concept of doing so without regard for what other people may think.

The relational, enacted, and communal layers came through when the athletes discussed their families, peers and teammates, and their coaches and organizations. In terms of relational identity, all three parts of that layer were present. The first part determines a sense of identity based on others' perspectives (Hecht et al., 2005). This was evident when participants stated they were unsure of how to communicate about the movement or wanted to be certain they communicated about their identity in relation to BLM in the right way. They knew that their peers' perspectives may be (or were) different than theirs.

Knowing that peer perspectives may be different came from knowing that their peers likely had different experiences than they did. That is evidence for the relational layer of identity (Hecht et al., 2005) as it shows how participants communicated their identity based on others' perspectives.

Secondly, that identity becomes advanced through relationships (Hecht et al., 2005). This was apparent when participants spoke about learning from other organizations and sports teams at their university. In serving as leaders of their teams as athletes, participants described the importance of team unity and working with their

fellow athletes, students, and coaches to speak up about racial justice, especially since the death of George Floyd in May 2020.

Finally, the relationships themselves construct their own identities (Hecht et al., 2005). This step started to be achieved through the conversations with their teammates and coaches, which were begun by the participants. These Black university athletes became more confident speaking out and eventually communicated this identity in more public settings. Initially, many were scared to speak out at all. Over time, the participants became empowered by BLM and gained confidence. Aside from the confidence, the work of their universities and teams or organizations also bolstered their ability to speak out and start conversations.

The enacted layer (Hecht and Lu, 2014) showed up when the participants discussed speaking out, specifically. It intertwined with the controversy and dangers previously discussed, but it reflected the enacted layer because it showed how the participants took action and that became a part of how they enacted their identity as athletes, U.S. citizens, and Black Americans. It is important to note as well that as an athlete in America, everything an athlete does is a part of their identity, whether they want it to be or not. This is in part due to the large presence social media has in the world. Andersson et al. (2017) noted that youth "live in media" as discussed in Chapter 2. This makes it easier for anything shared on social media to be interpreted as part of that athlete's identity due to the frequency and rate at which it is shared, and the narratives people create on social media. It is simply the way in which fans and the media see athletes, even at the university level.

The final layer of CTI (Hecht et al., 2005) is the communal layer. This layer was most present in terms of the teams and organizations of which the participants were a part. Participants felt a group identity within their teams and organizations. In discussing the social support of their families, teams, and faith-based organizations, participants described the power of communal identity in helping them communicate their support for BLM from their vantage point of being Black university athletes at a university in the United States.

Social Identity Theory was also evident throughout interviews and survey data. This is similar to the communal layer of identity (Hecht et al., 2005) in that it requires one to find community within a group but also feel accepted and approved by that group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Also intertwined in this was Threshold Identity (Keating, 2012), the concept that people look for community and acceptance across multiple groups. The participants found community within their teams and organizations, and also within the Black Lives Matter movement. Participant 4 discussed this in detail in Chapter 4, stating that BLM empowered them to be who they are boldly. They found community within the group of people who support their right to a serene, equal life in America. In Chapter 2, the two sides of ethnocentrism were also discussed as part of this theory (Neuliep et al., 2005). The positive side, where ethnocentrism is a tool for a group under fire, is evident throughout the data. Black Lives Matter and the participants' sports teams are the in-groups, and the ethnocentric idea that their lives matter *right now* is important because that fuels the group to fight for social justice. Whether participants were speaking about BLM as a movement or their specific athletic team, they felt supported in part by their peers and coaches recognizing the importance of talking about racial

injustice at this moment in history. If it became a takeover of the country, or "only Black Lives Matter," that is when it would become the negative, opposite side of ethnocentrism (Neuliep et al., 2005). Participants described the positive form, stating that they just wanted equality and for all of the hate and violence to subside. Finally, multiple participants discussed taking community with them, or finding it wherever they land. This is important because it allows for that communal layer of CTI as well as the entirety of SIT to take place at all times.

Cultural Identity Theory itself did not necessarily appear explicitly. However, in Chapter 2, existentialism was discussed through the lens of CIT (Sartre, 1999). This specific perspective was evident throughout the interviews and surveys. The example given in Chapter 2 was Colin Kaepernick existentially creating his own identity by kneeling and continuing to embrace that throughout the aftermath (Boren, 2020). The participants reflected that same existential perspective through enacting their identity and speaking out, and then embracing it and standing firm with their viewpoints. This can be drawn back to some of the events discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, such as Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics (They created a new identity as impacted by the Black Lives Matter movement, although as noted earlier, some participants were careful about who they shared that with in terms of conditionally supporting the movement.

RQ 3: Perspectives on Agenda-Setting and Framing

The last of the three research questions focused on athletes' perspectives about BLM as covered in the media, specifically analyzing their experiences through the theories of agenda-setting and framing as functions of the media. According to the

interview data, the participants stated that it was pretty evident where the media had

employed these functions, and as a result, they distrusted the media.

In terms of first-level agenda-setting, picking which stories to tell (McCombs and

Shaw, 1972), the participants felt that the media picked the poorest versions of the BLM

story in order to create a certain narrative. Picking only the non-peaceful or destructive

BLM stories creates a negative narrative and leaves out the true motives and goals of the

movement, creating distrust in the media.

Regarding second-level agenda-setting (McCombs, 2005), participants discussed

how the media chose certain aspects of BLM to portray to the public, which was why

they distrusted the media. This is similar to Entman's (1999) media frame, which

involves picking certain attributes through which to display the story. One of the specific

examples of this is anchored in Black Lives Matter demonstrations. A lot of the

demonstrations were meant to be peaceful, but it only takes one disruptive, abhorrent

person or action for the media to label the demonstration as a riot or a violent protest. The

participants spoke about this when they said that some people saw the progress BLM was

making and they wanted to inhibit such progress and work toward social change. When

the media covered this news, it drew attention to those negative aspects that were not

necessarily affiliated with BLM as a movement. This has created distrust in the media

among the participants. The next section will discuss theoretical/methodological and

applied implications of the study.

Theoretical/Methodological and Applied Implications

The findings of this research study, while limited in scope due to the number of

interviews and surveys, do offer implications in both considering the theories and

methods used in the study as well as applied implications. In this section, I explore

implications for advancing our knowledge regarding theories of communication and

identity and agenda-setting and media framing, as well as posit implications for the

mixed-methods approach used in this study. Finally, I advance applied implications for

society, Black university athletes and how they communicate their identities, and media

coverage of BLM as a social movement.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are concrete. In terms of

Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 2005), all four layers of identity in

relation to that theory were present and very supported in the interview data. It is clear

that Black university athletes can communicate their identity through Black Lives Matter

on all four levels. Further, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) was also

explicitly present throughout the participants' responses. In connection with the relational

and communal layers of CTI, SIT emerged through the fears participants had about

acceptance or rejection based on their support of and choices to speak out upon behalf of

BLM. Next, McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda-Setting Theory as well as Entman's

(1999) Media Frame are boldly present theories in the data. What is important to note

here is that the participants suggested that the media use agenda-setting and framing,

without mentioning the theories. Not only do these theories hold true, but the participants

are aware of it and were able to call out the media in that regard. These theories can be

combined and intertwined to explain how young, Black athletes express their identity

through pressures of a nationwide social justice movement. This could be applied to any

subject population and related to any communication phenomenon.

Further from theoretical implications, there are also some methodological implications I offer. In terms of mixed methods, it is evident that they can be beneficial. The semi-structured interview with a funnel question format (Matsumoto et al., 2015) allowed me to find the deeper implications behind the participants' statements, while the survey, though not as useful as I had hoped, allowed me to focus on a different aspect of the social justice movements, therefore garnering different information from my participants. This could be effectively applied to any communication study. Also, Tracy's (2013) two-step iterative analysis made the coding process smooth and reliable with two coders categorizing and reviewing everything. This could be applied to and make any communication study reliable.

Applied Implications – Society, Black University Athletes, and the Media

Societal implications can be determined from this study. This study shows that experiences are different for everyone, and it is not black and white. Not everyone has to go through the same things that these Black university athletes have endured or encountered, and that means something for society. It means that those supporting the Black Lives Matter movement are trying to communicate their struggles, fears, and feelings to the rest of society.

Having completed this study, we can now better understand how Black university athletes communicate about their identities. We learned that they may hesitate to identify themselves any differently than a non-Black person due to social pushback or disapproval for their choices. We also learned that after that hesitation, they may decide to speak out and be leaders, even though it may cost them their friends and family, if not their job or position on a team. This is incredibly important because many people have never been in

a position where sharing their opinion would lose them a job, but they *have* been in a

position where sharing an opinion could cost them a friendship. This study is a good

example of just how common that is. As a society, we can now better understand what

these athletes and other Black people across the world, young and old, are enduring on a

daily basis.

Finally, the media can better portray BLM in the future. One way the media can

do this is to nix Agenda-Setting by writing and sharing a more level, balanced script

about BLM demonstrations, as well as giving equal attention and focus to all of the main

aspects of the story. Billings and Angelini (2007) state that the intersection of race and

sports is a victim of agenda-setting and media framing. Words and phrases that

emphasize one part of the story over other parts are a good example of where we start to

see some agenda-setting or framing taking place. Lastly, giving equal and similar

attention to BLM demonstrations as compared with other incidents, race-related or

otherwise, is a good place where the media can improve.

Limitations

Given these theoretical/methodological and applied implications, I now turn to the

limitations of this study. As discussed in Chapter 1, there were some limitations I was

afraid I would encounter. Some of those were in fact an issue during the execution of the

study. First, I only conducted five interviews. I aimed for ten, but ultimately did not reach

that goal. This happened in part due to the time constraints for completing this study.

Along with this time constraint, every single sport on the university campus was in

season during the Spring 2021 semester (the time period of the study) due to the

pandemic affecting the prior Fall 2020 season. The pandemic also affected my ability to

recruit in the way I would have recruited if it was a pre-pandemic time period. I even

opened recruitment up (after IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval) to the entire

athletic conference (nine universities total) in order to help acquire ten participants, and I

still ended up with only five participants, all from the original university for which I

obtained IRB approval.

Another issue was that it was actually much more difficult for the participants to

share their feelings in response to certain questions than I had anticipated. Since the

campus is a predominantly white institution (PWI), I thought maybe the participants

would be eager to share with me. Being a Mixed-Race woman who is similar in age to

the participants, I had thought and hoped that it would be easier for them in some ways,

they were open about sharing their experiences, but in other ways, they seemed ill-

prepared and unsure of what to say. The uncertainty and controversy mentioned

previously even came out in their interview responses. I could tell on several occasions

that they were worried about giving "the right answer" even though there was no right

answer, and anything they said would have been valid. Throughout the process, I noticed

that the participants I knew very little or did not know at all prior to the interviews were a

lot more comfortable being vulnerable and completely open. The participants with whom

I had a relationship with prior to the interview seemed a little more closed off or

uncertain about speaking about their experiences. This also could have been due to the

time constraints we faced and nearing the end of a busy, pandemic-influenced Spring

2021 semester and academic year. Either way, they pushed for more structure in the

interviews rather than seeming relaxed and open to sharing their experiences.

Because the participants felt the need for structure, that affected me as the interviewer. I started to ask fewer follow-up questions throughout each interview and felt pressed for time to more efficiently ask questions, rather than continue to ask probing questions to get more in-depth answers. Additionally, some of the questions needed to be more focused on the media. I did not ask any questions that further probed the participants' survey statements. In addition to this, some participants may have been thinking that social media is part of media, which I did not define as such. Finally, since the survey sample was so small, there was no validity in doing inferential statistics, and it was difficult to intertwine the survey and interview data together, since they focused on different parts of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

I have a few suggestions that would aid future research on this topic of Black university athletes' experiences with how they communicate about their identities. First, semi-structured interviews are good, but I recommend having some follow-up or probing questions at the ready. Having them planned out before the interviews take place will provide more direction for when a participant says something that leaves the interviewer stuck in the conversation. It is easier to stay on the path the interviewer wants to be on if those questions are planned out and written down in the interview protocol.

The second recommendation is to stick to a qualitative design. Mixed methods are good for a lot of reasons, but with such a small sample size, the survey was not as valuable as I expected it to be. It was incredibly hard to incorporate into the results section because it did not mesh with the interview data as well as I thought it would.

Next, I recommend recruiting from multiple locations immediately. I probably would have had more participants if I had heavily recruited multiple campuses to begin with. Finally, I recommend opening recruitment to White athletes as well as university coaches. There are coaches and athletes that I know of who would have provided different perspectives and really rounded out the study or made it a little more extensive, especially if they were Black coaches who had previously been athletes.

Conclusion

This study allowed me to examine the identity development of Black university athletes as affected by media representations of athletes demonstrating on behalf of Black Lives Matter. The small sample size does not negate the concrete evidence found in the study. Black university athlete identity development is affected by numerous outside sources including the media and its skewed representations. The participants want their message and story to be real and authentic. This is significant because most people want the same thing, and as a society, we have the power to allow their message to be heard.

Appendix:

Survey Questions

1. I am aware of Black Lives Matter demonstrations in sports.

2. I feel happy when a professional athlete demonstrates on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

3. I feel nervous when a professional athlete demonstrates on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

4. I feel empowered when a professional athlete demonstrates on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

5. I feel powerless when a professional athlete demonstrates on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

6. I understand why athletes are demonstrating on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

7. I trust mainstream media in general.

8. I trust mainstream media when reporting on racial issues.

9. I trust mainstream media when reporting on professional athletes.

10. I trust mainstream media when reporting on racial issues in professional sports.

11. I think racial justice has been achieved in America.

12. I think athletes should continue to demonstrate for Black Lives Matter.

Scale options:

1. Definitely true

2. Mostly true

3. Somewhat true

4. Neither true nor false

5. Somewhat false

6. Mostly false

7. Definitely False

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little bit about when you first heard about Black Lives Matter. How did that make you feel?

2. How, if at all, do you identify with the Black Lives Matter movement? Or if you don't identify with the movement, why not?

3. Which demonstration or specific protest associated with Black Lives Matter do you most identify with?

4. How, if at all, has Black Lives Matter impacted your sport as a whole?

5. How, if at all, has Black Lives Matter impacted your organization?

6. How, if at all, do you view yourself as having a role or a part in the fight for social justice in the U.S.?

7. How, if at all, has Black Lives Matter affected your identity? [Think about yourself not only as a Black American, but also as an athlete, as a citizen in the U.S., as a representative of SDSU as an organization, etc.]

8. How, if at all, has your self-perception of your identity changed between 2013 (the start of Black Lives Matter) and the present day?

9. What, if any, do you feel are your duties or responsibilities in this movement?

10. What, if anything, can your organization do better, in terms of racial justice or social justice?

11. How do you want to represent your community, and how do you define that community or communities, in the future?

12. How do you define Black Lives Matter?

Codebook

Code	Definition	Example
Controversy	Likely to give rise to public disagreement	"I'm not sure how people will feel. Some people don't support this."
Conditional Support	Supporting based on premises or aspects of a situation	"I'll support it at home but not in public."
Hope and Empowerment	Wanting progress toward social justice and racial equality	"I wish there would be a change moving forward."
Distrust	A lack of trust	"Things are getting

		twisted; we are not being accurately represented"
Danger and Fear	A fear of being hurt or put in a life-threatening situation	"I don't want to be on the front lines. It's dangerous out there."
Leadership	Wanting to set an example	"I want my community to learn from me."
Speaking Out	Starting a conversation	"I'm more likely to say something."
Unity	A sense of togetherness	"We're all on the same page"
Exhaustion	Defeated from relentless events	"The same things keep happening."

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