

HE'S MY CHILD: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO BLACK MOTHERS EXPERIENCES
THROUGHOUT THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL RECRUITMENT PROCESS

by

ASHLEY RAE MARIE BAKER

(Under the Direction of Billy Hawkins)

ABSTRACT

Currently, there is a dearth of knowledge of Black mothers' roles in key sport and education decisions. While popular media outlets have been the primary platform in which society has been informed about the role of Black mothers throughout the athletic recruitment process; the seemingly absent perspective of Black mothers is further evidence that recruiting stories are a distorted and incomplete representation of Black mothers' experiences. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the personal narratives of Black mothers who have navigated the college football recruitment process with their sons. Using Black Feminist Thought as the guiding framework this study expands upon current literature on the intercollegiate athletic recruitment process by giving attention to the narratives of Black mothers.

Six Black mothers shared stories of their experiences throughout their son's football recruitment process. Each of their sons was recruited to and accepted a scholarship to a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I football program in the United States. Through an exploration of common themes across the data the following three themes emerged: *This is My Child: Mothering Responsibilities*, *This was all about relationships: Establishing and Developing Relationships*, and *This was overwhelming: The Business of Recruiting*. Overall,

three conclusions were drawn from this study: 1) Black mothers are highly involved, active participants in their son's college football recruitment process, with a felt obligation to support their sons; 2) Black mothers develop and maintain relationships that are instrumental in helping them obtain knowledge to successfully navigate the recruitment process; and 3) Black mothers view the college football recruitment process as a business, which seeks to recruit the kid who will best serve the needs of the football team as quickly as possible.

INDEX WORDS: Black mothers, motherhood, sports mom, college football, intercollegiate athletics, football recruiting, college recruitment, narrative inquiry

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Raymond Larue and Denise Elaine Baker, for your unconditional love and never ending support I dedicate this dissertation to you. As I write this you are selflessly giving of yourselves to make this moment possible. I thank you for always believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself. Dad, you pushed me to achieve what I felt was the impossible. You have always been my necessary voice of reason. When I gave you a thousand reasons for why it could not be done your response remained the same, “yes it can, go do it.” Mom, your endless prayers over my life gave me the strength and courage to travel this journey. This would not be possible without every meal you cooked, every call to check on me, and every board game you played with RB. For the both of you I am forever grateful. I will never be able to repay you for the sacrifices you have made for me to achieve every one of my goals. I aspire to love and give of myself to my own child in the ways that you have for me.

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“...these are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” (Revelation 3:7,8) (NIV)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hello, Miss Baker. My son and I met with you last week when we came to campus for his recruiting visit. I think he really wants to come there to play basketball. Your campus was the first campus I visited with him, but he has been to a lot of others without me. Everyone we met was very nice. There were so many meetings, and I tried to take notes, but it was all overwhelming. This whole recruiting process has been! When you gave us the packet of academic information, your card was in there, and you said to contact you if we had any additional questions. I have questions. A LOT of questions! Is there a time when I can call to talk to you? Thank you.

For many elite high school athletes, the intercollegiate athletic recruitment process plays an important role in the college decision-making process. It is often a complex and time consuming process requiring athletes, coaches, and parents to be involved all year. Harper, Williams, & Blackman (2013) noted college coaches “scout talent, establish collaborative partnerships with high school coaches, spend time cultivating one-on-one relationships with recruits, visit homes to talk with parents and families, host special visit days for student-athletes, whom they wish to recruit, and search far and wide for the most talented prospects” (p. 17). Scholars suggest that throughout this process parents may serve as “unofficial agents” for their children (Magnusen, Mondello, Kim, & Ferris, 2011), and they can effectively be involved in helping their children navigate a potentially daunting process of selecting a college and

enduring the recruitment process. Despite the impact of the recruitment process on high school athletes and their families, the perspectives of parents called for by scholars has been vastly ignored (Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Paule & Flett, 2011; Paule, 2011).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) two largest revenue-generating sports are football and men's basketball, and they receive the most media attention, attract the most fans, and yield the most revenue from merchandise sales (Harper, 2006). In the U.S., National Signing Day (NSD) has become a widely followed, nationally televised event, significantly increasing the attention given to the symbolic end of the recruiting process. Traditionally, the first Wednesday of February is National Signing Day, the first day a high school senior can sign a National Letter of Intent (NLI) for college football with a NCAA member. Coverage on major sports networks like ESPN begins as early as 8:00 a.m. and is broadcast from numerous college campuses, high schools, and student-athletes' homes across the United States. This widely covered event draws attention to the hundreds of high school football players accepting college scholarships, many of which are young Black men.

An analysis of representation trends and six-year graduation rates in revenue-generating sports teams at 76 colleges and universities that comprise six major sports conferences (e.g., the ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, and SEC) revealed an overrepresentation of Black male student-athletes¹ on the football and basketball teams (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). In football, Black males represented 57.1% of the teams. Problems as prevalent as the overrepresentation of Black men on revenue-

¹ The author intentionally will use the term "Black" instead of "African American" to describe the racial group rather the ethnic group. The term "African American" will only be used when cited from another reference.

generating NCAA Division I sports teams (Harper, 2006), the underrepresentation of Black men in the undergraduate student population at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), combined with the scholarly argument that Black families push their children to overinvest in sports (Edwards, 1988) call for attention to be directed toward the recruitment process, instrumental machinery for attracting these same Black male athletes and their families to college campuses throughout the United States.

The significance of Black families and specifically Black mothers' roles in the lives of their athlete sons is seen through the many Black male athletes who have publicly recognized their own mothers (i.e. Oklahoma City Thunder basketball player Kevin Durant's 2014 most valuable player [MVP] speech). As part of Maria Shriver's #DoingItAll series, which raises awareness about the struggles of single mothers, Cleveland Cavaliers basketball player LeBron James wrote an essay about what his mother means to him. In the opening of his essay, James stated, "You think LeBron James is a champion? Gloria James is a champion, too. She's my champion." National Football League (NFL) Minnesota Vikings quarterback Teddy Bridgewater credits his mother Rose Murphy with inspiring him to never give up, just as she never gave up in her fight against breast cancer. In 2016, the NFL community celebrated Mother's Day via a social media campaign highlighting athletes like former Pittsburgh Steeler Ike Turner's tweet that displayed a picture of his mother with the caption "Happy Mothers Day to my mom...who taught me how not to judge and always treat a WOMAN with respect...#Foundation" (Around the NFL, 2016, p.1). Wanda Pratt, whom Durant declared was "The real MVP," Gloria James, "A Champion," Rose Murphy, and Cora Taylor are just a few examples of the many Black mothers who have been influential in their sons' sports experience. These examples highlight the

importance of widening the representation of Black mothers in sports and expanding the growing literature regarding college football recruiting.

To date, coaches and student-athletes' roles and experiences have been the primary focus of much of the recruiting literature (Bukowski, 1995; Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Pauline et al., 2004; Schneider & Messenger, 2012). Simultaneously, the mass media depiction of the recruitment process has appeared in many popular sports films and documentaries over the last 30 years (see *Blue Chips*, 1994; *He Got Game*, 1998; *Hoosiers*, 1986; *The Program*, 1993; *Year of the Bull*, 2003). The most recent trend in recruiting research has been a critical examination of what are perceived as the negative aspects of the recruitment process, such as early commitment (Bricker & Hanson, 2013; Paule & Flett, 2011) and racial bias (Paule, 2011). All still fail to give attention to the athlete's mother and the roles mothers fill throughout the recruiting process.

A limited number of news stories have surfaced, reporting instances where mothers have been involved in the college recruitment process. While there is a small segment of the media giving attention to these stories, the most common headlines magnify the negative influence of Black mothers in college football recruiting. Examples of such headlines are: "*In college football recruiting, mother knows best... right?*", "*Recruit signs with Florida State after mom said no to USC*" and "*Another mom ruins a recruit's plans.*" These stories provide a limited portrayal of the role that mothers play in the recruitment process of their sons. While this research is not an attempt to ignore the negative influence mothers have had on their sons' recruiting experiences, more research is needed to explore how mothers themselves describe their involvement in this process. The recruitment process encompasses a limited amount of time over the course of a

young man's career in sports and it must be acknowledged that the recruitment process is just one of many moments throughout a sports career. It is understood that often times many years of sport participation lead up to the recruitment process and those years of involvement by mothers are influential in shaping the roles they take on during their son's college recruitment process. Moreover, the seemingly absent perspective of Black mothers' experiences in recruiting and sport socialization processes reflects the need for the current research study.

Statement of the Problem

This research seeks to address pervasive problems regarding Black women in academic literature and more specifically, their lack of representation as mothers within the sports literature. The first area of concern is that research on women has often ignored women of color (Collins, 2000); when discussed, Black women are rarely recognized as a group separate from Black men, and when women are talked about, the focus is often on White women (hooks, 1981). The same can be seen within the sports literature, in that our current understanding concerning parents most often does not distinguish the roles of mothers independent of the roles of fathers and has been generated from relatively homogenous subject populations, consisting primarily of Caucasian, upper-middle-class, and suburban families (Coakley, 2006; Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Palomo-Nieto, M., Ruiz-Pérez, L., Sánchez-Sánchez, M., & García-Coll, V., 2011).

Black mothers' roles in their sons' youth sport experience, specifically the college recruitment process, requires attention in research. Not only are Black males overrepresented in the two largest revenue-producing sports for the NCAA, football and men's basketball, but also, both sports have been under increased scrutiny over ethics surrounding recruiting practices (Byers, 1995; Paule, 2008; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Dailing (2002) explained the importance

of the recruitment process for big-time college sport programs when he said: “Recruiting is the lifeline to an athletic program. Without gifted athletes, even the most talented strategist or motivator will be rendered ineffective as a coach” (p. 24). Thus, it is important to better understand the role Black mothers play in their recruitment and college decision-making processes.

Furthermore, Harding (1987) recognized that studying women was not completely absent from sociology, but that the study of women has had a marginal place within the discipline, based on inadequate perceptions of women’s lives. This research seeks to do more than fill the gaps left by traditional approaches to gender; it aspires to “create a reconstruction of meanings which both articulates the individual experience and promotes women’s collective interests” (Cotterill, 1992, p. 594). The unique experiences of Black women and the dearth of literature concerning them underscore the importance of this research. This study tightens the focus on Black mothers’ experiences in sport socialization processes, particularly their level of involvement in the recruitment process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process of their sons. This study addresses the gap in the literature regarding understanding the roles and perceptions of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process. Specifically, this study will examine Black mothers’ knowledge of and involvement in the college recruitment process. In addition, the study will focus on understanding the various roles Black mothers filled throughout the college recruitment process of their sons.

Research Questions

In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be used:

1. What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process?
2. How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?
3. How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?
4. What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

Significance of the Study

There are a limited number of ways in which the intricacies of Black motherhood can be captured. One way they can be explored is through eliciting the narratives of Black mothers. We lead 'storied lives,' and narrative is a basic human way of making sense of the world (Riessman, 1993). Narratives have the ability to give voice to a community and culture, yet voices from Black mothers and stories of their experiences are largely absent from the body of academic literature concerning the college recruitment process. Research has only taken an interest in the recruitment process from the perspective of coaches, fathers, and athletes (Bouldin, Stahura, & Greenwood, 2004; Claerbaut, 2003; Dohrmann, 2012; Feldman, 2007; Paule, 2011; Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000; Wolff & Keteyian, 1991).

Taking into consideration the most easily accessible stories documenting the mother's role in the recruitment process has only highlighted the negative involvement of the mothers of Black male football players; it forces the question, what additional representations of Black

mothers in the recruitment process are missing? Offering a co-constructed counter narrative, capturing those experiences of Black mothers adds value and alternate representations within the academic literature on Black sports moms.

With a better understanding of the ways in which Black mothers experience the recruitment process, we not only gain a new perspective on the recruitment process, but we also gain insight into ways coaches and administrations can be equipped to help prepare all mothers to navigate the recruitment process with their sons.

Definition of Terms

Black

This term designates a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups in Africa (except those of Hispanic origin). This classification includes those who identify as Black or African American.

Contact period

During this time, a college coach may have in-person contact with prospective student-athletes and/or their parents on or off the college's campus. The coach may also watch prospective student-athletes play or visit their high school. Prospective student-athletes and their parents may visit a college campus, and the coach may write and telephone during this period (NCAA, 2016a).

Dead period

A college coach may not have any in-person contact with prospective student-athletes or their parents on or off campus at any time during a dead period. The coach may write and telephone prospective student-athletes and parents during this time (NCAA, 2016a).

Division I Institution

NCAA member institutions sponsor at least 14 sports (at least seven men and seven for women, or six for men and eight for women), compete in the minimum number of contests against Division I opponents (varied by sport), and offer a minimum amount of financial aid, but may not exceed established maximums. Division I members offer athletic scholarships. Public institutions comprise 66 percent of Division I membership, and private institutions comprise 34 percent of Division I membership (NCAA, 2016b).

Division II Institution

NCAA member institutions sponsor intermediate-level division of competition that offers an alternative to both the highly competitive level of intercollegiate athletics offered in Division I and the non-scholarship level offered at Division III. Division II schools must offer at least 10 sports with a minimum of four men's and four women's sports at coeducational institutions. Scheduling is highly based on regionalization. These schools range in size from less than 2,500 to over 15,000, with the average enrollment approximately 4,500. There are currently 302 Division II members (281 active and 21 advancing through the membership process). Division II offers athletic grant-in-aids; however, very few student-athletes receive full athletic grant-in-aids. Small public universities comprise 52% of Division II membership, and small private institutions comprise of 48% of Division II membership (NCAA, 2016b).

Division III Institution

NCAA member institutions sponsor a division of competition, which offers an alternative to both the highly competitive level of intercollegiate athletics offered in Division I and the intermediate level of competition offered at Division II. Division III institutions do not offer

athletic grant-in-aids to student athletes. Division III members offer an average of 8.1 men's sports and 8.9 women's sports (NCAA, 2016b).

Evaluation period

During this time, a college coach may watch prospective student-athletes play or visit their high schools, but cannot have any in-person conversations with them or their parents off campus. Prospective student-athletes and their parents can visit college campuses during this period. A coach may write and telephone prospective student-athletes or their parents during this time (NCAA, 2016a).

Full Grant-in-Aid.

A full grant-in-aid is financial aid that consists of tuition and fees, room and board, books, and other expenses related to attendance at the institution up to the cost of attendance (NCAA, 2015).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

This association is a national governing body comprised of nearly 1,200 institutions created for preserving competitive balance, academic integrity, and amateurism for all its institutions and student-athletes (NCAA, 2015).

National Letter of Intent

The National Letter of Intent is the official document administered by the Collegiate Commissioners Association, used by subscribing member institutions to establish the commitment of a prospective student-athlete to attend a particular institution (NCAA, 2015).

Official visit

Any visit to a college campus by prospective student-athletes and their parents paid for by the college is considered official. The college may pay all or some of the following expenses:

prospective student-athletes' transportation to and from the college, room, and meals (three per day) while prospective student-athletes visit the college, and reasonable entertainment expenses, including three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest (NCAA, 2016a).

Quiet period

During this time, a college coach may not have any in-person contact with prospective student-athletes or their parents off the college campus. The coach may not watch prospective student-athletes play or visit their high school during this period. Prospective student-athletes and their parents may visit a college campus during this time. A coach may write or telephone prospective student-athletes or their parents during this time (NCAA, 2016a).

Prospective student-athlete

A person becomes a "prospective student-athlete" when he or she starts ninth-grade classes or before the ninth-grade year, when a college, their relatives, or their friends provide any financial assistance or other benefits that the college does not provide to students generally (NCAA, 2015).

Recruiting

Recruiting is any solicitation of a prospective student-athlete or prospective student-athlete's relatives (or legal guardians) by an institutional staff member or by a representative of the institution's athletics interests for the purpose of securing the prospective student-athlete's enrollment and ultimate participation in the institution's intercollegiate athletics program (NCAA, 2015).

Recruitment process

The process refers to the time when athletes become prospective student-athletes until they sign a National Letter of Intent.

Student-Athlete

This term refers to a student who participates on a NCAA sponsored varsity intercollegiate athletic team, except on a football and/or men's basketball team at a Division I institution (NCAA, 2015).

Unofficial visit

Any visit by a prospective student-athlete and their parents to a college campus paid for by a prospective student-athlete or their parents is considered an unofficial visit. The only expense a prospective student-athlete may receive from the college is three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest. Prospective student-athletes may make as many unofficial visits as they like at any time. The only time a prospective student-athlete cannot talk with a coach during an unofficial visit is during a dead period (NCAA, 2016a).

Limitations

One limitation associated with this study is that the sample consisted of a limited number of Black mothers with sons who accepted an athletic scholarship at a college or university. Therefore, findings from this study cannot be generalized to all Black mothers with sons who have competed in intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, there are Black mothers whose sons competed in intercollegiate athletics, but did not receive athletic grant-in-aid, who are not represented and may reflect a different perspective on the recruitment process--one that did not result in a scholarship.

The time frame of the college recruitment process is also limiting within this study. Many college athletes have participated in sports for many years, prior to enrolling in college, and exploring the role of Black mothers throughout a four to five year process does not account for their involvement in the other years of their son's sport participation. This study is also limited

by gender, focusing exclusively on the recruitment process of male athletes. Snowball sampling may potentially lead to a sample of respondents with similar experiences. The findings of this study cannot provide a comprehensive narrative of the experiences of Black mothers throughout the recruitment process, but it will contribute an additional piece of the life stories of Black mothers in sport.

The two guiding frameworks of the study also pose potential limitations to the research. The use of Black feminist thought as a guiding framework prioritizes the voice of the participants, therefore leaving limited space to insert other perspectives that may have been included in the participant's experiences or phenomenon of study. Within narrative inquiry the question of "whose voice is dominant" is often discussed. Within this study the use of Black feminist thought directs us to the participant's story as the dominant one. With that said, a limitation of this inquiry within the present study is, it requires the researcher to capture the range and richness of each mother's experiences and confine it to one story.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one serves as an overview of intercollegiate athletic recruitment and the limited perspectives of those who have navigated the recruitment process in sports literature. This chapter also highlighted the role that Black mothers have played in the lives of their Black male athlete sons. While there is evidence of the influence that Black mothers have on their sons, little is known of their role in key sport and education decisions. Previous literature primarily focuses on the coaches, fathers, and athlete perspectives throughout the recruitment process; however, the study of the role of Black mothers in this process has been widely ignored. This current study seeks to expand the current literature surrounding the intercollegiate athletic recruitment process by providing light and voice to Black maternal experiences throughout this process.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process of their sons. In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process?
2. How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?
3. How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?
4. What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

In this chapter, to provide context for this study, the following areas are reviewed: youth sports in the United States, mothers in youth sports, intercollegiate athletic recruiting, Black families in The United States, mothering, and Blacks in sports literature. These areas of scholarship provide a foundational understanding of youth sports, Black mothers, and the football recruitment process

Youth Sports

In the United States (U.S.), an estimated 21 million children between the ages of six and 17 are playing team sports. During the 2012-2013 school year, more than 7.7 million U.S. teens competed in high school sports (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2014).

While youth sports is an arena that can provide healthy, safe, and character-building recreation for children, researchers have shown that sports participation can be both positive and negative (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Hyman, 2009). The benefits of youth sports participation include healthy lifestyles, academic achievement, social relationships, and leadership development (Coakley, 2009; Engh, 2002); however, alternative perspectives highlight detrimental outcomes such as burnout, coach abuse, eating disorders, and negative parental involvement (Gould, 2010; Taliaferro, Rienzo, & Donovan, 2010).

As youth sports have grown, parents and coaches have continued to be highly involved in the organization and evaluation of youth sport programs. Some parents encourage their children to play sports at ages as young as 4 years old, spend large sums of money to position their children for future sports success, and even pressure coaches to provide significant playing time (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Hyman, 2009). On the other hand, there are parents who organize community leagues, volunteer to coach, run the concession stands, and lead the charge in making sports safer for their children (Coakley, 2009). Parents have come to view sports participation, especially competitive sports, as a key component of their children's overall socialization (Coakley, 2006).

The role of parents in their children's sports participation can vary. First and foremost, parents are often the primary socializing agents getting children involved in sports (Fredericks & Eccles, 2004). A growing body of literature has focused on the socialization activities of parents and the impact they have on children's initial sport involvement and future sports activity choices (Brustad, 1996; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Greendorfer, S., Lewko, J., Rosengren, K., 1996; Leonard, 1998; Snyder & Purdy, 1982). Parents serve the role of sport socializing agents while providing the context in which children learn about sports (e.g., community centers, YMCA,

club sports) (Brustad, 1996; Leonard, 1998; Snyder & Purdy, 1982). Parents are essential to sport socialization of their children through exposure, financial support, and encouragement (Fredericks & Eccles, 2004; Greendorfer et al., 1996).

Another implication in sports literature is that mothers are most often not the main characters in youth sports. They spend time in the background filling gender specific roles with limited opportunities to take on leadership capacities. As children enter middle school and high school, the role mothers play in their sporting experiences may be less related to sport activity and more related to providing psychological and emotional support to their children's pursuit of sport excellence (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; Palomo, 2009).

Mothers in Youth Sports

While parents play a critical role in the youth sports experiences of their children (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Coakley, 2009; Fredericks & Eccles, 2004; Messner, 2009), research has shown that mothers play very specific background roles (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; Coakley, 2006; de Lench, 2006; Palomo, 2009). Researchers acknowledge that few studies distinguish the roles of mothers independently from those of fathers, and when the distinction is made, it is usually to highlight the role played by the father (Coakley, 2006; Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Palomo-Nieto, Ruiz-Pérez, Sánchez-Sánchez, & García-Coll, 2011); when mothers are studied, Black mothers are not studied apart from White mothers.

One example of a study that discussed the differences between the roles of mothers and fathers in youth sport participation is Coakley's (2006), which highlighted the implications of father's involvement in youth sports and the cultural changes this involvement has for families. Coakley identified childcare, schools, and churches as contexts that have been feminized by women and have left many fathers feeling left out, but contended this is not so with youth sports.

He insisted youth sports is “a context that has been organized and controlled by men in ways that reaffirm traditional gender ideology at the same time that they meet expectations for father involvement” (p. 127). Furthermore, in another study by Chafetz and Kotarba (1995), findings revealed that the upper-middle class little league mothers in their study also reproduced gender ideologies as they took on gender specific labor roles such as preparing snacks, cleaning uniforms, and chauffeuring their children to and from practices and games. Performing these roles facilitated a more enjoyable experience for their husbands and sons. Subsequent studies illustrated how mothers also sacrificed their own leisure or sports activity in order to make their children’s sports participation enjoyable and to enable their husbands to have their corresponding leisure time, too (Harrington, 2006).

A popular text that discusses the role of mothers in youth sport is Brooke de Lench’s (2006) work, *Home Team Advantage: The Critical Role of Mothers in Youth Sports*. This text aimed to provide mothers with practical steps to use within their own families, where they have the greatest influence to provide a better, safer and more balanced youth sports experience for everyone. According to de Lench (2006), sport mothers’ roles most often limit them to sitting in the stands and behind the concessions counter, selling snacks and raffle tickets. She echoed Coakley (2006) in the belief that parents are under pressure to do everything possible to help their children get ahead of their peers, and mothers in particular feel pressure to pack more and more activities into the lives of their children.

Thompson’s (1999) interviews with 46 women explored how women facilitate and service sports for the participants, particularly their husbands and children. This study detailed how the jobs (e.g., domestic labor and childcare) done by women give others the space to participate in sports. Sixteen of the mothers had children who participated on the junior State

Squad tennis team in Australia. The greatest demand of the mothers was providing transportation to get their children to and from tennis practice. Only three of the mothers reported sharing the responsibility with their husbands; all of the other mothers were the sole providers of transportation. The impact of being the only ones handling the driving greatly influenced the mothers' daily activities, and many of their other responsibilities revolved around their transportation responsibilities (Thompson, 1999). The study concluded that the space provided for the families as a result of the work done by mothers directly contributed to the individual careers and the service of sport.

Moreover, Messner's (2009) multiyear study explored gender roles in South Pasadena, California's youth little league baseball. The study provided an explanation of how men and women move into different leadership roles. Messner (2009) argued that youth sport has created a "gender comfort zone" that informally funnels men to leadership roles and women to roles of "team mom." When in these positions, women utilize their knowledge of caring for children, which Messner labels "kid knowledge." However, he explains that as the participant's age increases, "kid knowledge" is less valued by leaders in sport; therefore, mothers find themselves looking for other ways to be involved. Although women have choices concerning which roles to adopt, their choices are constrained by a gender-sorting system. Since most women have less sport experience and are not recruited into assistant coaching positions where they could develop skills and confidence, female volunteers are less likely than men to get the chance to coach older groups (Messner, 2009). Contrary to Messner (2009), Davison et al. (2003) and Fredericks and Eccles (2005) found the mothers in their research were not only in leadership positions, but also emphasized their importance as role models to the girls and boys.

Intercollegiate Athletic Recruiting

Since the introduction of competitive college athletics in the mid-19th century, intercollegiate athletics in the United States (U.S.) has become increasingly competitive, and the coaches that represent these institutions are under intense pressure to attract the most talented athletes to their teams. At the same time, high school athletes face a major life decision when they choose a college to attend to further their education and athletic careers. Recruiting plays an important role in each of the aforementioned processes and has become more complex as it requires year round participation by related parties (e.g., college coaches, athletes, parents). Each year, colleges and universities invest a significant amount of department resources into recruiting (Funk, 1991). The recruiting process facilitates the attraction of highly talented athletes, ensuring their commitment to attend the institution and once enrolled, excel athletically to enhance the success and reputation of the school and its athletic program (Schneider & Messenger, 2012). With so few roster spots available for high school athletes striving to compete in college athletics, the recruitment process is a way for coaches and athletes to find the best fit for their respective needs.

Similar to gaps in the literature on the role of mothers in youth sport, the depiction of the mother's role in the recruiting process fails to differentiate between the maternal and paternal roles. The available literature on the college recruitment process primarily focuses on coaches and student-athletes' roles and experiences. Researchers have examined the factors that influence an athlete's choice of which college or university to attend: (a) athletics (Bouldin, Stahura, & Greenwood, 2004; Pauline et al., 2004); (b) academics (Bukowski, 1995; Mathes & Gurney, 1985); (c) amount of financial aid (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990); and (d) facilities (Schneider & Messenger, 2012). Athletes' personal recruiting experiences throughout high school have also

been documented (Claerbaut, 2003; Dohrmann, 2012; Feldman, 2007; Wetzel & Yaeger, 2000; Wolff & Keteyian, 1991), while more recent research has critically examined what are believed to be the negative aspects of the recruiting process, such as early commitment (Bricker & Hanson, 2013; Paule & Flett, 2011) or racial bias (Paule, 2011). Many popular sports films and documentaries over the last 30 years have depicted various phases of the recruitment process (see *Blue Chips*, 1994; *He Got Game*, 1998; *Hoosiers*, 1986; *The Program*, 1993; *Year of the Bull*, 2003). There is a paucity of literature that focuses on the parental role in the intercollegiate athletics recruiting process, and as a result, scholars suggest it would be beneficial to explore the perspectives of athletes and their families (Paule & Flett, 2011; Paule, 2011).

History of Recruiting

As Zimbalist (1999) noted, competitive college sports were not introduced to U.S. post-secondary institutions until the nineteenth century. In the early 1800's, intramural athletics programs on college campuses were the first signs of the modern day intercollegiate athletics; the first competition was held between Harvard and Yale's crew team. During these early stages of college athletics, the recruitment of athletes was nonexistent (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Athletic teams were organized, coached, and composed of and by the faculty and student body. However, over the years as universities sought to be more competitive, coaches began to "shop" for athletes who could help strengthen their programs on and off campus. The development of this program, along with the visibility of the institution's athletic success, was critical to promoting institutional pride and recruiting prospective athletes (Chressanthi & Grimes, 1993). The increased focus on winning in competition and the recruitment of athletes were key aspects of the change taking place in college athletics during the late 1800's (Zimbalist, 1999). Athletic departments desired to be the best, and to accomplish this goal meant having the most talented

players--and winning. As a way to attract the best players, universities used money generated through booster clubs or from alumni to offer scholarships and constructed athletic facilities to host competitions. In order to pay for the stadiums and arenas, universities used money from ticket sales (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2006). Attendance depended upon the success of the team, and success on the playing field hinged upon the talent playing.

Simultaneously, competitive scholarship packages were being offered with little to no oversight from university administrators. Prospective athletes were offered housing, meals, and employment. Because of the violation of the amateur code established by the National Collegiate Association (NCAA) 1906 bylaws, opposition developed (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). According to the NCAA bylaws, recruiting students for athletic purposes is a violation. In the mid 1930's, the NCAA reported major concern regarding the recruitment and subsidization of athletes (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). University administrators had long opposed the recruiting of students based on their athletic talent because they feared it took precedence over their academic abilities. By 1952, awarding financial aid for educational purposes as part of the recruiting process was legalized as an acceptable practice (Hawkins, Baker, & Boteva, 2015); during that same time, the NCAA and universities were attempting to establish and enforce amateurism policies. Universities could offer financial aid packages to students in exchange for their participation on the university's athletic teams, and students from any state could be awarded financial aid. This expanded opportunities to recruit athletes on a national scale, led to more advanced athletic recruiting, and increased competition between coaches to recruit elite talent to their programs.

Modern Day Recruiting

The landscape of recruiting has significantly changed since its inception. Athletic conferences like the Big 10 are spending billions of dollars recruiting student athletes (Benson,

2002). A 2013 ESPN report listed the reported recruiting budgets of 99 NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision, which ranged from a low of \$166,312 to a high of \$2,796,184, spent by Louisiana-Monroe and Auburn University, respectively (ESPN, 2013). Recruiting budgets are not the only area of change for college programs. The recruiting timeline, rules and regulations, technology, media coverage, and travel are others areas that have also transformed the recruiting process. Prior to joining a university's athletic team, there are common experiences for many athletes through the recruiting process. This includes the use of technology for exposure and communication, campus visits, athletic scholarship offers, and for sports like Division I, football media coverage of athletes' decisions regarding where they will attend college (Fondren, 2010; Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004; Paule, 2008).

The recruiting process may begin as early as a coach identifies a talented athlete. The NCAA recruiting guidelines differ for Division I men's basketball, Division I women's basketball, Division I football, Division I other sports, Division II, and Division III NCAA and are not enforced until that athlete begins taking 9th grade classes (NCAA, 2014). Some coaches believe the sooner they can identify a talented athlete and make contact, the greater recruiting edge they have on other programs (Paule, 2008). Once coaches identify athletes they are interested in, it is important for them to continually evaluate the athletes, establish a relationship with them and their families, and build that relationship through personal contact with the athletes at their high schools. Ultimately, the goal is to persuade the athletes to commit to attending the coaches' institutions and to compete on their teams.

To initiate the recruiting process, coaches, parents, and athletes are all able to take advantage of available technology and its ability to host sources of information that can be shared almost instantaneously. In the early 1900's, coaches primarily contacted recruits and their

parents through the mail; however, with major advances in technology such as athletic highlight film, online recruiting services, personal webpages, Skype, and social media, coaches and athletes can exchange information and “communicate” during the recruiting process (Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004). Coaches are now using social media platforms like Twitter to generate excitement for their recruiting efforts, to contact recruits, to announce the commitments of high school prospects, and to encourage fans to interact with recruits (Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014; Murdock, 2013; Staples, 2013). Jensen et al. (2014) stated that the reach of social media and access to coaches’ daily lives can pay dividends during recruiting. In a February 4, 2014 *Huffington Post* article titled “*College football recruiting staffs turn to Twitter for edge ahead of National Signing Day*” stated:

Coaches can tweet to their heart's content to let fans know that ‘someone’ has verbally committed to their school without actually mentioning the recruit by name. And they're doing it all over the country, whether it's Tennessee's Butch Jones tweeting ‘#BrickByBrick’ or Texas A&M's Kevin Sumlin tweeting ‘#Yessir!’ (Megargee, 2014, p.1)

The ease of using social media to connect with recruits is detailed here:

College coaches can simply log onto Twitter and Facebook and engage in a conversation with a recruit instantly without leaving their desk or the film room. Once that connection is built, it makes the recruiting process an around-the-clock task for coaches and recruits. (Kirpalani, 2013, p. 1)

Once interest is shown, athletes are invited to the college campus by the athletic program, and their families decide which invitations to accept. During these visits, college coaches put forth tremendous efforts to entice talented recruits to commit to their institutions. Athletes and

their families are housed in local hotels and given tours of campuses; meetings are scheduled with various members of the campus, and they are entertained at social events, and taken to local restaurants as a way to learn about the atmosphere of the university. This process involves a significant amount of time, energy, and traveling for families, especially the athletes who are being recruited by multiple programs. For many, the recruiting trip to a college campus sets the academic and athletic tone for the prospective athlete and is an influential factor in the decision making process.

According to the NCAA recruiting guidelines, there are two different types of “visits” an athlete can make to a college campus, unofficial and official visits (NCAA, 2016a). Unofficial visits are when recruits pay their own expenses to visit the institution. The university is not allowed to cover any expenses of the visit or plan any events. The NCAA’s Eligibility Center’s Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete (2016a) states:

Unofficial visit. Any visit by you and your parents to a college campus paid for by you or your parents. The only expense you may receive from the college is three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest. You may make as many unofficial visits as you like and may take those visits at any time. The only time you cannot talk with a coach during an unofficial visit is during a dead period.

(NCAA, 2016a, p. 26)

Official visits occur when recruits visit a school and the university covers all of the expenses and plans events for them during their time on campus (NCAA, 2016a). Official visits cannot occur until the recruit’s senior year in high school, and recruits can receive a maximum of five official visits.

Official visit. Any visit to a college campus by you and your parents paid for by the college. The college may pay all or some of the following expenses:

- Your transportation to and from the college;
- Room and meals (three per day) while you are visiting the college; and
- Reasonable entertainment expenses, including three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest.

Before a college may invite you on an official visit, you will have to provide the college with a copy of your high school transcript (Division I only) and ACT, SAT or PLAN score and register with the NCAA Eligibility Center. (NCAA, 2016, p. 26)

In addition to showcasing the institution's campus, coaches are also permitted to visit the prospective athletes to meet with them at their homes.

Offering financial incentives, also known as athletics scholarships, is another way to influence the prospective athlete's decision during the recruitment process. While NCAA Divisions I and Division II colleges and university athletic scholarships are awarded, in Division III, colleges and universities do not award financial aid in the form of athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2013). Colleges and university athletic scholarships for student-athletes may cover the costs of tuition and fees, room, board and required course-related books. At a minimum, an athletics scholarship must be a one academic year agreement; however, in Division I, colleges and universities are permitted to offer multi-year scholarships (NCAA, 2013). Comprehensively, athletes receive more than \$1 billion in full or partial scholarships (Eitzen, 2006).

Once a scholarship offer is made, the athletes have the responsibility of deciding which program they will commit to. In football, recruits may verbally commit at the time of the scholarship offer or officially commit on National Signing Day (NSD) by signing the National Letter of Intent. National Signing Day falls on the first Wednesday in February. It is not uncommon for recruits to verbally commit to a school after receiving an offer and then later de-commit before National Signing Day to accept an offer from another program. However, once a National Letter of Intent is signed, the recruit is committed to that program, and the only way a recruit can be released from his commitment is for the program to release him.

Division I college football coach G. Fisher emphasizes the importance of knowing who the decision maker is when recruiting an athlete (personal communication, April 17, 2014). He says this is one of the first pieces of information he must acquire to successfully recruit an athlete. Choosing a college or university to pursue a degree and continue athletic participation is a major decision for high school athletes. This time represents the ending of childhood and shifts to the beginning of more independence and less direct parental involvement in their everyday lives. Parental involvement in the final decision may differ from family to family, so gaining an understanding of their role in the process is important.

Parental Roles In Recruiting

Popular media provides a host of information about the role parents play in recruiting; however, much of the information regarding the parental role in recruitment comes in the form of advice on what to do and what not to do. The headline for a 2014 article on www.stack.com, a website created to bridge the information gap between amateur athletes and professional athletes, reads: “*Parent behavior can affect an athlete's chance of being recruited by college programs.*” The article stated that coaches take note of parents who display negative behavior because they

fear it will continue at the next level and have an adverse impact on the athlete and the team.

One role parents may serve in recruiting is as “unofficial agents” for their children (Magnusen, Mondello, Kim, & Ferris, 2011), so they must have a general understanding of how to help their children navigate this process.

Dr. David Hoch, a former high school athletic director and college basketball coach, is currently a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) High School Today Publications Committee. Hoch contends most parents have little to no experience or understanding of the college recruiting process, and one way for them to learn about it is from their children’s high school coaches. Since coaches often serve as facilitators in the recruiting process, parents are encouraged to establish a collaborative relationship with their child’s high school coach. Because parents love and want the best for their children, Hoch warned that many parents may be unrealistic concerning their child’s athletic ability, and this is why the relationship with high school coaches is important. According to Hoch (2006), there are basic considerations that coaches should cover with parents about the recruiting process. He contends that parents should be provided with the following information:

- Parents should be told that only about three percent of all high school athletes will earn a NCAA Division I athletic scholarship. An additional two to three percent may be offered one on the NCAA Division II or National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) levels.
- It is also important to point out to parents that they need to be careful when analyzing and listening to a college coach offering the possibility of a scholarship. It is important for the family to question and be sure how much and exactly what the possible athletic scholarship covers.

- Coaches should be able to direct parents to the NCAA and the NAIA websites to get answers to their questions.
- Inform parents of the role the coach plays in the recruiting process (e.g. meet with the family and explain the basics of the recruiting process, offer to write a letter of recommendation, or provide a copy of game tapes to college coaches who request them). Coaches should clarify that they will be helping and not functioning as a fulltime recruiting agent, and taking care of every little detail.
- One of the most important duties that a high school coach can perform is to explain to the family at what level their child is best suited to play. The coach has to define the ability of the athlete.
- The family needs to consider potential majors for the athlete, the location of the school, the size of the institution, and a whole host of other additional factors.
- Lay out a timeline for the family so they are aware of important due dates of college materials (e.g., financial aid paperwork or college applications). (p. 1)

Tom Kovic is the founder and President of Victory Collegiate Consulting where he advises families and student-athletes in developing and executing personal plans for the college search. Kovic (2014) stated parents can play a major role in the recruiting process and maintains they “should make an active commitment to enthusiastically assist their children from start to finish in what will be a very important life decision” (p. 1). Parents should take an active role in creating the recruiting process for their child. Kovic encouraged parents to cultivate relationships and have regular meetings with “typical”

team members (p.1). These team members include guidance counselors, high school coaches, and club coaches. While their child is being recruited, parents should actively communicate with college coaches. The final choice is ultimately up to the athlete, but parents should be there every step along the way (Kovic, 2014).

Making mistakes or feeling uncertainty during the recruiting process is normal for most athletes, and Kovic (2014) suggests parents allow their children to experience those struggles as a way to prepare them to learn to deal with being under pressure and having to make important decisions. There are numerous red flags that could come up for coaches when communicating with athletes and their families. Parents are not always aware of the impact this can have on an athlete's recruiting process. Coaches may be concerned if parents consistently answer questions that have been directed to the athlete or if parents enter the first meeting with a college coach asking for a scholarship (Kovic, 2014). Parents who are too involved, he warns, could negatively impact the development of a relationship between college coaches and the athlete's family. Coaches are interested in child-parent relationships, and coaches look for respectful children whose parents are neither over-bearing, nor disinterested (Flett, Gould, Paule, & Schneider, 2010).

Black Families in The United States

The experiences and roles of Black mothers in The United States are as diverse as their respective families. Black families experience multiple realities, embedded within a social structure that requires deeper exploration to be more clearly understood (Brewer, 1995; McAdoo, 1988). The early work of social scientists often ignored research on Black families because of the misconception that all Blacks experience life in similar ways (Willie & Reddick, 2010).

Black Families in White America (Billingsley, 1968) set a framework for studying Black families that suggested that the Black family must be viewed as a separate but interrelated social system within the larger society. In 1992 he argued, “one cannot understand contemporary patterns of Black family life without placing them in a broad historical, societal, and cultural context” (p. 22). Billingsley’s (1968) research provided a thorough discussion on the social status in the Black community, detailing the characteristics of the old and new upper classes in comparison to the white class structure. At that time of his research, Billingsley believed social science had not given proper attention to Black families in The United States, and he found that many of the middle class white students in his courses were:

...convinced from their exposure to social science that black families are characterized by disorganization; that the matriarchal family form is dominant; that most black children grow up without fathers; that female-headed families produce girls who are masculine and boys who are feminine; that children from female-headed black families do worse in school than children from two-parent families; and that most low income female-headed black families are supported by welfare and living in public housing projects. (Billingsley, 1970, p. 136)

One highly controversial study of the Black family in The United States was the Moynihan Report (1965), formally published as *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Author Daniel Patrick Moynihan, assistant secretary for policy planning and research at the U.S. Department of Labor, described discrimination at essentially every level of society-- jobs, the welfare system, and in the crisis of family life of poor Blacks. Some felt his report was an attack on Black families, blaming them for their own misfortunes, while others felt it was a candid description of the conditions of the ghettos and the widening gap between upwardly

mobile Blacks and those left in the ghetto. Moynihan's report said Blacks were at a disadvantage because their families deviated from male dominant households and that "Negro children without fathers flounder and fail" (p. 35).

A 2013 report conducted by the Urban Institute and Fathers Incorporated revisited Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report to analyze the state of Black families today, to examine any change over since the initial report, and to compare these findings with those of other ethnic and racial groups (Acs, Braswell, Sorensen, Turner, 2013). Since the release of the Moynihan report, significant progress has been made by middle-class Blacks, but there has been little economic improvement for the Black poor (Acs, et al., 2013). The report stated that Black poverty rates and unemployment rates were considerably higher than those of whites, black children were more likely than white children to reside in single-parent households, and black teens and adults were far more likely to be imprisoned. Single parent, female-headed families were far more likely to be poor than other families (Acs et. al, 2013). The percentage of Black children born to unmarried mothers increased from about 20 percent to 73 percent between the early 1960s and 2009, and in 1960, 20 percent of Black children lived with their mothers but not their fathers; by 2010, that number rose to 53 percent. Subsequently, in 2010, over 40 percent of single-mother families with children were in poverty; because black children are far more likely to reside in single mother families, their poverty rates far exceed those of white children (Acs et. al, 2013).

The constant comparison to mainstream white families has been pervasive in the evaluation and representation of Black families. One example of this within Moynihan's (1965) report is his argument, "The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability. By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown" (p. 5). He also wrote,

“At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time” (p. 5).

For many years, bleak outlooks and inaccurate claims about the state of the Black family in The United States have been challenged. Scholars have described Black families as having strong kinship bonds, high work orientation, strong religious orientation, stability, and cohesive functioning (Billingsley, 1992; McAdoo, 1988, Staples, 1994). As Billingsley (1992) contends, “The African American family is neither dead nor dying, nor vanishing” as some scholars have asserted. Instead, it exhibits resiliency and strength that is “by far more powerful and contain the seeds of their survival and rejuvenation” (p. 17). It is clear some Black families have made progress and not all of them are stuck in the lower class, educationally limited, or lacking resources. In particular, Black motherhood is one aspect of the Black family that has been attacked in social science research as well as within popular media. Black motherhood, which is often devalued, misunderstood, and negatively portrayed, is one facet of Black family life that should be explored for better understanding.

Mothering

Before discussing Black motherhood, it is important to note that motherhood exists as a social institution. Feminists have contended that motherhood is more than a role, but rather an institution embedded in patriarchal dominance, economic systems, power relations and the distribution of resources” (Hill, 2005, p. 130). Thus we find Black women left to navigate the intersectionality of multiple roles and to locate themselves within a system that has silenced them not only as women, but also as mothers. There is a dearth of literature that places Black mothers and Black motherhood at the center of study and analysis. Primarily quantitative in nature,

literature prior to the 1970's explored Black motherhood, but mostly from a deficit model and was produced by mostly White and Black men (Collins, 2000). Moving into the 1970's, there was more evidence of researchers committing themselves to destroying the myths and stereotypes of the Black woman and the Black family (Hill, 1972; Ladner, 1972; Stack, 1974; Staples, 1971; Willie, 1970). As Collins (2000) argued, male perspectives on Black mothers cited high rates of divorce, female-headed households, and births out of wedlock as evidence of a lack of Black maternal power in deteriorating family structures. Moynihan's (1965) report accused Black mothers of failing to discipline their children, emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children's academic achievement. Conversely, other social sciences and popular literature have described Black women as the strong, self-sufficient females responsible for the survival of the Black family (McCray, 1980).

Despite these contradicting depictions, Black motherhood has been of central importance to the Black family. Black mothers have often mothered effectively under difficult circumstances and have made contributions to sustaining families in a racially oppressed society, yet the double-edge sword of sexism and racism works to devalue and disempower them (Collins, 2000; Hill, 2005; hooks, 1981). Across cultures, Black mothers are more likely to have the responsibility of managing their own personal lives, childrearing, and maintaining their households while working (Benin & Keith, 1995, Burgess, 1995). In addition to experiencing racism and sexism, Black mothers often confront issues of classism. These women are forced to find and develop a sense of self as Black, female, and mother, all within the constraints of sexism, racism, and classism. Collins (2000) explained that while motherhood can serve as a reminder of the oppressive state of women, it can also "serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting

ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment" (p. 176).

Hill (2005) provided an overview of Black motherhood under the historical understanding that the "dominant demand placed on women was to produce a sufficient supply of children, ideally in the context of a marital relationship that ensured paternity..." (p. 124). Hill also stated that being able to become mothers gave women a level of authority and validated their position in the family and the community. In the colonial U.S., children were considered economic assets, and Black women in particular were expected to have as many children as possible. While Black women were faced with pressure to bear children, it is estimated that nearly one-fourth of those of reproductive age gave birth each year (Hill, 2005). Enslaved women who bore children faced a number of hardships related to motherhood. They were expected to simultaneously prioritize their work roles, care for their own children, and care for the children of others. However, motherhood was still one of the few attainable social roles for Black slave women under the systematic race and gender oppression of slavery, and it often afforded them privileges that other slave women, who could not or would not bear children, could not access (Hill, 2005).

Along with the abolition of slavery came a growing interest in reproductive control among Blacks; there was a link perceived between birth control and racial progress (Hill, 2005). Black women now had more freedom to control their own fertility. Simultaneously, the Women's Rights Movement (1848-1920), primarily led and benefitted by White women, began to shift the focus to the issues of birth control and motherhood, which generated new ideas about and definitions of motherhood. As time progressed to the 1960's, the Feminist Movement also addressed motherhood, but was limited by the White middle-class and did not give consideration

to Black women's unique experiences (Collins, 2000). While these two movements have undoubtedly had significant impact on women's rights, culture has been a determining factor in what motherhood means and what defines acceptable behavior for mothers; mainstream social science literature presented the full-time, at-home, middle class White mothers as the norm (Boris, 1994).

Collins (1994) noted that these White perspectives are problematic for Black mothers in that they were produced by a dominant cultural ideology determining what it meant to be a "good mother." Hays (1996) stated, a mother must:

recognize and conscientiously respond to all the child's needs and desires, and to every stage of the child's emotional and intellectual development. This means that a mother must acquire detailed knowledge of what the experts consider proper child development, and then spend a good deal of time and money attempting to foster it....[T]his is an emotionally taxing job as well, since the essential foundation for proper child development is love and affection. In sum, the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive. (p. 8)

Texts like Hays' (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* and Glenn, Chang, and Forcey's (1994) *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* offer a variety of perspectives on mothering in different class and racial contexts and the historically constructed 'ideology' of motherhood. These authors stress that mothering is not universal. Glenn, Chang, and Forcey generally describe motherhood as "a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people" (p. ix). Hays sought to systematically unpack and analyze the cultural model of mothering, specifically giving attention to the contradiction that

within a society “the logic of self-interested gain seems to guide behavior” mothers are expected to “expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money raising their children” (p. x).

Race and class limits imposed on Black women impede their ability to meet these demands (Collins, 1994; Hill, 2005). There are few exceptions the culture of motherhood provides; one is that financial need is an acceptable excuse to work outside the home as well as for having a family member or a spouse to look after children (Ehrle, Adams, & Tout, 2001). According to Krieder and Elliot’s (2010) report on the historical changes in stay-at-home mothers, the number of stay-at-home mothers has decreased from 9.8 million in 1969 to 5.7 million in 2009. The authors noted that Black women were about half as likely as White women to be stay-at-home mothers. Historically, Black women have always worked and have traditionally not had the choice to be a stay-at-home mothers--even married Black women. The report cited Thistle’s (2006) assertion that Black mothers with young children were still in the work force following World War II, when many of their white counterparts were no longer a part of the labor force. McAdoo’s (1977) study of the different levels of involvement and support given to Black mothers who were single as well as those who were married found that Black families have benefitted the most from social networks. This research built upon previous studies, which documented the positive influence of the extended family, most notably for those in poverty (Hill, 1972; Billingsley, 1968; Stack, 1974). The “village” of “other mothers” (Collins, 2000) and “other fathers” (Hill, 2005) are recognized as people who contribute to the care of the children, therefore enabling Black mothers to work, manage their homes, and rear their children. Even with evidence of the need to work outside the home and strong support networks, these “exceptions” the culture of motherhood provides are still not often extended to Black mothers.

Black Families in Sports Literature

The role of Black mothers in sports has received limited attention in sports research; however, one way their presence and influence is made noticeable is when they are publicly recognized by their high profile, high performing, athletic children. An additional area that has been studied is the increased level of sport socialization by the family within the Black community, and as a result, Black males face challenges that are different from those who are not socialized towards sports (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Edwards, 1983, 1988; Harris, 1994; Sailes, 1984). Through a study of 201 Black and 43 White high school football players from 5 Southeastern states, Krist (2006) found that for Black football players, the mother was the most important person influencing player's decisions to participate, graduate from high school, and aspire to attend college. This research also noted the differences between White and Black athletes' motives for participating in football; one significant difference is the Black athletes' desire to please their parents.

Harris (1994) credited increased family support as one way the Black community encourages the valuation of and participation in sports for young black boys. Edwards (1988) stated Black families are four times more likely than White families to push their children towards sports careers, and often, this encouragement comes at the expense of other areas of development. Oliver's (1980) study also found that Black families in a community baseball program saw the program as an activity that may increase their child's chances for a career in professional sports. However, there is research that revealed not all Black parents make sports their primary focus. Donnor's (2006) study of 17 Black male Division I football players found that Black parents viewed education and academic excellence as an important factor in improving their children's lives, and parents viewed sports as a means to a rewarding education,

not as a means to a professional sporting career. There is less evidence of Black parents placing greater emphasis on academics; therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of the experiences of these parents who hold such a strong belief and faith in the professional athletic careers of their sons.

Professional sports leagues like the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) have rules that do not allow high school football and basketball players to be drafted immediately after high school, thus making college one of very few choices these athletes have if they plan to pursue a professional career. The NFL will not allow players to be drafted until 3 years after their high school class graduates, and the NBA forces players to wait a year after graduation until they are eligible for the draft.

For highly talented Black high school athletes who possess the ability and desire to continue athletic participation in college, there are a host of factors they must consider in the college selection process, which is a process they do not participate in alone. Black parents can effectively help their children confidently navigate a potentially daunting task of selecting a college and enduring the recruiting process. Recruiting athletes is an important component of college athletics; the process itself is intended to shape the athlete's selection of a college (Schneider & Messenger, 2012). Despite the importance of the role of parents throughout the recruitment process, it has very little scholarly attention. In particular, Black families and Black mothers have little to no representation in academic literature.

News stories have magnified the negative influence of mothers throughout the recruitment process, focusing on the end of the process when it is time for their sons to announce where they will attend college. In the late 90's, when National Football League (NFL) quarterback Michael Vick was recruited to universities across the country, then Syracuse

University quarterback Donovan McNabb was instrumental in helping to convince Vick to join him there (McQuire, 2014). Vick's mother made it clear early in the recruiting process she wanted her son to stay close to home in Virginia (McQuire, 2014). Ultimately, he did just that and committed to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

A more recent account of a mother receiving national attention for impact on her son's college recruiting process is April Justin of Harvey, Louisiana (Schultz, 2012). Her son Landon Collins was the nation's top-ranked high school safety, and on January 5, 2012, Collins announced on live national television from the Under Armour All-America game, "I'm gonna go 'Roll Tide, Roll'" and placed a pair of the University of Alabama football gloves on his hands. His mother sitting next to him, visibly disappointed, shook her head in dismay, and when she was questioned by the announcer, Justin replied, "I feel LSU is a better place for him to be. LSU Tigers No. 1" (Schultz, 2012, p. 1). The video clip surfaced on the Internet almost immediately and sparked more dialogue about how mothers involve themselves in the recruiting process.

"Recruit signs with Florida State after mom said no to USC," stated another headline appearing in *USA Today* a year later in 2013 (Myerberg, 2013). The article reported that Matthew Thomas, a five-star linebacker from Miami, Florida, was prepared to sign his letter of intent to attend the University of Southern California when his mother refused to sign the paperwork. As a result, Thomas signed with Florida State University, which was, in fact, closer to his home. Another mother, Andrea McDonald, confiscated her son Alex Collins' National Letter of Intent and disappeared in an effort to prevent him from signing to attend the University of Arkansas. She did so reportedly because she wanted him to stay close his hometown of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida for college. Ultimately, the athlete's father, not married to his mother, signed the paperwork. McDonald hired a lawyer and filed a lawsuit to void the signing of the letter of

intent. According to the University of Arkansas athletic department website, Collins currently attends the university and is a sophomore running back on the football team.

These few stories provide a limited portrayal of the roles Black mothers play in their son's recruiting process. While the call for this research is not an attempt to ignore the negative influence some Black mothers have had on their sons recruiting experience, more research is needed to explore Black mothers' depictions of their involvement and understanding throughout this process. Because media outlets have been the primary platform for disseminating information about the role of Black mothers in the process, there is concern that these recruiting stories are distorted, inaccurate, and incomplete representations of Black maternal experiences in this context.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Thought

The writings on Black feminist thought provided guidance for this study (Collins, 1990, 1995; hooks, 1984, 1989). Black feminist perspectives provides a framework to locate Black mothers within the context of sexism, racism, and classism engrained in U.S. society (Cannon 1988, Cole & Guy-Sheftall 2003, Collins 1990, 1994, hooks 1981). They also conceptualize Black female experiences as distinctly different from White female experiences. Collins (2000) contended Black women possess unique perspectives of their experiences and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group. As a Black female, I acknowledge the role, as Collins (1986) stated:

...[to] produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman's standpoint for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought contains observations and interpretations about Afro-American

womanhood that describe and explain different expressions of common themes (p. S16).

The oppression experienced by Black women within the broader social context often leaves them invisible in the eyes of their oppressors. “Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure” (Collins, 1990, p. 5). Black women are rarely recognized as a group separate from Black men, and when women are discussed, the focus is often on White women (hooks, 1981). Traditional feminist theory often fails to consider the diversity of the women it seeks to empower and the intersectionality of race, class and gender in society. This study will specifically focus on uniquely Black maternal experiences throughout the recruitment process and attempt to illumine their roles within said process.

Theoretical perspectives in Black Feminist Thought place Black mothers and their experiences at the center of analyses and encompass theoretical interpretations of Black female reality by those who live it (Collins, 2000). “Rather than treating motherhood as a ‘dependent variable’ or using it primarily to support or challenge preexisting sociological or political theories about women’s lives” (McMahon, 1995), the experiences of Black mothers are placed at the center of analysis in this research study. Black women and other women of color have theoretical perspectives that validate their personal experiences. Qualitative and centered methods seek to gather information from the perspective of the group being studied (Dickerson, 1995). Employing qualitative research methods within this study enables me to consider the significance of contextual issues and the personal meanings of the phenomena under investigation, while also enhancing our knowledge about the unique experiences of these Black mothers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

One key theme of Black feminist thought is the replacement of denigrated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images. This relevant theme supports the rationale for using Black feminist thought to examine Black motherhood and its intersection with the college recruitment process. Historically, the negative images perpetuated in academia and in the media include the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare single mother, and the young teenage mother. Current images of Black mothers throughout the recruitment process have been distorted and incomplete. Black feminist thought “reflects this effort to find a collective, self-defined voice and express a fully articulated womanist standpoint” (Collins, 2000, p. 100).

The use of Black feminist theory in sports literature has been limited to a narrow scope. It has never been used as a framework for which to conduct research on the lived experience of Black mothers, however it has been used in research about Black female student-athletes (Bruening et al, 2005; Carter, 2008; Carter & Hart, 2010). Black feminist theory has provided a guiding framework in exploring and understanding Black female student-athletes’ experiences and it’s framework being extended to Black mothers in sports is equally as valuable and necessary.

Black feminist thought influenced the data collection process in that as the researcher I “talked with” rather than “talked to” the Black women throughout the interviews (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Black feminist thought also shaped the analysis of this study; that the researcher was an insider to the Black culture as well as a mother was influential in attending to and understanding cultural cues, codes, and insider language specific to the group (Etter-Lewis & Foster, 1996). In Black feminist thought, the story is told and preserved in narrative form and not “torn apart in analysis” (Collins, 2000, p. 258). This allowed for the design of the study to

support using the participant's voice, to co-construct the personal narratives of Black mothers in an effort to better understand their experiences throughout the recruitment process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the relevant literature pertaining to the study of Black maternal experiences throughout their sons' college football recruitment process. The scarcity of research on this specific topic led to a review of literature that explored youth sports in the United States along with the role of mothers within that context. The historical context of intercollegiate athletic recruiting combined with a modern day view of recruiting practices provided a foundation to explore parental roles throughout the recruitment process. Next, the chapter explored the history of Black families in The United States and the role of "mothering" in the Black community. This chapter positioned Black women in academic literature and explored the absence of their perspectives and stories. The chapter continued with literature that focused on locating Black mothers in sports literature, more specifically the college recruitment process. Finally, the chapter concluded with an explanation of the theoretical framework used to contextualize the research conducted.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Previous chapters laid the groundwork for why Black maternal experiences throughout the college recruitment process need to be studied. This chapter provides a description of research methodology and includes discussions on aspects of the overall research project: (a) research design; (b) methods of data collection and analysis; (c) measures of quality in qualitative research; and (d) researcher values and assumptions.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process of their sons. This study addresses the gap in the literature regarding understanding the roles and perceptions of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process. Specifically, this study examined the depth of Black mothers' knowledge of the college recruitment process and their involvement throughout. In addition, the study focused on understanding the various roles Black mothers filled throughout the college recruitment process.

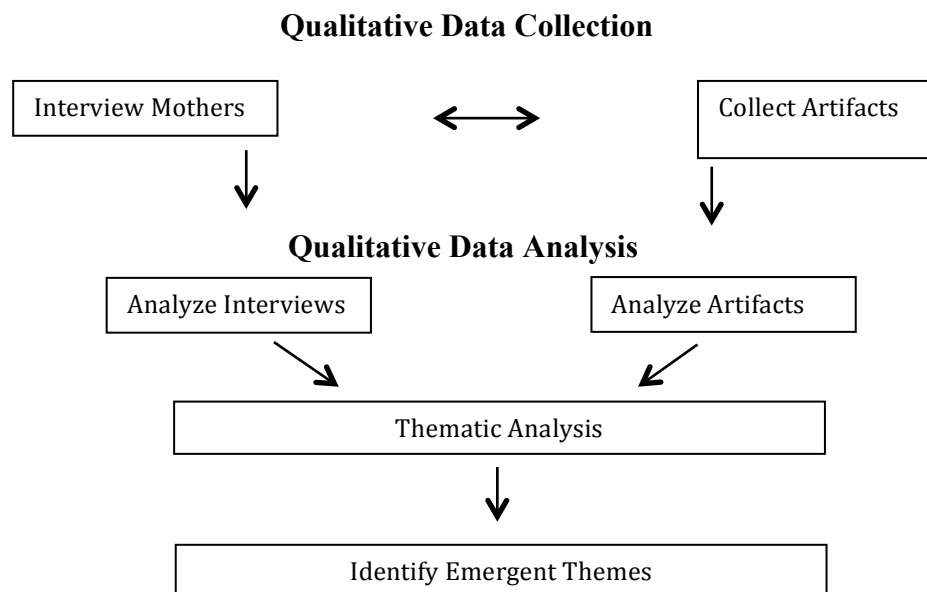
In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process?
2. How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?

3. How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?
4. What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

This study employed a naturalistic inquiry research design, whereby qualitative data was collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and then compared to identify emerging themes across the data (Patton, 2002). Narrative data collection methods were used to produce co-constructed narratives reflecting the living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories of the studies participants (Bold, 2012). By providing accounts of their experiences throughout the recruitment process, the participants were able to create and establish a reality of the recruiting experience (Prasad, 2005). This research design includes interviews with Black mothers and a collection of meaningful artifacts (e.g., recruitment mailings, newspaper clippings, photographs, hand written letters) gathered throughout the recruiting process, as seen in the diagram below.

Naturalistic Inquiry Research Design (Patton, 2002)



Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the collaborative effort between a researcher and participant to understand experiences of the individual and society (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) urged each researcher to prepare to answer the important question, “What does narrative help us learn about our phenomenon that other theories or methods do not?” (p. 123). Narrative design is recognized for its interactive nature, which can translate into leveling the disparities of power uncovered throughout the research effort (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Narrative is a basic human way of making sense of the world; we lead ‘storied lives’ (Riessman, 1993). Narratives have the ability to give voice to a community and culture. Voices from Black mothers and stories of their experiences are largely absent from the body of academic literature examining the college recruiting process. It is through narratives that individuals are provided with a useful format to tell stories (Riessman, 1993). Thus, this study’s use of narrative inquiry elicits stories of Black mothers’ college football recruiting experiences.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) stated the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are story-tellers. This suggests that people make meaning from their lived experiences, and through the telling of stories, they are able to arrive at an understanding of the world. Johnson-Bailey (2004) insists that narratives are useful for revealing those life stories in individual and societal contexts. For researchers employing narrative inquiry, the stories submitted by individuals offer representations of their life experiences (Riessman, 1993). "Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2006, p.375). Bell (2002) articulated that “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the

imposition of story structures. That is, we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us” (p. 207).

“[Black] women’s lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African American women with our objectification as the Other” (Collins, 2000, p. 99). Johnson-Bailey (2004) suggests narrative analysis should be intentional, especially with regard to stories of the “other.” Johnson-Bailey’s research supports the use of narratives and states that “no other techniques or formula has been more appropriate than narratives as a way of letting the ‘Other’ speak” (p. 128). The narratives, derived from the participant interviews, are an effective method to present the participants’ definition of themselves and their experiences as opposed to a definition of disenfranchised groups by researchers or members of the majority population (Johnson-Bailey, 2010).

Data Collection

Qualitative research methods were used to collect data through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews and artifacts (e.g., recruitment mailings, newspaper clippings, photographs, and hand written letters) representative of the recruiting process. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) purport using interviews as an effective method for eliciting rich descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences. Additionally, the one-on-one setting of an interview creates an environment where the researcher can probe a participant for responses without the influence of other participants (Roulston, 2010).

Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study consisted of Black mothers (N=6) who have experienced the college recruitment process as parents. Purposeful sampling was used to gain insight into the researched group (Merriam, 1998), and as Patton (2002) described, this technique also allowed the researcher to identify individuals who could best address the research questions. Along the same lines, Erlandson et al. (1993) explained the value of this sampling technique: “Purposive and snowball sampling through human instrument increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual and cultural norms” (p. 82).

Patton (2002) noted that sample size is dependent upon what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is useful, and what will have credibility. Patton’s (2002) assertion that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244) is often used as rationale for a small sample size. Therefore, a sample size of 6 participants was appropriate for this study for the following reasons: (a) the purpose of the study was not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population; (b) the study intended to focus on the breadth and richness of information gathered through each individual interview as opposed to sample size (Price, 1996), and (c) this study sought to elicit a manageable size of co-constructed narratives to introduce the experiences of Black mothers in sport to the sports studies literature, where these experiences are currently absent. Furthermore, in-depth understanding is produced through studying and analyzing information-rich cases rather than making empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). Probing and the capturing of the participants’ own words and descriptions enhanced the depth of data and allowed the research to elicit clarifications concerning specific areas of interest.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) self-identifying as Black, 2) mother of a son who has completed the college recruitment process, and 3) mother of a son who accepted an athletic scholarship at a Division I four-year college or university. The aforementioned criteria allowed the researcher to select subjects for inclusion in the study based on the perception that these respondents were the most useful and best suited to answer each research question. This criteria was also best suited for this study due to the lack of research about this subgroup's involvement in the recruitment process.

The overrepresentation of Black male athletes in the two highest revenue generating sports of football and men's basketball and the concurrent academic underperformance are major reasons to spotlight these athletes' mothers (Edwards, 1984; Funk, 1991; Harper, 2006; Hawkins, 2010; Sailes, 2010; Singer, 2008; Smith, 2009). Additionally, concerns about exploitation in big-time college sports are often directed at this subgroup of male athletes, but what is missing from the discussion is their mothers' perspectives and experiences with their college decision. Thus, proximity to their sons' athletic experiences and race were the two crucial criteria for this study. Additional factors such as their marital status, educational background, socioeconomic status, athletic history, etc. were explored, but were not the foci of analysis. In other words, the researcher acknowledged these factors as important, but for the purposes of this study, the participants' maternal and racial identity were the main areas of interest as they pertain most directly to the phenomena investigated here. This study encompassed a host of experiences as a way to provide insight into the participants' diverse backgrounds, but also gave attention to the similarities these mothers may have faced throughout the recruiting process as Black women and mothers.

Several assumptions influenced the decision to interview participants who met the aforementioned criteria. First, these women were those who could best address the research questions and provide rich details about their experiences throughout the recruitment process. Second, these women completed the recruitment process and had more insight into the process as a whole--more so than a mother whose son has not accepted a scholarship and was still in the midst of the recruitment and college decision-making process. Third, an effort was being made to include a diverse group of Black mothers by not limiting the sample to a specific range of criteria such as age, marital status, class, or sexuality. The rationale for this decision was founded on the belief that as Collins (2000) stated, in the process of self-definition, "Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (p. 114). The Black women in this study were provided with the opportunity to self-define themselves as it related to the intersecting oppressions, with an emphasis on sexuality, class, and the social institution of marriage. The power of self-definition was within the control of the Black mothers in the study, and as participants, they were provided the opportunity to articulate whether marital status, class, and sexuality were or were not part of their experiences throughout the recruitment process. Because little is known regarding the experiences of Black mothers in this context, the researcher had no empirical evidence that areas such as marital status, social class, or sexuality had any direct impact on Black mothers' navigation of the process. In addition, Collins (2000) further explicated the value of self-definition when she said:

By insisting on self-definition, Black women question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define ourselves, we clearly

reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (p. 114)

Recruitment

Data collection in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews. The data collection process began with submitting all research documents to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was granted, the recruitment of participants began. For participant recruitment, I used methods of network and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). I used professional connections with coaches and administrators in college and professional athletics to access participants who met the study criteria. The coaches and administrators received an emailed letter (APPENDIX A) asking them to pass along the contact information of mothers who fit the criteria and/or share the participant recruitment letter (APPENDIX B) with those same mothers. The use of coaches and administrators to access an already established line of communication to athletes' parents was helpful in making initial contact with mothers whose sons had accepted a Division I football scholarship.

Initial contact with the interested participants provided them with details regarding the purpose of the study, and potential interview dates, times, and locations were discussed. During these conversations, participants were asked to gather any artifacts representative of the recruitment process (e. g., recruitment mailings, newspaper clippings, photographs, and hand written letters) they were willing to discuss at the interview. Each mother was informed that if these materials were unavailable or inaccessible, the interview would be conducted without them. All materials were used to generate dialogue during the interviews and the researcher was

not to take any of the materials once the interview was completed. Any reference of the recruitment materials was verbally noted during the interview, so the researcher had an audio recording of the details of the materials provided. The researcher also used field notes to record any important information represented in/on the artifact.

The individual interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the participants. Some participants chose to meet at their homes, while others selected their place of employment. One interview was conducted while riding in a car. Each individual interview was audiotaped for transcription, and short memos were written throughout the course of the interview for additional analysis. Interview data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with each of the six participants.

Interviews

Qualitative research interviews “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world...” (Kvale, 1996, p.1). Interviews offer the ability to develop a relationship in order to access richer information with more levels of confidentiality than is offered with other types of interaction, for example, focus groups. “Researchers create contexts in which participants are encouraged to reflect retrospectively on an experience they have already lived through and describe this experience in as much detail as possible” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 56).

The semi-structured interviews lasted between one hour and 16 minutes and two hours and 35 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to read and sign a research participant consent form providing details of the study, the participant’s rights, and the stated purpose of the research (APPENDIX C). One copy of the consent form was kept for my records and the participants kept the second copy. I explained to each participant that I would be

audio recording the interview for future transcription and that those transcripts would be made available for them to review. This form of member-checks is useful to ensure the accuracy of participant response interpretations (Gratton & Jones, 2010). I also let them know that I would be keeping notes in my notebook during our interview to capture my own thoughts or to jot down notes that would provide me with information I would use to ask additional questions or use later throughout data analysis.

During each interview, I elicited the experiences of the participants using a semi-structured interview format. The participants shared details about their overall experience as mothers of athletes in the recruitment process. The semi-structured interview process and the use of an interview protocol (APPENDIX D) allowed me to have a general idea of what I would ask, but also provided flexibility to allow the interviewees to tell their story, not just provide set pieces of information (Reismann, 2008; Roulston, 2010). For example, I began each interview asking participants to “please tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, and your children.” I then asked follow up questions to gather more specific information based on the responses. Probing questions elicited participants’ stories while I was able to gain a broader understanding of their contexts.

I found it helpful to use blank space on the interview guide to allow for note taking throughout the interview process. Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002) give rationale to the usefulness of taking notes during qualitative interviews, such as helping with the formulation of new questions, facilitating later analysis, providing important quotes and more importantly, backing up data in the event of technical malfunction.

At the conclusion of each interview while commuting home, I used my audio recorder to capture my post-interview reflective thoughts. The convenience of being able to audio record my

thoughts was helpful because many of the interviews required me to drive significant distances, and the act of writing on the return trip was not an option. However, using the audio recording allowed for the immediate capture of my reflections. I transcribed these recordings within a week of the interview. These notes, memos, and reflective audio recordings assisted me throughout my analysis and in constructing the narratives.

Artifacts

Having the artifacts present at the interview did facilitate a more robust conversation, however for others it was limiting in that these artifacts were not available at the time of the interview. Two of the participants had access to artifacts at the time of our interview. The artifacts included newspaper clippings and original copies of recruitment letters, some typed and others handwritten, from college coaches. One participant created an extravagant display with the letters and the other mother compiled all of the letters into a book that was bound on the edges. As appropriate, references will be made to the artifacts provided by the mothers during their interview. The artifacts being unavailable for some of the participants created inconsistencies in being able to reference them in within the narratives and findings.

Data Analysis

The purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to "inquire deeply into the meaning of different situations and different people's understandings of the world" (Bold, 2012, p. 120). Narrative analysis refers to the process of collecting and interpreting texts that have a storied form. All narrative research relies heavily on interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and there is no single process to analyze and present narrative data. Narratives do not speak for themselves; they require interpretation (Reismann, 2008). Analysis is a complex process, not

easily described as having a particular structure since there will be much revisiting and reshaping before the final write up (Bold, 2012).

Researchers play a significant part in establishing the narrative data that is analyzed, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants chose to tell (Riessman, 2008). After all interviews were transcribed, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data captured. Polkinghorne (1995) named this phase the ‘analysis of narrative.’ It is important to note that within narrative inquiry, even as data is being collected, qualitative researchers generally begin analyzing and theorizing about what the data mean, so while post-interview analysis is discussed, it will also begin to take place throughout the interview process as well and must be addressed (Bold, 2012; Roulston, 2010).

Thematic Analysis

One of the most common approaches in analyzing narratives is thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis is a categorizing approach that uses stories to identify themes (Kramp, 2004). The focus of this approach is on the content of narration, ‘what’ is said; the analysis is focused on the narrative itself. Polkinghorne (1995) termed this process the ‘analysis of narrative.’ Prior to the analysis of the narrative, each participant’s interview data was used to construct individual narratives. The six participant narratives were constructed using a similar structure that included participants’ background information, their first moment of awareness that their son was being recruited, and lastly, a chronological account of the recruitment process. From there, the narratives were analyzed thematically.

Thematic analysis entails data reduction through applying codes to the data, categorization of data, through sorting the codes into thematic groupings, and lastly, reorganizing of the data into thematic representations of findings through a series of interpretations (Roulston,

2010). In this final component, ideas are tested and verified through the coding strategy, employed, then “final” conclusions are determined (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In analyzing their experiences, each participant’s story was analyzed and re-analyzed for insights about how she felt and thought about her role as Black mother navigating the college recruitment process. The specific areas of interest that guided this process are: a) experiences with campus visits, b) experiences interacting with college coaches, c) identified sources of information about the recruiting process, d) roles throughout the decision making process, e) and forms of communication throughout the recruitment process. Using the transcribed interview data, constructed narratives, and analysis of artifacts, I compared the experiences of the participants. These experiences were then categorized into themes and theorized to make meaning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An audit/decision trail (Roulston, 2010) was recorded so external readers can examine the process of data reduction and theme generation.

Measures of Quality in Qualitative Research

The trustworthiness of this study was based on provision by Lincoln and Guba (1985) concerning how qualitative researchers can reinforce the trustworthiness of their studies. The criteria provided are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria are referred to as parallel criteria to the traditional positivist research methods of validity and reliability.

Credibility refers to the assurance the researcher’s findings accurately represent the multiple realities of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A few of the strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba to address credibility include prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking. Prolonged engagement involves spending extended amounts of time with participants so that the researcher can identify patterns in the participants’ behavior or responses

that are not as easily observed in a brief interaction. Prolonged engagement also serves as an opportunity for the researcher to build trust and rapport with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1987). Within this study, peer debriefing is discussing research with a person who is disconnected from the research. I used “critical friends” (Marshall & identified individuals with limited to no knowledge of the topic of the study and who likely hold impartial views of the study). Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005; Roulston 2010) occurred with participants after the interviews. Each participant was provided a copy of their interview transcript and a preliminary participant profile, giving them an opportunity to offer any general feedback.

Transferability is similar to generalizability in the quantitative research paradigm. However, the goal of transferability is not to be able to generalize, but to find some similarities between similar populations that may help the reader better understand the phenomena. This is best addressed by thick description. Thick description, as Geertz (1973) explained, is based on the researcher collecting and reporting detailed and sufficient descriptions to allow judgments to be made about transferability.

Dependability refers to how the research is designed, the follow through of that design, and accounts for changes in the design “created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 203). Guba (1981) used the term ‘dependability’ as a concept that embraces the stability implied in reliability and the capacity for tracking required by explainable changes. The qualitative assumption is that the social world is constantly being constructed; therefore, consistency is not achievable in multiple and changing realities. To address dependability, an audit trail was used throughout data collection and analysis as a way to

make the research process transparent to readers in a way that may be replicated by others (Roulston, 2010).

Confirmability is concerned with asking if the findings can be confirmed by another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way this was addressed was by using data in the form of direct quotes from the participants to illustrate the findings. Additionally, by providing an admission of my personal beliefs and assumptions, the interpretive process was made more transparent to others (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Researcher's Values and Assumptions

I have spent 12 years working first as a student assistant in college athletics, then as an administrator. Over the years of working in higher education and athletics, I have had opportunities to work closely with coaches, other athletic staff members, current athletes, and prospective athletes and their families. As a student working in the football office, I was one of a host of females responsible for recruitment assistance. In this role, I was heavily involved in setting the itineraries for recruits when they came to visit our campus. I spent the majority of these campus visits transporting, touring, and interacting with the prospective athletes and their families.

Early in my experiences as a student worker, I began to recognize the intentional social interactions directed between athletes and staff during the athletes' visits. For example, if there was an athlete visiting from a particular location and we had a staff or faculty member from the region, we often introduced the athlete and their family to that person. We would also do this for any ethnic minority athlete visiting the campus. We reached out to faculty and staff of color and invited them to various activities throughout the athlete's visit. As the only Black female student assistant in recruiting whose hometown was only 2 hours from our predominately white college

campus, I was often called upon to share my experiences with Black athletes and their families. I spent a great deal of time talking to the Black athletes and their families, especially mothers and fathers.

After graduating and moving into a full time role within the same athletics department, I once again found myself as the only person of color in an athletic administrative role, involved in recruit visits, and called upon to share my experiences as a Black woman on campus. It was within this professional role that I found myself more observant, and in some ways, I became critical of this “strategic placement” of faculty and staff throughout these recruitment visits. However, I understood the value of seeing “people who looked like you” on campus because I, too, was one of those high school students coming to campus, looking for people like me. My parents also had questions about the diversity of the campus and the support for minority students on campus. Because I shared some similarities in experiences with the Black athletes and their families, I was able to serve as a source of information in ways that others within our department were not.

Around the same time I assumed my full time position in athletics, I gave birth to my son. At that time, my identity was tied to multiple roles. Some of those roles included being a Black female administrator, an unmarried mother, and a two-time graduate of the university where I worked. In the world of college recruitment, specifically in football and men’s basketball, this was a triple bonus. Not only was I knowledgeable about being a student on our campus, I had 2 degrees from the university (i.e. a representation of academic success). I was also a reflection of our departments “commitment to diversity” as a person of color in an administrative role (later, a senior leadership role). Lastly, like many of the mothers of the Black athletes that were being recruited, I was unmarried as well. Again, there was value in these varied roles, and I found it a

privilege to have opportunities for connecting with these families as they came to campus. The desire to explore my research area was born in the crux of my professional experience.

My meetings with recruits were not limited to Black families; however, each time I met with Black families, I felt an obligation to provide them with as much knowledge as possible to help them not only navigate the college recruitment process, but also the college decision making process. There were a number of factors that caused me to feel this way. I often thought about my own introduction to campus and how important and informative my meetings with faculty and students of color were. Looking back, I realized how critical they were in my transition towards ultimate success on campus. Additionally, I considered the roles being reversed. If I were a parent and my son were a recruit, what kind of experience would I want to have when I visited a campus? I strove to have a welcoming demeanor and be transparent about the challenges and opportunities these recruits could potentially encounter as a student and athlete on our campus. Because I was so willing to be a source of information for these families, I was often disappointed that when given the opportunity to ask questions throughout their visit, many of these families, especially the mothers, would remain silent or would only ask a few.

These trends in my professional experience caused me to question the perceived silence of these Black mothers during recruitment visits to campus. There were a number of times when I was contacted by families with questions after they left campus. One example is referenced in chapter 1 of this dissertation. I questioned whether or not we had made our campus welcoming or inviting enough for questions, whether they had answers to their questions, if they knew what questions to ask, or whether they were simply not concerned enough to ask questions. I knew that it could be none of those reasons, all of those reasons, or a combination of them. I concluded that the one way to truly gain a better understanding of what Black mothers were experiencing

throughout the recruitment process and how they gathered knowledge to navigate the process was to ask them myself.

In conducting this research, there were several values and assumptions about this topic I must acknowledge. Being a Black mother and an athletics administrator plays a significant role in my research interest. My personal narrative as a Black female administrator and mother involved in the college recruitment process of young Black men must be articulated and noted, as it has and will continue to influence my role as a researcher.

As a college athletics administrator, I have a general understanding of the recruitment process, and within this role, my previous interactions with Black mothers during the recruitment process provided me with observations of their experiences, as noted above. Another assumption I have involving Black mothers and college athletics recruitment is that the media and popular press have provided a limited and primarily negative depiction of Black mothers and their role throughout the recruitment process. These narratives have been constructed mostly by white men, and Black mothers have not been included to provide their own narratives concerning their experiences in this context.

As a Black mother with a son who participates in sports, I was able to connect with my participants in a way that may not have been possible if I was not Black, a mother, or a “sports mom.” I must also acknowledge that having a son who participates and has been successful in sports to the point that he has been “recruited” to join youth leagues has had an impact on my thoughts about experiencing “athletic recruitment” as a Black mother. I firmly believe that my values and assumptions strengthen my research; however, I do recognize that my unique positionality influences areas of my research. I used rigorous and appropriate research methods to enhance the trustworthiness and quality of my research. As Johnson-Bailey (2004) has stated:

There is an awareness that the lives of women of color are usually invisible in many academic arenas and when they are presented they are ‘often ensconced in sensationalism and stereotype’ therefore feminists who work with narratives have the responsibility to accurately and sensitively represent women of color. (p. 129)

This is the goal of my research: to provide women of color with the opportunity to assist in the co-construction of their personal narratives and to represent them in the academic arena.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three provided an overview of the methodological process and methods of this study. This narrative inquiry is designed to provide an exploration into the experiences of Black mothers throughout their sons’ college recruitment process. This chapter details the research design, participants and sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The theoretical approach, combined with data collection and analytical methods, enhanced the findings and implications. My assumptions and values have also been identified as a way to address potential bias associated with the current study.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruiting process of their sons. The six Black mothers in this study were selected using purposeful sampling in conjunction with network and snowball sampling. All participants are the biological mother of a sons recruited to play college football who accepted a scholarship to participate in NCAA Division I. The interviews ranged from 1 hour to 4.5 hours and were conducted over a five-month period of time due to the required travel to meet them and the coordinating of schedules. All interviews were sent out for transcription after the conclusion of the individual interviews.

Participant narratives were developed using interview data, hand-written fields notes, and audio-recorded field notes. Upon completion, the participants were provided with a copy of their narratives. Participant narratives were constructed and are displayed individually within this chapter. Previous studies on Black women, mothers in particular, often times do not account for their individual experiences or stories. Each mother's story is written in the form of six individual narratives for better understanding of how each of them individually experienced the college football recruitment process. While each individual narrative allows for a more in depth understanding of each participant's experiences, the participant narratives also contribute to a larger collective discussion of Black mother's experiences in college football recruiting.

This chapter addresses the first research question that guided the study: What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process? Within the chapter I

present a description of how I met each mother, the interview setting, and then I share each mother's narrative. The narratives include details of each participant's experiences throughout her son's college athletic recruitment process and includes excerpts that provide insight into her knowledge of and involvement in the recruitment process.

Profile Chart

Each participant shared her unique experiences throughout the college football recruitment process. Below is a demographic chart depicting general information to help further introduce each participant.

	Marital Status	Number of Children	Football Conference	Residence	Highest Level of Education	Athletic Participation
Tate	Married	2	Non Power 5	South	Ph.D.	Y (high school)
Anya	Widow/Single	1	Non Power 5	South	B.S.	Y (high school)
Lola	Married	2	Non Power 5	Midwest	Pursuing B.S.	N
Wynn	Divorced/Single	3	Power 5	South	Pursuing B.A.	Y (high school)
Miah	Married	2	Power 5	South	Pursuing B.S.	N
Yoni	Married	2	Power 5	South	High School Diploma	N

Tate

I met Tate through a mutual friend when I first started graduate school. Tate had a young son who played football, and she was looking for some advice on how to get him recruited by college coaches. We met for coffee one day to discuss a few strategies she and her family could implement, and from that point on, we remained in close contact with one another throughout her son's high school years. I reached out to her to ask if she would be willing to participate in my research study and share her experiences throughout her son's recruitment process. She happily agreed and expressed her excitement that this particular topic was being studied.

Within a week of reaching out, Tate and I met for her interview. We originally planned to conduct the interview at her house; however, upon arrival, she notified me that she had lost an important item while shopping earlier and needed to retrieve it. She asked if I would share the 45-minute ride with her and conduct the interview in route. I agreed and gathered the materials I needed to record it and to take notes.

Tate is a short woman with an infectious smile. When she came out of the house to meet me, she had on jeans, an oversized t-shirt, and a pair of Nike tennis shoes. Her hair was pulled up in a curly bun, and her glasses rested on the edge of her nose. Although she looked a bit rattled as a result of having to return to the store, her high energy and positive attitude were evident. She cleared the front seat of her car and invited me to get in. Her midsize SUV had plenty of room for my recorder on the console between us. There was also room to open my notebook to take notes as she spoke. After testing to make sure the recorder picked up both of our voices and there was minimal background noise, we set forth to conduct the interview and retrieve her lost item.

Tate's Narrative

Tate grew up in what she calls "a sports family." She is the fourth child of six and the oldest girl. She explained that playing sports was a hobby for her and her siblings and just one of the things they did to stay busy in the rural south. She participated in multiple sports, but said she never played well. Tate's older brother is the executive director of a state high school athletic association, and her youngest sister played college basketball. Sports participation was something she knew would be a part of her two sons' lives, but it was not until the summer before her oldest son's senior year of high school that she realized he was going to have a real opportunity to play football in college.

Both of Tate's sons participate in sports. One plays football and the other plays basketball. She and her husband have been married for over 15 years. When her oldest son was entering high school, Tate and her family moved from their hometown for her pursuit of a graduate degree. Uprooting her children was difficult for Tate, as she had always lived in the same town as her family. Although her husband relocated with her, Tate describes him as "mostly absent" from their children's lives, particularly their extracurricular activities. As a result of his absence, Tate found herself even more involved throughout their son's college football recruitment process.

When discussing her overall experience throughout the recruitment process, Tate said her son's coaches did not actively help get him recruited and were not supportive of him playing at the next level. She felt it was her responsibility as his mother to help him, so, as she stated, "I started his recruitment process." Tate and her son created a highlight video of his best football plays along with a personal website and sent those materials out to college coaches at a number of schools. In addition to sending out materials, she took her son to football camps across the country, often times inviting her son's teammates to attend as well.

As previously mentioned, Tate was not a college student-athlete, so she relied on a host of outside resources to help inform her as she navigated the recruitment process. Her oldest nephew was recruited to play Division I college football, and she was able to reflect on her involvement with his recruitment process to guide her as she helped her own son. Tate's father and brother were the first people to talk to her about her son playing college football. After watching his grandson play high school football for the very first time-in the 10th grade, Tate's father told her she should get some tapes together to send out because he had potential to play college football. It was with the help of her brother, who had successfully navigated the

recruitment process with his own son, that Tate was able to get her son on the radar of college football coaches.

In addition to using her brother as a resource, she also relied on friends who worked in the sports industry and the Internet. Tate recalled using the Internet to search for seminars and webinars that provided information about the recruitment process and what parents can do to get their son recruited to college for sports. She found multiple sites and resources; however, many of them required payment to access full services. These were the sites Tate found the least helpful throughout the recruitment process.

The recruitment process began during her son's junior year of high school when he received his first letter from a college coach expressing interest in him as a player.

My son has always been told he was really good in sports. But when we moved here, he wasn't getting recruited... Once he got to 10th grade, things took a turn for him, and he started to develop his skills as a player within his specific position...He says it was my honesty about his performance is what helped him work harder.

Tate felt her son was starting to improve as a football player, but she often stressed to him that playing football in college was not a guarantee, so he needed to work just as hard academically. When asked what it meant to her to have her son be recruited to play college football, she stated, "It's exhilarating, and it makes me proud. I am a sport fanatic, but him being recruited didn't mean a whole lot. I was more concerned with him going to school--getting into college."

The summer before her son's junior year, Tate had a job opportunity that required her to travel out of state for a full month, leaving her husband and sons behind. During that summer, her son's high school hired a new football coach. Tate found out that the new coaches had been taking many of her son's teammates to summer football camps, but had not invited him to any of

the camps. Tate felt responsible for his missed opportunity for exposure at the various camps where college coaches often attend to recruit and evaluate high school players. As a result, she spent much of his junior year of high school contacting coaches and sending out more materials.

Her efforts paid off, and coaches sent letters expressing interest in him; they also began attending her son's high school games to watch him play. However, by the conclusion of his junior year, he still did not have any scholarship offers. That did not deter Tate from taking her son on unofficial visits college campuses and sending him to more camps the following summer. She recounted one unofficial campus visit to a Division I school in the Midwest United States:

They wanted him to come for a 2-day event. We watched the spring game, but we were there on Friday also. So they brought them [the recruits] to the stadium where they had put down this brand new turf. And most of these guys, unless they grew up in a big college area, you know, this was a pretty big stadium to them. So, they rolled the highlights of the previous season...the highlight tapes included, like, the guys in the room. So we were watching the tape, and then I saw my son run and just lay somebody out, and I'm like, THAT'S YOU! THAT'S YOU OUT THERE! They treated you like a superstar. And to be honest with you, you could overlook some of the other things. Like, that they didn't graduate as many kids as some of the other universities--it was like smoke and mirrors.

At the end of the summer, just weeks before the start of his senior year, Tate's son injured his left knee during practice. His recovery was quick, and he played the first five games of his senior year, but he sustained a season ending injury on his right knee. Tate explained:

He had all of these letters of people who were telling him, hey, we're interested in you. And then he tore his ACL, and he stopped receiving letters. I mean, it was-everything

came to a halt. That was it. We had two colleges that stuck around out of all of those schools. A lot of HBCU's [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] really started contacting him. It was like, well, we know the top Division I schools aren't going to try anymore...so maybe we will get him.

Tate's son was ultimately offered a scholarship to one Division I university, and that came after his injury. The coaches at that university watched his highlight tape and saw him play in person twice. They still felt that once he recovered, he would be a great addition to their team. One of the highlights of the recruitment process came on the morning of her son's knee surgery, when she received a phone call from one of the coaches of the university that offered her son a scholarship. She related:

They called me the morning of his surgery. They knew we had to be up there at 6 o'clock. I received a call around 6:15. Wasn't even his position coach, but one of the coaches called me just to say I know that surgery day is today. Just wanted to let you know that we're all praying for a speedy and healthy recovery, and call us when he wakes up and if you need anything. Tell him that we're praying for him, and Godspeed and good luck...I was sold on them after that... They cared. And so, it was a beautiful process with them.

After that experience, Tate and her son decided he would commit and attend to play Division I football at that university. He spent the majority of his senior year rehabilitating, and once the season ended, the family looked forward to National Signing Day and his public proclamation of intent to attend Southeastern United States University. Tate described the morning of National Signing Day:

The earliest you could send in a NLI, is 7 o'clock in the morning. So, we signed it at 7 o'clock. Scanned it and had it emailed to them by 7:03. My son woke me up at 6 o'clock.

By the time we got to the high school, which his signing day was scheduled for 8 o'clock in the morning. We had already spoken with the coaches. We went to the high school, and there were only 2 major high schools in our county--my son's high school and their rival; there were only 2 boys who signed to play to football on the next level. My son was the only one in the county to sign to a D1 school. When we got there, they had a couple of refreshments. And they just had a table. National signing day for football was also the same day for soccer. We had a young lady who received a full scholarship for soccer, so she went first. Next, my son's coaches said some things about him. I was rolling my eyes at the thought of his head coach saying anything about him. I kept on telling myself, do not scream and tell him, "BUT YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!" His position coach said some really beautiful stuff about him. He really spoke to who my son is as a young man, as an athlete, a student athlete. And just how much he's persevered. Once he said that, we signed. He signed, did his interviews, took his pictures, he looked at me and said, "Hey, mom, the other guy who signed, which is in the next county over, about 30 minutes from here, he's in another school and he signed to the same college that I'm going to. I'm about to go watch his signing and give him some support." So everyone talked about how my son crossed county lines to go support the rival. It was a great story.

Tate's experiences throughout her son's recruitment process resulted in a closer relationship with her son. One of the challenges she faced as mother going through the process was that of coaches not taking her seriously or treating her with condescension. There were times she felt that she was handled differently than the fathers or the two parent households. As a result of feeling ignored and not having the support of her son's high school coaches, she determined to work hard at making sure her son was afforded the opportunity to play college football:

I think, as a parent, when your child has a dream and you see them working hard to accomplish that dream or that goal--I think that as a parent, it is your duty, it's your duty.

I actually look at it as a privilege. But I found that's it my duty to help my son accomplish those goals. I mean, you didn't ask to be here. You didn't ask to move. None of this you asked for, and I see you working hard, and this is what you want to do.

That perspective guided her involvement in the college football recruitment process and kept her motivated to do all she could to help her son become a college student-athlete.

Anya

I was introduced to Anya by the college football coach who recruited her son. Her son's coach and I have been friends for a number of years and have also worked together in the past. Upon learning about my research study, he offered to share my participant recruitment materials with her. Anya reached out to me via email to express her interest in participating, and from there, I contacted her over the phone to discuss further details and coordinate our interview.

Agreeing on a meeting time and place was difficult because Anya is a single mother who works full-time and has very little free time for outside commitments. She asked if I would be willing to meet her at her job for the interview because that would not require her to interrupt her other commitments. She explained that her job had multiple conference rooms that we could use; I agreed, and one afternoon, I drove to her office to meet.

Anya's job was on the 8th floor, in one of two large buildings in the downtown area of a major metropolitan city. I arrived early to the interview because I anticipated the challenge of finding parking and navigating the two towers to find her. Once I entered, the security guard at the front desk stopped me and asked me to check in. I provided my name and contact information and to identify my contact. I called to notify her I was waiting downstairs.

As I waited approximately 10 minutes in the lobby, I observed numerous professionals entering and exiting. Everyone used identification cards to access the offices and elevators. Anya and I had not met before, so I focused on each person stepping from the elevator, so when she walked out, she saw me standing where we agreed I would be.

As she came through the elevator doors, she immediately waved at me. As she approached, I noticed how tall she was next to me. In addition to being a tall woman, she had on 3-inch black high heels that matched her black business slacks. She gave me a hug and said how excited she was that I had come to meet with her. She directed me to the elevator and I followed to her office.

Our meeting was around her lunch break, and while I expected to be limited to one hour to meet, she informed me that she had flexibility with her schedule and that we had as much time as we needed. We entered her office space, and to the left, there were about 40 cubicles in a large open area. To the right were five conference rooms. Very few of her coworkers were there, so we settled on a conference space that was unlocked with the lights on.

While I set up my equipment for recording, Anya took a few bites of her salad and offered me something to drink. I declined and proceeded to provide her with more details about my study and explained the anticipated format of the interview. Her positive energy set the tone for the interview, and after a few minutes of small talk about my drive, I began recording.

Anya's Narrative

Anya and her two brothers were raised by their grandparents in the Northeast United States, where, she believes, sports meant everything to their family. The home she grew up in was also shared with her uncle, just a few years older than her. Anya recalled that every day in their home included some sort of sports activity going on or one on television. Her grandparents

were avid baseball watchers, and her brothers both played basketball. She often followed them around and tried basketball, but was not very good. Instead, she ran track and was a cheerleader in high school.

Anya attended college near her hometown, and upon graduation, she moved to the Southern United States to be closer to her biological mother. It was at this time she found out she was pregnant with her son, her only child. Anya recalled growing up in an urban setting and considered herself to have lived a “street life.” Moving to the south to get away from that lifestyle was something she felt was necessary for her as a new mother.

Anya and her husband were married after their son was born; however, her husband unexpectedly died when their son was in the 8th grade. Both of her brothers stepped up to fill the void in her son’s life. This is when Anya believes her son became more seriously focused on sports. She believes sports participation helped him mature as he grew into a young man through high school. She credits her own involvement as well as his uncles and coaches for helping him grow into a better athlete and student.

As Anya reflected back on the recruitment process, she said she loved every minute of it because it was fun and exciting. She felt “deep down inside” that her son had the ability to be successful in football. While a few of her son’s high school coaches helped with the recruitment process, Anya did not feel they did all they could to promote the players on her son’s team. She felt it was her responsibility to get as much information as possible. And she did not want to rely on his coaches to do all of the work. “We mostly did everything. We used a website to compile all of his best plays. He worked on that himself and added music to it and everything.” Anya’s best friend went through the college recruitment process with her own son and shared advice

about contacting coaches. On Sunday evenings, Anya and her son sat at the kitchen table and mailed his materials:

Each Sunday, we had our time period. We had our SAT period, and we had our time period where for 2 hours, he and I would just send college intent letters. You just send the stuff out. Send your video out. And so, after we got all the master letters, we would just re-send over and over. We did that every single Sunday. Every single Sunday. We sent a letter of intent to every Division 1 A. Then once we started, we decided we need to open the playing field. So we started the double A and started doing division 2.

Although Anya and her son did most of the work in the beginning of the recruitment process, there were many people who served as a support system for Anya throughout. She often shared stories of campus visits, coach's calls, or letters from different universities with her coworkers. Her coworkers asked how the recruitment process was going for them. There were many of her male coworkers to whom she reached out for feedback concerning her son's athletic ability. She explained:

We're mothers. You know. I know stuff about sports, but I don't know every single thing. I got pointers. I got tips. They would watch the team and have me tell him to do this or that. They would say he should try this on the defensive side of the ball. They would pull up videos for me to show him at home.

Other sources of information for navigating the process included her son's head coach and his defensive position coach. His defensive coach was the most helpful in telling her what she should be doing to help her son get to the next level in football. One night, his coach called and shared his plan for her son to switch positions on the football field so he could get more exposure and increase the possibility of recruitment. Although they were a bit apprehensive, she

trusted that he wanted the same thing for her son that she did. The Internet also served as a source of information for Anya and her son:

The Internet was my best friend. When I didn't know something, I went straight to the Internet. I was asking, what should I do? What should I sign up for? There were recruiting services charging thousands of dollars to help, too. I looked for information that was free. I even went online to find out what a letter of intent looked like, and I found a template. The funniest thing I found on there was a forum on what to cook for coaches when they come visit your house. Like what you should serve them. But seriously, I found out how to contact coaches, how to put up videos of yourself, and how to create sports profiles so coaches could find out who you were.

The recruitment process began for Anya and her son during his junior year of high school. During this time, coaches visited his high school and called his home, and the local newspapers were featuring him in their weekly stories. Anya described her feelings of excitement each time she saw her son's picture in the newspaper. Once they received communication from college coaches, Anya scheduled unofficial visits to all of the schools her son wanted to visit. As she reflected back on that time, she stated that many of the schools they visited were "out of his reach" and that they should have focused on more of the mid-major, lower Division I schools.

Anya's son attended a college football fair with his team, and it was at this fair where he met the coaches from the school that offered him one of his three Division I scholarships. The school, located only five hours from his home, became one of his top choices. Anya explained that the coaches from the school came to visit their home within one week of meeting her son. From there, the coaches came to visit three more times, even attending one of his basketball

games. One of the challenges throughout the recruitment process for Anya was that her son was set on attending a major Division I university; however, those schools were not offering him any scholarships for football. She felt if her son had more exposure earlier in his high school football career, he could have drawn more interest from the “bigger Division I” schools.

She recalled the trip they took to a Midwest institution for one of her son’s five official visits:

We drove to the campus because it was 5 hours, and I like to see where we going. Where you gonna be. I don't wanna get off no plane and then don't have access to ride around. Once we got there, they treat you really well. They all come out on the van like a hijack squad with all their shirts on. Probably about 8 different coaches, so you're overwhelmed a little bit. The parents get their own hotel room. They feed you breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They drive you around. You don't even have to go in your car no more. Once they arrived at campus on Friday evening, they went to dinner and were able to meet some of the players on the team. Each recruit was partnered with an upperclassman who served as host for the duration of the visit. The parents stayed at a local hotel while the players were free to stay with their hosts on campus or at their local apartments. On Saturday, the players and their families gathered for a campus tour. After the tour, Anya, her son, and the other recruits’ families met with the academic counselors, the tutors, and “the people who help design their class schedules.” Throughout the campus visit, Anya was more focused on things outside of football:

He had his folder with all the classes he would have to take--I mean, very thorough. I really appreciated that part because that was more my focus. I didn't wanna go see the gym. Some parents, that excites them. I'm glad that he's here. I'm glad that you want him here. But what else is he gonna be doin' while he's here? I was very pleased to meet the

tutors. They have a counselor who meets with them maybe twice a week. I was pleased with how much help they get.

The coaches and their families joined the group for dinner on Saturday night. The next morning, each player had an individual meeting with the team's head coach. During this meeting, the head coach told Anya what his plans were for her son. He offered him a scholarship and asked if he was ready to "sign with them." They were given the opportunity to decide at that moment, but they chose to wait so they could discuss it as a family after they left campus.

As Anya and her son headed to the car, Anya stopped a group of students to ask them what student life was like on campus. Anya shared:

I made sure that I stopped all black students, 'cause there wasn't that many to find. I asked how they were doing and let them know my son was thinking about going to the school. I asked, 'What is life like on campus? Is it racist?' You know, I really asked them questions.

Anya believed the students she stopped would be honest about their experiences on campus, and she knew the football staff was not going to share bad details because they wanted to "promote their school." This was one main reason why she asked questions outside of the structured football visit.

Anya's son did not make his final decision concerning his football scholarship offer until one week prior to National Signing Day. Her son was waiting for an offer from a larger Division I institution in North Carolina. That offer did not come, and it was very late in the recruitment process, so he decided to accept the scholarship offer at the Midwest institution. Anya described the morning of National Signing Day:

They made it big. It was really exciting, 'cause you can decorate their locker. You can decorate their car. They have a greet space for you with some little breakfast type items, and then you go into the assembly. Each player can invite 4 of their classmates, their friends. Mostly it's just your parents or any family members that wanted to come. They [the signees] have to give a speech. Once they talk about each player, what school they have been offered or, what school that they are signing with, they bring the parent on the stage and they take pictures and they have like this table and it's decorated. They couldn't put the college stuff out. Now the kid they can wear the colors of the school they're gonna sign. They can have a hat of that, but they couldn't decorate the table. And then they bring them up acting as if they were actually signing their letter, but it's a blank piece of paper. And you take pictures 'cause you got the papers there and things like that. You just take pictures, and then they have a brief reception for the parents and the students. It gives them the feeling like they were on TV, signing a real contract. But the actual contract, um, they had to forward it to us early that morning. And they have to get it faxed back to the coaches by a certain time; I don't know if it was 9:00 a.m., but I know he had to hurry up and go to the school so his coach could sign off and then send it that.

As we closed out our interview, Anya told me what the recruitment process experience was like without her husband and what she would have done differently if given the opportunity. She did not think the coaches took the mothers seriously. The first thing many coaches asked was where her son's father was. That made Anya feel as though she was "put on the back burner" or "less than" because there was no husband or father around. She described how it made her feel:

You could just tell that perception is there. I am wanting to talk to the father of this kid. Uncle of this kid. The brother of this kid. I don't wanna talk to the mama. I think they think a lot of the mothers are too emotional...But, I do believe when it's just a single mother--sometimes I don't think they take you as seriously, so they try to cater the conversation to the athlete. It's kinda like they move away from you, and they just start talking directly to him. And see, I'm that one that's gonna jump in. 'Cause see, that's my son.

This conversation led us to discuss one of her challenges throughout the recruitment process. Anya encountered times when she spoke with the fathers at her son's sporting events, asking questions about recruiting, and the men's wives would express their concern for "how much" she was talking to their husbands. She shared this story:

I've had this happen to me a couple of times. 'You talkin' too much to my man.' I'm just tryin' to get educated. Then that closes that door, you know, that you could've had open to learn more about what you should be doing to get your son recruited. Once I was askin' a guy all these questions. I need somebody to break this down for me because I was confused. And when that lady came to that field, I asked him, 'Why did you stop talking to me'? I just asked because he was always out there. I never saw the mom. And he was like, 'cause my wife felt like we were talking too much.' I just wanted to bring that up because it has happened so many times. And it's just like, wow, all I was looking for was a little bit of direction.

There were times throughout the recruitment process when Anya wished they had reached out to coaches sooner and that her son specialized in one sport instead of being a multiple sport athlete. "I wished I would've educated myself much earlier and would've talked to

more coaches,” was what she said when asked if there was anything else she would have done differently. She ended our conversation by stating:

Cause I was thinking the coaches, they're gonna do all that. We don't really have to worry about much. Maybe send some videos and things. I didn't know that you really gotta go out there and sell your kid. You really have to put in more time and effort.

Lola

Lola and I were introduced by the college football coach who recruited her son. We worked together for two years. He coached Division 1 at five different institutions. He forwarded my participant recruitment materials to Lola, and she called me one evening to express her interest in participating. We spoke for 30 minutes about the study, its goals, and why I chose to pursue this particular research topic. During our discussion, she told me that no one had ever asked her about her experiences throughout her son’s recruitment process, but that they asked her husband. Her son was preparing to enter his final year of college and was on schedule to graduate in December, right at the end of his last football season. She was happy to reflect on the recruitment process and to share her experiences with me. At that point, we discussed a meeting time and place.

Lola lives in the Midwest United States, and she invited me to her home for the interview. Due to the distance necessary for travel and her personal family schedule, meeting with her required a mutually coordinated meeting time. We selected a time approximately three weeks from our initial conversation, when I would be traveling in her area. Prior to my trip, Lola contacted me to reschedule our meeting because of an unexpected family obligation. We rescheduled our meeting two weeks after the originally scheduled interview.

I arrived at Lola's house early in the afternoon on the day of our interview. I arrived and saw four people sitting on the front porch. As I approached, Lola stood up and walked towards me, extending her arms to hug me. She had on a comfortable looking Black sundress and was barefoot. She introduced me to the people on the front porch: her son, her husband and her son's friend from high school who was home for summer break. She then welcomed me inside.

The small ranch style family home was cozy. Lola's home had three bedrooms along the hallway; one room belonged to her and her husband, one to her daughter, and the other was her son's room. Pictures of her son and daughter lined the hallway, along with one large picture of her immediate family. We sat in the living room, set apart from the kitchen by a two-sided fireplace. I placed my recorder on the edge of the couch Lola occupied, and we began the interview.

Lola's Narrative

Lola is a married mother of two children, one son and one daughter. She and her husband have been together for 30 years, married for 26. She recently reenrolled in college to complete her bachelor's degree in Business Administration. With both children out of the house and her husband just a few years away from retiring, Lola felt this was a good time to "go ahead and stay focused and get it done." She admitted that until she was married and had mothered a son, she was not into sports. Her son's youth sport participation that taught her about sports.

Although she did not grow up placing much value on sports, once her son started playing sports at the age of 7, sports became a way to bring them together as a family. She said:

I guess with us being there with him, that just brought our family together, you know, and learning the sports, it was exciting to me...I think just him just seeing us there supporting him was a big deal to him because there was a lot of kids whose parents wasn't there.

Lola's family attended all of her son's games in every sport he played when he was younger.

Once he went to college, the whole family was not always able to travel to all of his games; however, Lola stated that even if everyone could not go to his college games, she went by herself or with her mother. The college her son chose to attend to play college football is only a two-hour drive from her home.

Lola always felt in her heart that her son would play college football. His doing so was emotional for her because she saw how hard he worked, and she prayed that it would happen for him. She expressed how proud of him she was for "being able to show his talent." When his high school coaches started telling her and her family how good her son was, she really believed it would become a reality. At the end of his high school sophomore year, Lola and her family decided he needed to transfer to a different high school, a school that put more focus on developing their athletes and had more connections to college coaches. Lola stated:

His recruiting picked up once he transferred. His previous school did not have relationships with as many college coaches as the school he transferred to. They didn't push all of the athletes to be their best, they just focused on a few of the kids.

Feelings of excitement and nervousness overwhelmed Lola throughout much of the recruitment process. She was thrilled that her son was playing college football, but she felt burdened by the idea that they needed to "pick what school is best for him, his football career, and his future." There were so many different schools, coaches and personalities involved in the recruitment process, there were times when Lola let her husband handle everything. She attended every campus visit with her son, except one she missed to take her daughter across the country. She described her husband's involvement on campus visits:

When we did the visits, I allowed him to do mostly all the talking because I--he knew more than what I did anyways. If I had a question, I would chime in here and there...If it was something that I wasn't clear or I wasn't feeling comfortable with, then I would ask a question, too. But he did mostly all the talking.

In addition to her husband's help, the parents and football coaches at her son's high school were instrumental in helping them navigate the process. All of her son's closest friends went to college on a football scholarship and through the recruitment process at the same time he did. As a result, many parents stayed in contact with one another. Lola said, "A lot of the mothers, they were telling us what to watch for, questions to ask. So that's who I pretty much kept in contact with throughout this whole process of him picking and choosing what school to go to."

Lola and her husband kept every letter their son received from college football programs. When he received his first letter, they put it in a folder and ultimately created a binder to hold all of the letters. Coaches started to visit their son at school, attend his games, and make home visits to meet with them. She stated:

We got letters at our home and at my mother's home. A lot of letters. The high school coach would keep us informed. He would communicate with us of what colleges was interested in him. Even the school counselor at his high school was involved. The phone calls, I didn't answer them. My husband would answer the phone calls if a coach or somebody wanted to talk to him.

Overall, this was a positive experience for Lola, with the exception of one coach who came to visit and was "very arrogant." Lola said, "He wanted an answer right then and you know, and to me, I was like, let us, you know, have time to discuss this as a family and we'll get

back with you. And he wasn't trying to hear it.” Lola and her husband left it up to their son to make the final decision. She explained that as his parents, they told him how they felt about each of the schools, but ultimately, it was going to be his choice, and they would be support it.

Lola shared the details of her son’s official visit to the university where he signed and attended college:

We drove there. We got there in the evening. They met us. They had a whole agenda for us. We met at a hotel. One of the coaches came and met with us. They took us somewhere for dinner, and that's when all the coaches was [sic] there. We went to the pizza place. And that's when we all interact and got to meet everybody and all the coaches. We wasn't [sic] really talking about football then. Everybody is just meeting each other. The next day we met for breakfast. They took us around the campus. We went around the campus. They showed us the football field. They showed us the facility and all that kinda stuff and then we, after that, we met for lunch. I know we all met in one room, and they talked told us about the program. And then opened questions--did we have any questions? That was at lunch on Saturday 'cause we ended up meeting with one of the guys from academics and talking. I think he even picked some of his classes that day. He stayed with the host most of that weekend. We left on a Sunday. We had breakfast, met with the coaches before we left for a quick minute. They had already offered him before we went on the visit. They were one of the only schools that didn't pressure him to commit. We talked to the coach, and he let us know that he planned to redshirt him. He was up-front. Real honest. We felt like other schools were trying to tell us what we wanted to hear. We went on one more visit after that. On the way home from the last visit, he told us he wanted to attend Midwest University.

When Lola's son informed his parents that he wanted to attend the university they wanted him to attend, they were relieved and once again excited. Lola liked everything about the university from the first moment they contacted her son. The coaches made her feel comfortable, and she liked how they did not pressure her son to sign with them. The coaches at the school stressed the importance of academics and provided evidence of how they support their athletes academically. Because of her son's "questionable" academic effort, Lola was happy this would be support he would receive. She said, "They made me feel at home, and that is why I was so pleased with his final decision."

Lola's family was not prepared for what happened on National Signing Day in her son's senior year. They had looked forward to the ceremony because they had seen other young men at her son's high school participate. This day was also special for them because so many of her son's friends were scheduled to sign with multiple major Division I institutions. But "mother nature had other plans." Lola detailed the events of that day:

Well, that day we-they had a schedule but we had a big ol' storm. It was a blizzard that day. They didn't get to have it. We just drove over to his school because had to sign and send the letter. It was a blizzard, and there was no school. I was looking forward to it [Signing Day] 'cause I wanted to see the whole process of them, you know, signing. So not being able to see it was kinda, but, hey. Mother nature. We didn't get to have the ceremony. We got the letter to them, and that was important. Sign that letter and get that fax over to them. That was all we did that day. I was disappointed.

At the time of the interview, Lola's son was preparing to enter his last season of football at his university, and I asked how she felt about the recruitment process now that he was four years into his college football career. She answered, "They have really done their part. What they

promised what they would for him, they had kept their promise. They have really looked out for him through this whole time so I wouldn't change anything.”

Wynn

Wynn and I met 8 years ago when her oldest son was in college. We lost touch over the years; however, when her son heard about my research, he encouraged her to see whether she met the participant criteria. Her other two sons both went on to play college football, just like their older brother. Just a few years removed from her youngest son's commitment to a major Division I university in the Northeast United States, Wynn asked if she could participate in the research study. Once it was determined that she met the criteria, we met for the interview.

Meeting with Wynn in her new hometown required another trip out of state. We coordinated a meeting time that allowed me to drive to her home, conduct the interview, and drive back the same day. During our scheduling conversation, she asked if I would send her the interview questions in advance because she wanted to be prepared. I shared the interview protocol with her, but reminded her that throughout our interview that I might ask probing follow-up questions to learn more about her experiences.

On the day of our interview, I met Wynn at her temporary home, located about a mile from her new job. Wynn recently relocated from the Northeast United States to the Southeast United States in an effort to restart her life in a new environment. She lived alone and was saving up money to buy a house in the area.

As I approached her home, she came out to greet me. Wynn has a smile and presence that beams. She had on a bright yellow t-shirt and jean shorts. She did not step outside because she wasn't wearing shoes. She hugged me, apologized in advance for her “tiny little place,” and welcomed me in. She offered me a seat on a small couch in her one-bedroom efficiency

apartment. Wynn poured a cup of tea and came to sit near me. She explained that she had looked over the interview questions, they had given her a chance to reflect over her life as a “sports mom,” and that she was ready to share her story. I turned on my recorder and began the interview.

Wynn’s Narrative

Wynn is a divorced mother of three sons and grandmother of five. She comes from a large family and is the third of six children, three boys and three girls. Wynn was raised by her godparents in the Northeastern United States. Growing up, all three of her brothers played football, the youngest, professionally for a brief stint. Wynn described herself as into athletics, but not “the most athletic” person. She ran track and was a cheerleader in high school. Although she did not participate, baseball was and is her favorite sport.

Immediately after high school, Wynn entered the military, where she met her ex-husband and where she felt her life “started.” Wynn gave birth to three sons within four years, and throughout our interview, she often referenced the close bond her sons formed through being so close in age. Wynn and her ex-husband divorced when their boys were in elementary school. She relied on her family to help with her sons. She stated, “My family, my sisters, my mother, my brothers, uncles, close uncles, whatever--they were the ones that gave the massive support to my boys.” It was difficult for Wynn to leave her boys behind as she fulfilled her service to the Navy, but at that time, she had no other options.

Wynn shared that her own challenging childhood shaped the type of mother she aspired to be. She explained:

Who I am as their parent, what I got from me growing up, is the support that I did not receive through the things that I wanted to do in life. What I needed. As a parent, I had to

make sure I gave it to my children. I needed to make sure that academically and in life in general, my kids were successful.

Once out of the military, Wynn attempted to pursue her college degree. Life became too busy to continue pursuing her own personal educational goals. She believed the time she spent studying and going to school was taking away from her doing things with her children. She never completed her degree, and now, almost 30 years later, she is back in school to finish. With her grandchildren watching her, Wynn feels obligated to show them they can accomplish their goals no matter how long it takes.

When it came to sports, Wynn said her brothers tried to get her to put her sons in football at a young age, but she wanted them to play baseball. She first introduced baseball to her boys when they were just old enough to play t-ball. She was highly involved, attending every practice. She volunteered as the team mom, moved on to become a coach, and then to being an umpire. As her boys grew older, she subsequently felt her “place” was to be in the stands supporting instead of out on the field, “calling my sons out at the base.”

Wynn’s sons went from playing baseball to basketball and eventually, football. Once her oldest son started playing football in middle school, her younger two sons wanted to do the same. Over the course of their seasons, Wynn had to attend multiple games because they were not often placed on the same teams. There was one year in high school when all three of her boys played on the varsity team together. It was the first time they were ever on the same team. All three of Wynn’s sons went on to graduate from high school and play college football.

Having come from a “sports family,” I asked Wynn what role sports plays in their lives. She said sports is the way their family comes together, and it made her relationship with her boys stronger. Wynn shared that during every high school and college football season was when her

family was the closest. No matter what was happening, they always came together as one to support the boys playing football.

Wynn and I focused on the college recruitment process of her youngest son. Her middle son did not attend a Division I institution for football; instead, he started at a junior college. Her oldest son did accept a scholarship offer to a Division I institution; however, Wynn was minimally involved in this recruitment process. Her only involvement was meeting with the head coaches who came to visit her home or job. When it came time for her youngest son to go through this process, she wanted to be as involved as possible, but she acknowledged that her oldest son took the lead in guiding his youngest brother through the decision making process.

The indirect benefit of having two older brothers who played college football was that many of the coaches who were interested in Wynn's youngest son already had a relationship with the family and with his high school coaches. This made the start of the recruitment process a little blurry for Wynn. The NCAA rules restrict coaches from contacting players prior to the junior year of high school, but athletes and their families can reach out to coaches. Having the help of her older son allowed for their family to initiate contact with coaches who were already familiar with her two older sons.

Wynn said:

The whole recruitment process was fun for me. Fun to see the coaches want to travel to us from all over the country, just to sit and meet with me and talk with me and tell me how important it was for my son to be on this team," said Wynn. Everything Wynn needed to know she asked her oldest son because he had experienced the recruitment process and the college football experience first-hand. Her oldest son was involved in sending film, contacting coaches, and making sure they were doing their part to "get him

noticed.” Wynn explained that all she had to do in the beginning was “sit back and observe.

Although Wynn knew when her son was a little boy that he was athletically talented, it did not become real to her that her son would be playing college football until he signed his letter of intent. She felt he was passionate about sports, but did not believe that he really loved it. Unlike his brothers, he did not talk about football and sports all the time. She was unsure whether he really wanted to play football in college.

Wynn traveled to one school with her son for an official visit. As she stated, “and that’s all I needed to go on.” The rest of the visits he took, unofficial and official, were accompanied by his older brother. Wynn described what that one campus visit was like:

They take you out there as a parent. They’ll sit down, they’ll ride you around and take you out to eat. Then after they take you out to eat, they send you up to your hotel room, and they come get your son, and you don’t see no more of nobody or nothin’ until the next day. Then the next day they send you to a bunch of meetings. You get to meet a lot of important people. They told me how great my son was and how lucky they would be to have him on their team. They just tried to make us all feel really special.

Although Wynn’s oldest son was heavily involved in his brother’s recruitment process, Wynn felt it was still important that coaches “keep her in the loop.” There were only two coaches out of the three final schools her son considered that continued to communicate with her. One coach from the school, which happened to be the school where her older brother played college football, did not include her when he was recruiting her son. The coach focused on getting her brother to influence his nephew, as opposed to including Wynn in the process. This disappointed Wynn, and her son ultimately chose to eliminate that school from consideration.

Because Wynn was not highly involved in campus visits with her son, I asked her to tell me about the home visits from the coaches. One school from the Northeastern United States visited three times. The head coach came to visit once, the maximum number of home visits permitted. When the assistant coaches came to visit Wynn, they had to meet at her workplace. Wynn explained:

They came to my job and talked to me at my job. I told them if you need to talk to me, you gotta come to where I work 'cause I'm a manager, and I can't miss work or just jump up and come meet you because you are at the school." When she finally spoke with the head coach during a home visit, she was impressed with his philosophy on coaching and focus on family.

By the end of his senior season in high school, Wynn's son narrowed his choice to two schools. He used all five of his official visits even though he was confident in his final two options. Leading up to National Signing Day, he had still not verbally committed anywhere. Wynn told a very interesting story of the events of Signing Day and how they led to her son making his final choice. The night before Signing Day, Wynn called her son to ask if he had made a decision. He said he was still unsure. The advice she gave him was:

...'Did you make a choice yet?' And he says no, Mom, I'm still thinking, and the coaches have been callin' my phone and blowin' my phone up. I said 'This is what I want you to do. Get a piece of paper and fold it in half. Write down the schools that are on your top priority list. On both columns, I need you to write the why's and the why-not's that you wanna go to either one of these schools. And if you come up with more why-not's for one of the other schools, then you know that may not be the choice, that you don't go to that school.'

When they woke up in the morning, he still had not decided. She said they spoke before he went to school, and he said he wanted to be close enough so his family could attend his games, but also wanted a place to make an impact on the field. The problem was, both schools met those basic criteria. Wynn told me the story of National Singing Day:

It still came to that morning, when we sat at that table and I said, ‘Where do you choose?’ He told me he still didn’t know, and that they were both still equal. So that's when the coach, his principal came over to him and he said, ‘Well, do you need to borrow my quarter?’ And he said ‘yes.’ And then he said wherever it lands on heads or tail is where I'm gonna go. When he flipped it, it landed twice; I don't know if it was tails or heads. It landed twice for [Northern University]. He chose [Northern University] for tails and [South University] for heads, and it landed on tails twice. He flipped it one more time, and then he picked up the [Northern University] hat and put it on his head. So, it was the coin toss that made the choice between the two schools, but either one of those schools would've been a great school for him to go to, and he knew that.

Since he had not made a decision before the coin toss and singing ceremony, Wynn and her son had to sign his scholarship paperwork while at the table and fax it to Northern University after the ceremony.

As we finished the interview, Wynn shared a few reflections from the recruitment process that we had not yet discussed. Having observed the recruitment process three different times, Wynn felt that she could have been more involved with all three of her sons. She held negative views about the process, much of which were the result of each of her son’s college playing careers not going as well as she hoped. She told me her current views on the recruitment process were:

Now looking back and reflecting back on how the whole college recruitment thing goes, it's nothing but a big business. They really don't care about your kid as much as you think they do and as much as they say they do. They just need to fill that roster with that most athletic kid.

When I asked her to explain why she felt that way, she said the coaches didn't always follow through on promises made to her sons. While her youngest son played all four years at the institution he chose, both of other sons transferred from their first institution and finished their playing careers at different schools. Wynn wished she had been more influential in their decision making processes. Her philosophy was to "just be supportive and let them choose," but she felt she could have guided them so perhaps they "would have made fewer mistakes along the way" had she been more educated about the process.

Miah

Miah and I were introduced by her son's former high school football coach. Coach Hampton was a former student-athlete with whom I had previously worked. He worked with many high school athletes who have gone on to play college football, and I contacted him when I first began my research. He shared my participant recruitment letter with a few of the mothers of his current and former players. Miah called me within a week of receiving the letter and asked to participate.

Our first phone conversation was an opportunity for me to share more details about my research, and I answered her questions about participating. Over the course of our conversation, she shared the contact information of two other mothers with whom she was very good friends and who were also interested in participating. I learned that Miah was well connected with many

of the other mothers in her area and considered herself to be a mentor to some of the younger mothers with children playing football at her son's former high school.

Initially, all of the mothers wanted to gather together for a group interview at Miah's house. They often met at one another's homes to socialize. Miah explained that each person would interview separately, but because I had to travel a significant distance to her area of the state, she encouraged them to schedule a time and day near hers for convenience. This coordination illustrated Miah's position as leader among the mothers.

I traveled to Miah's home in a small but popular football town in the Southeastern United States. Miah's son went to a high school that had won multiple state championships in football over the past decade. His high school produced an average of three to five Division I college football players each year throughout the same period. Currently, there are a number of NFL players who went to this same high school. It is considered a powerhouse, and the local community is very supportive of the football program.

As I entered Miah's neighborhood, I observed that many of the homes had sports flags hanging in their yards. A large number of the flags represented the high school Miah's son had attended, and the rest represented college sports teams. When I arrived at her house, there was a large flag hanging from her front porch with the logo of the university her son attended to play college football. The mailbox was also adorned with the school logo, and the flowers planted at its base were of school colors. Both cars in Miah's driveway had car clings on the windows portraying the school logo.

I walked to the front door where Miah greeted me and welcomed me into her home. She had on a plain gray t-shirt and a pair of denim capris pants. She led the way to a formal dining room at the front of the house. The hallway to the dining room was lined with family photos and

multiple sports photos of her son, many of which appeared to be from his youth football days.

After offering me a snack and a glass of water, we sat at the dining room table where I placed my notebook and recorder for the interview.

Miah's Narrative

Miah is a married mother of two boys. Miah and her sons' biological father separated when the boys were younger, but once they were older she married her current husband. For a long time, she was a single parent, and she described her sons' participation in sports as "my way to keep my boys engaged." When her boys were little, they lived in a "not-so-great neighborhood," so she worked hard to keep them involved in things that kept them from hang-outs around their home. She says it was an outlet for her as a single parent.

Growing up, Miah did not participate in sports and had no interest in anything other than school. Her first exposure to sport participation was through her children. Her oldest son enjoyed basketball and was a good baseball player, but ultimately quit sports due to a lack of interest. She described a different reaction by her youngest son:

Then of course, for my youngest one, I knew nothing about sports. I was a woman. I put him in football, and apparently, he was good. I didn't know. I just took him to practice, waited until they were done, took him home. Then I put him in basketball, and apparently, he could dribble and shoot. I put him in baseball. He was really good at that. Honestly, there was nothing that I didn't put him in if they were keeping score he was good at.

Miah did not expect much from her kids playing sports because she was using it to "keep them out of the streets." She dedicated her time and resources to keeping them in sports. She explained that when her son was five, she went to every practice, no matter how long it lasted or how many

days per week. She never wanted to like parents who “just dropped their kid off.” Her physical presence from such an early age was something that her son grew to expect all the way through the college recruitment process and into his college football-playing career. She said their bond was strengthened through sports, and “he [now] expects me to be everywhere he is, cheering him on.”

When her children were young, Miah and their biological father started a college fund for them. Going to college was never an issue; she said her expectation was that her boys would attend college. The recruitment process opened her eyes to the possibility that she would not have to spend any of that money on college and that he could use it for other things, like a car or other expenses. She shared:

When they started talking about he could go to college for free because I had no clue about athletic scholarships...once I realized he could go to school for free, I felt like it was my obligation to help the process along, and so I did. Of course, once they came to visit him, he had to have the talent, but I tried to help as much as I could.

Early in the recruitment process, Miah said she went on the Internet to look up every college; “There was no school too big or no school too small.” She and her son filled out athletic questionnaires for 50 to 60 different schools. Miah did not care what school it was; her goal was to “get on their mailing list, which is the first step.” When her son got on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, she joined so she could monitor what he was saying as well as what was being said to him.

The recruitment process “seemed to happen overnight” for Miah’s son. She too described the process as overwhelming. Miah stated:

The most overwhelming part was all the phone calls, all the mail. Some days, he would get so much mail that...and he never read one piece of it. One time, one school sent him 25 pieces. You know, they write those letters. It all came at the same time. Another school did that, too, but once they start getting to the hand-written things, then they're trying to personalize it for you. All the mail, and of course, I'm reading everything. He wasn't even interested. Every week, he would bring home a pile of mail from. All that stuff's still up in there in a drawer. He never read it.

During his freshman year, Miah's son played on the junior varsity team and dressed for the varsity team. There were weeks when Miah and her family went to games on Thursday and Friday nights. At the end of his freshman year of high school, the coach told Miah that she should have a highlight tape created. She had no clue what a highlight tape was. Her husband had recorded every game from their son's freshman year. She asked around and found a local videographer, so they sent the tapes to him; he "sliced them up and made a highlight tape." By the start of her son's high school sophomore year, the highlight tape was complete, and they began sending it out. They posted his highlight tape on *YouTube*, and within six hours, it had over 5,000 views.

He had a "really good" sophomore season, but Miah said she still viewed sports as a way to keep him engaged in school. She told me, "He couldn't play sports if he didn't do well in sports." Miah believed it was not until her son's sophomore year when it "sparked with him" that he could actually play college football. Once he became aware of that possibility, he decided he wanted to play for a Division I university in one of the top Power Five conferences², and that

² With the establishment of the College Football Playoff in 2014, the term "automatic qualifying conference" is no longer in use, as the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) has been discontinued. However, five of the six former AQ conferences are now known as the "Power Five conferences": the Big Ten Conference, the Big 12 Conference, the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Pac-12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference.

became his motivation. That was not her priority; she did not have a preference concerning where he attended, so she simply encouraged him to pursue college. During his junior year, schools began sending mail, were watching his film, and soon visited him at school.

Once coaches started communicating with her son, his high school coach made clear that in order to get to her son, they had to go through Miah. She was viewed as protective of her son and her influence over his college decision. She relied on other mothers at her son's school who had gone through the recruitment process already to help when she had questions about "what to do next." When asked who her resources were throughout this process, she stated:

None of my friends or family or anybody had ever experienced this, so I couldn't even talk to them about it. Here it is, my child is top ten in the state but nobody in my family even knows this. You know what I'm saying? Because that's not their world. They have no clue.

Miah's "saving grace," as she called it, was a friend of hers whose sons played on the team. Her friend also had a son who was in the NFL, so she was going through the recruitment process for the second time. She took Miah under her wing and shared valuable information that she never forgot. The best advice she received from her friend was to "get real good at just smiling, waving, and continuing to walk."

The attention on her son and her family became so intense that Miah intentionally sat apart from the other parents. There were times when she even sat on the visitor's side so people would not see her at all. She said, "All people wanted to talk about was football or recruiting," and all she wanted to do was just "watch her son play." Despite the challenges she faced with the other parents, there were some who came to her for advice. She described those experiences: "I had maybe three or four parents come to me and ask me for advice. I just shared with them

highlight tapes and then doing what they could on their end. If they asked, I would try to give them my perspective through my experiences.”

At the end of his junior year, Miah’s son was invited to participate in the state Junior Elite game. It was the first year the event was held in their state. He received his first college scholarship offer at the end of that game. The following week, he received two more scholarship offers. By the time he entered the spring of his junior year of high school, he had received an “upward of 30-some offers.”

Miah explained that it got overwhelming really fast because he went to camps and fans stalked them. She shared one story that highly influenced her navigation through the recruitment process:

He went to a camp up in [Mayfield]. I was there, but I was doing some homework, so I really wasn't paying attention. I had my little lawn chair, and I'm doing my work. I had sat out there pretty much all day, and no one knew who I was. He had run the 40 and he had done really well. He ended up winning the MVP for DB's that day. When they announced his name to go get his little trophy, of course, you know I'm clapping. Then, a fan figured out I was his mom. At the time, I didn't realize I should've probably not cheered. Anyway, so this is a [East Coast University] fan and they said they hope that their school offers him. I just casually said that if they do that's fine, and if not, that's ok, too. Later, I come home and I'm reading the report from the camp. Well, in the comments section there was a blog and that fan had went on there and he wrote, 'I had a very in-depth conversation with [Miah] today, and she said that all they're waiting on is for an offer from [East Coast University].' That was not what I said, and that made me so mad. I

completely stopped talking to people after that happened to me. I didn't know what their intentions were.

In addition to fans "stalking" Miah and her family, she also experienced a few uncomfortable moments with college coaches showing up at her job or at her son's school, waiting in the parking lot. One afternoon when she left work, she said there was a coach waiting next to her car for her. There was also another coach who waited in the parking lot at her son's school on multiple occasions to talk to him. This led Miah to request that the school no longer pull her son out of class to meet with coaches and limited his meetings to two or three coaches per week. Her son was missing class, and his grades were beginning to reflect it negatively.

After embarking on eight unofficial visits to college campuses during the spring, Miah decided that her son needed to commit to a university before his senior season began so they could stop the recruiting. She mused:

I was like, '...you really need to make a decision because you need to focus on graduating.' He wanted to focus on having a good senior season in football. I wanted him to go ahead and commit for that reason, and two, because if he got hurt his senior year, whatever school he committed to would pay for his rehab and all the surgery. That was my biggest thing because I'm like, 'If you get hurt, you might lose your opportunity.'

Miah felt her role in the decision making process was to take her son to all of the schools he was considering so he could make a choice. She did not want to influence his decision, but she did want him to decide as soon as possible. Her advice was to select a school that "you can see yourself living here even if the coaches leave and if you can't see that then this is not the school for you."

During each unofficial visit, Miah had a list of five questions that she asked every coach. None of her questions had to do with football because she felt “football’s going to take care of itself.” She asked questions that were related to academics, academic support, discipline/punishment, and injuries.

Her most memorable unofficial visit was the very first one. Her son ultimately committed to this institution, but she described their time on campus:

They won him over that first visit because when I tell you they rolled out the red carpet for him, it was like everything they did was about him. They had video presentations, and everything that seemed to be tailored to just him. About midway through the visit, he looked at me and asked if this was real. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing, so now I know they do that for highly recruited athletes, and they can put stuff together really fast-like. We went there before we went anywhere else, and after he left there, nothing could compare to what they had done. They had everybody from on down to the janitor talk to him and come say hello. The receptionist, the janitor. Even the people at the hotel and the cook, the person who was making the omelets that day, when we went in, she knew who we were, even though I know they had went and told her.

All of the campus visits did not go that well; there were a few schools where she had negative experiences. While at one school, a coach spent much of their visit bashing other universities and telling them why her son should not choose them. Miah said, “We didn't even finish the visit. That was our thing. Just sell me your product. As soon as they wanted to talk bad about somebody else, we were done. We didn't even bother to listen to the rest of the pitch.”

Prior to the start of his senior year, he verbally committed to a major Division I university about two hours from his hometown. As a result, when it came time to make his official visits at

the end of his senior season, he did not want to waste time taking all five of the permissible visits. Miah's son made only one official visit, and it was to the school to which he had already committed. She said she had no desire for travel to five different campuses to hear identical pitches. Although many of the bigger schools knew he had committed, they did not stop recruiting and inviting him for visits. Despite the other schools' efforts, Miah and her family only communicated with one school. She shared the story of when her son's future head coach came to visit their home:

The best time, of course, was when the head coach came. He showed up in this black Escalade. They pull up, and he gets out of the truck, and he's got on a three-piece suit, and we all in here just lounging like this. He comes in, and I'm like, 'Coach, you are a little over dressed.' He goes, 'Well, they make me wear a suit when I go to the visits.' My dad cooks ribs and ... my dad cooks ribs and so he had made ribs and sausages, and I had made some sides. We probably cooked maybe ten slabs of ribs. He comes in; he takes off his coat jacket. He sits at the table. I fix everybody a plate. He bites into the ribs. He goes, 'These ribs are legit.' He pulls up his sleeves, and he puts his elbows on the table. He ate it, and he was like, 'Can I have some more?' By the end of the night, it was the head coach, the assistant head coach, me and my husband and my dad, my son and one of his high school coaches. They ate all ten slabs of ribs. We had a great time. They just sat down on the floor, and we just laugh and talk for a little while. That was much better than the actual recruiting when you're trying to feel people out because after that, when you get to the home visits, it's just trying to get to know individuals.

Miah's son participated in the traditional Signing Day senior year; however, at the end of his junior year, his school principal allowed him to have a commitment ceremony. School was

out in May, and the principal allowed Miah's family to do a special commitment ceremony on the last day of school his junior year so that his teammates and classmates could attend. Having already held this ceremony, Miah was not as excited as some of the other parents for the official National Signing Day. No one had explained to her that the scholarship papers would already be signed and faxed off prior to the start of the ceremony. She thought that he would sign the real scholarship papers at the Signing Day ceremony at school. She said, "The papers we used for signing day were just dummy papers, basically."

The school had the gym decorated for the eight football players who were signing that day, but Miah decorated her son's table with items from his university.

I put out a bunch of his All-American cards for him to autograph for people because people wanted some paraphernalia. They were trying not to make it all about him, but it was, for me, so I didn't really care about the other kids.

After the ceremony at the school, the local media interviewed Miah's son, and then his family threw a party for him at a local restaurant.

National Signing Day was a good day for Miah and her family, but what she did not know was that things would change drastically the next day. She woke up to a news story that three members of the coaching staff, one of whom was her son's recruiting coach, had been fired. This disappointed Miah because she felt they were deceitful and intentionally waited until all the kids signed on Signing Day so they could not back out of the "slave contract." After her son's first year of college, the whole coaching staff was fired and Miah discussed how that was something she always reminded her son about through the recruitment process. She explained:

Recruiting is about relationships. Whoever can build the relationship with the athlete first and build a good relationship usually is where the kids are going to go. That's why they

try to start getting them early. His school did a really good job of that. After all this happened, and now we're on our second coaching staff. I am questioning, 'What's the whole purpose of recruiting?' You go through all of this, and then one day, all of those people are just gone. That's why I told him, you have to choose a place where you will be happy, no matter who is there. I am glad I knew to tell him that because it has been a whirlwind since the recruiting process ended.

Yoni

Yoni and Miah's sons both played on the same high school football team. Yoni's son is a few years younger than Miah's, but they have remained friends even though their sons attend different universities. Miah shared Yoni's contact information with me during our interview and identified Yoni as someone who would also fit the criteria of the study. I called Yoni to introduce myself and share details about the study. She happily agreed to participate and wanted to know how soon we could meet. Yoni and I communicated via text message multiple times to coordinate our meeting. She travels five out of seven days a week for work, and she wanted to conduct the interview at her home.

Yoni and I scheduled an interview date for a Wednesday afternoon in September, the day before her son's first football game of the season. This particular week, she requested to work from home so she could attend her son's Thursday night game. One week before the scheduled interview, Yoni contacted me to inform me that she had been selected for jury duty and was scheduled to appear in court on the day of our interview. She was fairly confident that she would be dismissed early on in the jury selection process because her husband was a veteran member of the county police force. She assured me that we would still have our meeting, and that if anything changed, she would let me know if she needed to cancel and reschedule.

The morning of our interview, I received a text message from Yoni stating that she had, in fact, been dismissed from serving on the jury, and I was welcome to drive to her home at the appointed time. The drive to her home was approximately two hours from me. The majority of the drive was along a major highway; however, the last 12 miles were all country roads with few stop-signs and fewer houses. Yoni warned me in advance that if I were using my phone as a map, there would likely be times I would lose my cellular signal. So she sent step-by-step directions to her home via text message, just in case. These directions turned out to be very helpful because the low signal strength posed multiple challenges along the final 12 miles of the trip.

Yoni's home, shared with her husband, sat about 100 yards off of the street. As I pulled into the driveway, there were three cars parked outside of the garage along with a large barbecue grill and smoker on a trailer with wheels. As I exited my car, I heard multiple dogs barking inside. I knocked on the front door, and Yoni's husband answered. He was dressed in his police uniform and spoke in a very firm, assertive tone. He asked if I would wait for a minute while he put their two dogs in the back yard. He returned, invited me in and instructed me to take a seat in the living room to wait for Yoni.

Yoni came from the kitchen to welcome me to her home. She gave me a hug, thanked me for making the drive to her home, and also for conducting research on "sports moms." She asked if I could join her in the kitchen for a few minutes while she finished packing lunch for her husband. She explained that he was then working the night shift, and he was just getting ready to leave. She did not often get to pack his lunch due to her travel for work, so she was excited to do so as she was working from home.

We sat in the kitchen and talked about my research and how I came to pick this particular topic to study. I went over the general details of my research, and as we were concluding that

part of the discussion, her husband entered the kitchen to get his lunch bag and to leave for work. At that point, Yoni and I settled down in her formal living room. I placed the recorder across the room next to her seat, and we began.

Yoni's Narrative

Yoni grew up in a single parent home with her mother and three sisters in the Midwest United States. She was never introduced to sports as a child and had little interest in participating. Yoni attended college after high school; however, she encountered multiple financial hardships, and after losing her academic scholarship, she could no longer attend. She never graduated. She met her husband a few years after leaving college, and they have been married for 26 years. They have two sons, both of whom are enrolled in college pursuing a dream Yoni wishes she had achieved.

Yoni's oldest son has no interest in sports, but her youngest son has participated in sports since he was seven years old. Her husband was a college football player at a major Division I university in the South and now is a Sheriff for the local police department just 30 minutes from his alma mater. Yoni's job requires her to travel often, but she also has the ability to work from home, which provides her with the opportunity to attend her son's college games regularly.

As a child, Yoni's younger son primarily participated in Track and Field. When he became interested in that sport, Yoni says her and her husband "went all in." His talent led him to participate all over the country in various meets, and he also won multiple gold and silver medals in the Track and Field Junior Olympics. Yoni explained the role of sports in the lives of her and her family:

We looked at track as a means of discipline and a means of being a part of a team, being accountable to something. I think that we, as parents, felt like this was the right pathway

because we heard of so many other kids getting in trouble, having free time. We wanted to introduce both of our children to extracurricular activities that would be meaningful in a way that will keep them busy but also will be some life lessons.

Once in middle school, Yoni's youngest son began playing football. Yoni spent a significant amount of time taking him to practices, traveling for track and field, and attending his sporting events. At that time, their oldest son wanted to transfer to a different high school that had more opportunities for him to pursue his passion for the arts. This same high school is locally recognized as a major football powerhouse. Yoni and her husband decided it was the right time to move so both boys could attend that school. This decision was influenced by the fact that they were experiencing financial difficulties, and this was a great time to start over in a new place; her older son could pursue the arts, and her younger son would be able to join an elite high school sports program.

In addition to the school's strong football program, at the time of their son's enrollment, there were two young men on the team who had a brother playing in the NFL. Yoni and her husband knew that college coaches would come to watch those brothers play, and consequently, their son would also get exposure. She said it was all "strategic."

Although Yoni's son had been a star player at his middle school, he was not one of the best players at his new high school. Yoni said her son wanted to be on the field so bad that he learned to kick the football so he could take over the kicker position until they gave him more playing time as a wide receiver. He excelled as a kicker, and by the time he reached his junior year, he was ranked the second best kicker in the state. During that same year, he also earned one of the starting wide receiver spots.

I asked Yoni when she realized her son would have the opportunity to play college football, and she referenced her family relocation: “I’ve known. I’ve always known, well, I won’t say always. I guess since he was ... I’ll say for sure 14 or 15. When he went to [the new high school], and made that transition, I knew then, when he started kicking, I knew.” Yoni felt a sense of pride seeing her son’s hard work and determination pay off. She said he had overcome every obstacle thrown his way, and he deserved all of the success he achieved.

The recruitment process moved very quickly for Yoni and her family. While many schools had expressed interest in her son running for their track and field programs, he wanted to direct his efforts to playing college football. One way to get the attention of college coaches is to play well in high school, but also to participate in state or national combines created for elite players. The state where Yoni and her family live hosts an annual Rising Elite football game for juniors in high school in December. Top players are selected from across the state and must be invited to participate. Yoni took her son to a summer camp where the Rising Elite staff evaluates players before extending invitations. At the end of that camp, Yoni’s son did not receive an invitation to play in the Rising Star game.

During his son’s junior season, Yoni’s husband worked behind the scenes to convince one of the representatives from the Rising Elite selection committee to watch his son play. The representative did not show up to watch his son play until the high school playoffs started. By this time, Yoni felt it was too late, but to her surprise, her son was selected to play in the Rising Elite game. Just a few weeks later, her son’s high school team won the State Championship, and within a week, he was preparing to play in the Rising Elite game. Yoni shared that her son entered the Rising Elite game with two state championships in track and field, one state

championship in football and was the Most Valuable Player for the season, but he received no scholarship offers. She said, “He wasn’t on anyone’s radar in college football.”

She told the story of what happened after the Rising Elite game, the game that changed their lives forever:

When it started, that was in December. The ball game, the Rising Elite ball game, was New Year's Eve. That was the day that our lives changed forever. He went to that game and he was not favored to start. He was not ... It was like, they were talking about everybody else. He left that game the MVP. From there, the phone started ringing, and they kept ringing and the letters kept coming and reporters, and that changed his life and ours, too. He ultimately received offers from 35 colleges.

After the Rising Elite game, Yoni said she was very proud of her son, but she had to step in to “keep him grounded” because his head was getting so big from people telling him “you are going to the NFL.” Reporters constantly called their home, and coaches visited his high school, regularly pulling him out of class. She explained how difficult it became to find her own mail in their mailbox because so many letters were coming each week.

With all of the excitement, there were moments when Yoni felt her son had lost sight of the fact that he still had another year until graduation. It was her responsibility to help him navigate this process, so she contacted the school principal to specify when her son could and could not speak to coaches. She stated:

Coaches were in the way, at the school, camping out. I was getting complaints that he's being pulled out of class. I had to call the attendance office almost every day for two or three months to say this is who was there, please take him off the tardy list because the teachers were pissed.

She described the first few months after the Rising Elite game as “completely overwhelming.”

Yoni and her son spent a significant amount of time together discussing the recruitment process and traveling to visit schools. She said, “Our goal was to get him to see every school he wanted to see. Sometimes it was just he and I.” They traveled to eight schools for unofficial visits during the spring of his junior year. When I asked her to describe what those visits were like, Yoni said each visit was essentially the same:

They all told us the same things over and over. I was tired of hearing the same speech everywhere we went, and so was my son. They showed us the facilities, they let them try on jerseys, they fed us food and treated us well. They made all kinds of promises. I was so ready for him to pick a school. I didn’t want to keep taking visits.

She recounted one specific visit that would eventually hold more significance than she knew at the time:

He [head coach] said, ‘I’m offering [Yoni’s son] a full scholarship and if he keeps his nose clean, he stays out of trouble, he does what we ask him to do. He will also be able to get his master’s.’ I said ‘So, you’re offering my son his undergraduate degree and master’s degree’, and he said, ‘Yes I am.’ ... ‘If he gets hurt during his senior year and anything happens, we’ll still going to honor it, I’m a man of my word.’ I said, ‘okay, we’ll see.’

Yoni and her family decided that the process had become so overwhelming that her son needed to decide (commit) before the start of his senior year of high school. Two weeks before the start of his senior season, August 19th, he committed to an in-state Division I institution. The excitement was short lived because the first game of his senior year, Yoni’s son tore his ACL. He was unable to play in any more games his senior year.

Yoni was devastated and was concerned whether the scholarship offer would be honored. She called the head coach of the university where he committed and let him know about the season-ending injury her son sustained. His response comforted Yoni:

When he got hurt and I found out his deal, I called [head coach] and I told him what happened. He said, '[Yoni], remember what we talked about.' He said, 'I'm a man of my word, and that's the way it's going to be now what can we do to help you'.

Yoni drove her son two hours to have surgery on his knee performed by a doctor who worked closely with that college's football team. They stayed overnight and returned home the next day. Even after her son's injury (and commitment), multiple schools offered their assistance with his rehab if he switched his commitment to them. Yoni's family declined, instead traveling back and forth to his future college town for follow up visits and rehabilitation.

There was one particular moment throughout the recruitment process that Yoni said was very difficult for her to handle as a mother. Yoni told me about the last game the team played her son's senior year of high school:

They lost in the playoffs, and at the end of the playoffs when that last buzzer sounded and it was the end of his senior year, he was on the sideline. I was down there with him, and he literally fell on me, sobbing from the disappointment and the hurt that he couldn't contribute to the team and this is the way his senior year ended. It was horrible. I will never forget comforting my son like he was a baby again.

Despite criticism from the local newspapers, Yoni and her husband took her son on four official visits after his senior season ended. They were writing negative things about her family, specifically her son, in the paper. "He has a lot of nerve taking the visits" was what she read from one journalist. Yoni said her family had already communicated with her son's college

coach that they were going to take him on a few official visits because “he's earned it and we want him to be able to have that experience.” They also entertained coaches at their home.

Yoni said the home visits were “awkward” because “the vast majority of all of this happened after he was already committed somewhere.” She shared a story of a time when she was notified at that last minute that a coach was coming to visit her son at their home:

To me, it was awkward for me. One time I remember. Literally, I am jumping off a plane trying to come home make sure the house doesn't look like a mess. I wanted to be hospitable and have something for them to eat. It was just ... You don't know what to say. In the back of my mind, you're wasting my time because I'm thinking nothing is going to happen. He isn't going to change his mind.

Another coach who came to visit left Yoni unimpressed and disappointed that her time was wasted. He came to their home and she stated:

He was so cocky. He came here and he was like, Well, he can't give you one of these. He put his hand up here, his super bowl rings or National Championship rings, something. He's famous. He said my son wouldn't have rings like him if he stayed committed to the other school.”

She recounted multiple stories of coaches she felt were “stalking” her family and being “desperate.” There was a point when they encouraged their son to stop answering the phone.

I asked Yoni to tell me about the time when the head coach from the university where her son had committed came to visit. She said that his visit was much different than all the others. She said,

I rearranged my flight because I knew he was going to be here, and he came with another coach, and we had dinner and hung out and took pictures. It was just different. He's such a really good guy that it was just easy. I trust him.

Coaches continued to contact Yoni and her family until National Signing Day. She felt a sense of relief when Signing Day came. She knew once he signed his National Letter of Intent, the other coaches would leave their family alone. The year before her son's Signing Day, she went to the school to help set up for the seven young men who had committed to play college football. She decorated the gym with flowers and mini football helmets and ordered cake for the post-signing reception. Prior to this, no one had ever done anything "special" for Signing Day, and she felt the young men and their families deserved to have a big celebration.

There were nine football players signing scholarship papers the year her son graduated. She told the story of her involvement the days leading up to Signing Day:

That was a week before, and I was riding the athletic director like nobody's business. When I tell you I was on her, I just had to be because she wasn't doing what I thought was the best for the program. I sent an e-mail and I said, 'Now, I'm just reminding you of what occurred last year, and we want to make it even better.' I reminded them that the tablecloths weren't ironed, and we were on television and that there were things that needed to be done in a very organized fashion. The morning of signing day when I got to the school, the principal was standing in the door and he said, 'Ms. [Yoni] I want you to look around. Is everything to your standard?' They had a step and a repeat behind the signing podium. They had the table skirted all beautifully. They had everything the way it should've been because my thing is, I wasn't just advocating for my son. These are good

kids. They have done the right things. They should be celebrated in the right way, not half-assed.

At 7:03 a.m. the morning of Signing Day, Yoni's son signed and faxed his National Letter of Intent. The coaches from his university called Yoni three times that morning starting at 6:45 a.m., asking if they were still going to sign and fax it. Many of Yoni's family and friends came to the ceremony. Her mother purchased hats they all planned to don once her son made his official announcement. She shared details of that morning with me:

Signing day that morning, it was an emotional time, and we were excited, and we wanted to make sure we had everything. My son left before us. Then we go over to the school.

When we get up on the stage, and we mock sign...After we had signing day at the school, the ceremony, and took pictures ... It was just incredible. All the people we invited, family, track coaches, friends, grandparents, we all went and had brunch, and then after we had brunch, we all went downtown and celebrated the rest of the day. They interviewed the kids on TV. They had the Rising Elite alums all on a panel, and they answered questions. It was just phenomenal. It was incredible. Just incredible.

Throughout the recruitment process, Yoni relied on her husband and a few of her friends to guide her. There were other mothers who had been through the recruitment process before her whom she knew she could call at any time. These same mothers called to check on her because they understood how taxing the process is for a highly ranked recruit's family. Overall, she felt relieved when the process was over, but grateful that she was able to experience it. The ability to experience such positive results is not something many families are afforded. She closed out our interview by telling me,

I watched him through a lot of defining moments and having to really prove himself. He and I are very close. We've been on this journey together and football has been a major part of it. He's so happy and he's very comfortable, and I don't worry about him or his future at all.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide relevant information on the six Black mothers who participated in this study and to address the first research question that guided this study. Presented in this chapter was each participants profile along with their narrative. The first half of each mother's profile detailed the interview, my reflections on the interview with the participant, and setting descriptions on the day of the interview. As the mother's progressed through the various stages of the recruitment process they shared details of their lived experiences, which are reflected in each individual narrative.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process of their sons. In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process?
2. How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?
3. How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?
4. What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

This chapter consists of the major findings of this research, which emerged from an exploration of common themes across the data. The findings chapter begins with a data display of the major themes and subthemes. Then a presentation of the three major themes using data from the interviews and finally, the chapter then concludes with a summary.

There are three major themes in this chapter; within each of the themes are subthemes. The first theme, "This is My Child": Mothering Responsibilities, had three sub-themes: mothering in life, mothering in sports, and mothering in recruiting. The second theme, "This was all about relationships": Establishing and Developing Relationships, had three sub-themes: their sons, the coaches, the other mothers. The third and final theme, "This was overwhelming": The

Business of Recruiting, had four subthemes: exposure and public attention, weekly communication, aggressive coaches and pressure to commit. The themes and subthemes are displayed in the following section.

Data Display

- I. “This is My Child”: Mothering Responsibilities
 - A. Mothering in life
 - B. Mothering in sports
 - C. Mothering in recruiting
- II. “This was all about relationships”: Establishing and Developing Relationships
 - A. Their sons
 - B. The football coaches
 - C. The other mothers
- III. “This was overwhelming”: The Business of Recruiting
 - A. Exposure and public attention
 - B. Weekly communication
 - C. Aggressive coaches and pressure to commit

“This is My Child”: Mothering Responsibilities

Concepts and practices of motherhood resounded throughout the data. As the mothers reflected upon the recruitment process they each spoke specifically of the obligation they felt to fulfill various mothering roles in their son’s lives. Addressing the second research questions guiding this study: How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons’ college football recruitment? It became evident how their feelings of meeting mothering expectations guided their involvement in their son’s football careers. Although the primary focus was

understanding how Black mother's articulated their roles throughout recruitment, it was clear within the data that mother's viewed their roles to extend well beyond the scope of just the recruitment process. Within this theme all of the mothers in the study identified specific steps they took to fulfill mothering roles and responsibilities in their son's lives, in their son's sports experiences, and specifically within the football recruitment process. The first subtheme *Mothering in life*, encompasses the mothering roles the participants felt obligated to fill as it related to their son's overall life experience. These roles extend beyond the sports and recruitment context and detail the mothering roles within education and other developmental areas of their son's lives. The second and third subtheme, *Mothering in sports* and *Mothering in recruiting*, respectively, relate to the roles each mother felt obligated to fill throughout their son's sporting experiences and throughout the four to five year recruitment process. Each area discussed points to the various roles mothers fill as their son's navigated throughout their sports careers.

Mothering in life

This subtheme was evident in all six participants' narratives. Tate, a married mother of two sons, whose husband was not involved in the recruitment process at all, best articulated it:

I know I'm a hard mother, me and my sons have a relationship where I'm always honest. Sometime honest to a fault. I was trying to be honest because I love him so much. At the end of the day, I just want my child to go to school to receive an education...I was more concerned with him getting into a good college. I found that's it my duty to help my son accomplish those goals. That's what I'm supposed to do. As your mom, we both have responsibilities. And if you've taken care of your responsibilities, then my responsibility

is to help you get where you are going. And that's how I saw my job. That's what I'm supposed to be doing as his mother.

Similar to Tate's narrative, Anya, a widow with one son, spoke about how she maintained a level of honesty with her son that not everyone else gave him. Anya stated, "I have a strong family value system where I'm very supportive. I was taught to be that as a mother. So I push him a lot. Deep down inside you know your kid. I've always been honest with him. I'm probably harder on him than anyone else. I want to see him succeed."

Lola and Yoni, both married with two children, spoke of how they regularly prayed for their sons and how they felt it was important to "keep their sons lifted in prayer" because young Black men are faced with so many challenges in today's society. Yoni reflected on her life as a young child growing up in a single parent home and how that influenced what her and her husband wanted for their own children. She said:

I want my children to have a better opportunity than I had. I don't want my kids to have that struggle. We set aside money for both of them to attend college. As parents we felt like we had to do whatever we could for our boys... We always say you're going to invest in your child early or you're going to invest later.

Similarly, Miah and her sons biological father began saving for college when their boys were little. She expressed that early on she was determined to do her part to ensure that they would stay out of trouble and make it to college. Prior to marrying her son's stepfather, Miah was a single mother living in a "not-so-great neighborhood" and she tried to keep her boys involved in activities that would prepare them for life. She described how it was an outlet for her, but also kept her boys in spaces that taught them things she was not able to.

Wynn's own practice of mothering was rooted in the lack of support she received as a child from her parents. The divorced mother of three sons revealed, "who I am as their parent, what I got, from me growing up, is the support that I did not receive through the things that I wanted to do in life." She continued to explain that what she needed as a child is what she focused on providing her three sons. She was actively involved in their school and wanted to be sure the teachers and administrators were also doing their part to help her kids be successful in life.

Mothering in sports

The second subtheme, *Mothering in sports*, was strongly evident in all six of the participants. Each mother identified the roles they filled in their son's sport experience from youth sports all the way through to high school. Once their son's committed to playing sports or as Anya put it, "really got interested" they each supported them by attending games and practices, while also taking on other supportive roles with the team. Lola, Wynn, Miah, and Yoni all stated that they drove their children to every practice and every game when their son's were little. Miah felt her presence at so many of her son's sporting events led him to expect her to always be present. Miah stated:

When he was five I would go to practice. I would stay for however long, however many days a week. Three, four days a week. Go to the park on Saturdays, stay all day. I was never that parent; I'm not going to drop my kid off. I'm not going to ask somebody to bring them home. If he's there then I have to be there...Even when he played AAU, wherever they traveled I went...I love people but I don't always trust that people have the best intentions for your child. I don't want to leave it to chance...After a while he just expected me to be there. Now, when he got to high school I didn't go to practice. I didn't

need to. I just showed up to the games...He knew that if he needed me to come I would come, but when he got to high school I didn't feel the need to do that.

When Yoni's son was in high school she not only attended every game, but her and her husband would volunteer with the team every week. She described her role in feeding them weekly:

I started volunteering at [the high school] and feeding the team. I continue to do that all the way up until his senior year. We led the tailgate. We led the community, bringing people together. We did that because that's who we were. We would haul that grill over to [the high school] every single week. Everywhere that team went, we went with that grill and we fed them all. Players and the families.

Wynn's son's also began playing sports at a young age. She attended every game she could from the time they were little all the way through high school. When she was not stationed on the naval ship she was actively involved as a coach, team mom, and umpire during their t-ball playing years. Coaching and umpiring are roles that no other mother in the study took on during their son's playing careers. Once her children were older Wynn felt it was necessary to shift to a more hands off supportive role. She eventually limited her support to being in the stands cheering for her boys.

Anyia filled many of the same roles as the other mothers, however she took on the additional responsibility of hiring a personal trainer to work with her son to help him stay in shape and develop his athletic skills. When her son was preparing to go to college she reached out to a personal trainer that she had worked with in the past and asked if he would work with her son prior to him leaving for college.

Tate and Anya shared similar stories of how they would talk to their son's about their athletic performance and how they would often evaluate them during games and/or camps. Anya said, "I knew that he had the ability to do it. When your kids out there playing, you know if they're good or not. I tell him what I think he does best, what I think he needs work on." Tate once told her son, while at a football combine, she thought he was a "2 star" maybe a "3 star" athlete, despite his feelings that he was doing well. Tate went into great detail regarding her role in assessing her son's performance in football:

They told the parents to get off the field, but he would look at me and I'd be telling him, hey, that 40 time not gonna cut it and I'd be shaking my head. He'd be doing the shuffle and I had my little stopwatch out there. I just remember all these men looking at me like, what in the world? And I was like, hey, you need to cut a second off of that time...And I just remember doing that, but I remember when he was doing all of that, that in my mind I was like, he's getting better, he's getting better.

This level of involvement by each mother was something they all felt was part of their responsibility regardless of what other parents were doing for their own children. Many recognized that being "his mother" gave them a level of influence as well as protection over their children. These feelings extended throughout the college football recruitment process.

Mothering in recruiting

Miah summarized this subtheme best when she stated, "This my child. You don't know nothing. For some reason them being in the spotlight makes people feel like they own them. They should be part of the process. You wanna tell me where my child should go." Throughout five of the six interviews the participants frequently used the phrases "my child" and "my family" when speaking about their experiences during the recruitment process. Perhaps one of

the most important times to be involved during their son's athletic career was during the college football recruitment process.

Tate, Anya, Lola, Miah, and Yoni expressed feeling personally responsible for the outcome of their son's recruitment process. They also identified the ways in which they took an active role in the recruitment process as a result of feeling obligated to do so, as a mother. Over the course of the recruitment process these mothers took their sons to visit college campuses, registered them for football camps/combines, assisted in filling out questionnaires, sought out videographers to create highlight tapes, took notes, and sent emails to coaches.

When it came to time to go on campus visits, unofficial and official, five of the six mothers went on every visit with their son. There was only one visit that Lola was unable to attend due to a conflicting trip she took with her daughter. Miah shared her perspective on taking her son to visit college campuses, "As long as I was his mama he wasn't going to visit a school alone." Yoni and her husband went on visits with their son, however many times it was just she and her son. When asked why it was important for her to take him on eight unofficial visits she said, "our goal was to get him to see every school he wanted to see." Anya shared an almost identical response when she cited the nine schools they visited, "I took him to all the schools that he wanted to go to. We traveled to go to all of those unofficial visits."

In addition to campus visits, Tate, Anya, and Miah all took their sons, as well as their son's teammates to camps throughout the country as a way to expose their talent to college coaches. Tate not only took her son's teammates, but she also invited her nephew to attend the camps. Tate acknowledged that there were other mothers who did not have "flexible occupations" that allowed them to take their son's around to camps, so she did it for them.

Similar to Tate, Yoni also took her son's teammates to camps and combines while they were in high school.

On Sunday afternoons Anya and her son would spend a few hours sending out college intent letters, completing online questionnaires, and sending out his highlight film. Miah revealed, "There was no school too big or no school too small that I would not send his highlight tape to and fill out their athletic questionnaire. I probably did that for over 50 or 60 schools." Both Miah and Anya were advised to have a highlight tape of their son's best plays made. They each admitted that they had "no clue" what a highlight tape was or how to make one. Miah hired someone to create her son's highlight tape, while Anya said her son created his own, online. Tate created her son's highlight film for him using an online recruiting service and she also created a website that highlighted his family, his art, and other important facts about who he was outside of football.

In addition to all the work they were already doing for their sons, mothers like Anya also spent time searching for and emailing members of the coaching staff from all of the schools her son was interested in. The five mothers in the study who were highly involved in the recruitment process felt their involvement was necessary to assist their son's in getting noticed by college coaches. It was most succinctly stated by Tate when she said, "he was being recruited because mama was working hard for him to accomplish his goals of playing college football."

"This was all about relationships": Establishing and Developing Relationships

The development and maintaining of relationships was critical to how Black mothers obtained knowledge throughout the college football recruitment process. Their relationships with their sons, coaches, and other parents were instrumental in navigating the recruitment process. Not all of the relationships were positive; nonetheless, even the negative experiences were

valuable. The first subtheme, *Their sons*, details how the recruitment process influenced each mothers relationship with her son. The second subtheme, *The football coaches*, is one area where each mother discussed the level of involvement their son's high school football coaches had throughout the recruitment process. Each spoke of how much assistance, or lack of assistance the high school football coaches offered. This level of involvement, whether high or low, impacted the relationship between parent and coach and ultimately influenced their recruitment process experience. The final subtheme, *The other mothers*, discusses the relationships that were created and maintained with other mothers who had experienced the recruitment process and were available to serve as resources to the mother in this study.

Their sons

Tate and Anya, two mothers whose sons were not as highly recruited as the others, said their relationships with their son grew closer over the course of the recruitment process. The lack of involvement by Tate's husband and the death of Anya's left them both highly involved and "learning as they went" through the process for the first time. Tate shared,

I actually think that me and my son- my eldest son- have grown closer in this experience just because of all the things that I've seen him go through, and all of the things he's seen me go through, and it's- it's just so different being the mother now because I've only ever been the aunt of the child being recruited.

Lola, Miah, and Yoni admitting similar feelings about their relationships with their sons. They stressed that they learned together with each new experience and interaction. Miah was adamant about attending campus visits with her son and explained how her son relied heavily on her to be present, because of his closeness to her. She said, "that's what he expected. He didn't ask his dad to go. He was like, 'Okay, mama. Where we going to visit?'" Lola and her son would take road

trips together, as did Yoni and her son. During those trips they would talk about college and how the decision-making process was going. Yoni described her connection with her son in relation to those road trips,

My son is my roll dog. One of my very best friends. Because we went everywhere together. When he needed to go to practice, on trips, across town. It didn't matter. I drove him and we rode together and just talked. About life. Sports. Where he was going to college. We became so much closer during that time. He taught me things about football and we just went through this process learning together.

The football coaches

Although Tate's hands on involvement throughout the recruitment process was primarily fueled by her desire to see her son succeed, the lack of involvement from her son's high school coaches also forced her to be an active participant. Lola and Anya, and also recognized early on that their son's high school coaches were not helping. They each decided that if their sons were going to get recruited they would have to take on the responsibility. However, before taking on all of the responsibility they felt that if they developed a more positive relationship with the coaches that would help them receive the guidance they were looking for.

Lola admitted that her and her husband were supportive of their son transferring to a different high school because the coaches at the time were only focused on helping certain players on the team. Her son was not one of them. She shared her thoughts on the coaches at his first high school,

"[the high school coaches] don't have a relationship with the different schools to where kids can get recruited. And it's still like that here. You know, if they- they might have 1 or 2 kids and then they just focus on those kids, even though there's a lot of talent here.

They only focus on a few kids and those are the kids they help get recruited. The rest of us were on our own, with no help. That's one reason why we moved him.

Tate had an identical experience with her son's high school coaches. They were spending time assisting other athletes on the team, but they were not helping her son. She said, "he wasn't being recruited because his coaches weren't out there helping. When I would try to talk to some of the coaches, to be honest with you, they didn't seem that interested in helping me." Tate also shared how upset she was when she learned that the coaches were making calls for other kids, but not doing the same for her son. She said, "a lot of college coaches depend on high school coaches to call them and make recommendations-for the kids and being like, hey, I got a guy down here that I really think that y'all would love. And send them tapes. My son's coaches weren't doing that for us. They did it for other players. Not us though."

Anya's experience was similar, but she shared that she was not aware that the coaches were supposed to help in those ways. She found out from another mother that the coaches were helping other kids on the team "get recruited." The other mother explained to Anya that the coaches had been taking other boys to camps to meet with coaches and also assisting with sending out recruitment materials. Anya said, "we never got any of that," although she did admit that there was one coach on the staff who eventually "helped a little bit." Anya's guidance from other parents was another relationship the mothers felt were vital to the navigation of the recruitment process.

The other mothers

Five of the six mothers in the study often resorted to asking other parents, specifically other mothers, for help when they had questions about recruiting. Yoni's best friend reached out to her multiple times throughout the recruitment process to ask her if she needed help, as did

Tate's friend who also has a son that plays football. For the majority of the mothers, these relationships with other mothers in their circle were a significant part of how they obtained knowledge throughout the recruitment process.

Miah made friends with a few mothers on her son's team and she shared these thoughts about their relationship,

We still keep in touch even though the boys don't play together anymore. It's good to have those people because when you go through some of the things that you go through in college recruitment. You sometimes need someone to call or talk to. They understand whereas I can't call my regular girlfriend and talk to her because she has no clue. She hasn't been through it. She doesn't know

Yoni's friends were helpful as well. She shared a story about one of her friends who not only helped her, but also stepped in to

Another parent. It's funny because I have another friend who, I say friend because we don't hang out together too often, but I know I could call her if I had questions about football or recruiting stuff, I could call her and we have that common thread. She even reached out to my son recently. He got her and he respects her. I know she can be in his ear reminding him to do the right things. I've seen her maybe twice in 16 months, but I know I can go to her if I need her.

Anya talked about two of her very close friends who both had been through the recruitment process. She said although some people were helpful there were times that others were not. They were not always open about the steps they were taking to get their sons recruited. Anya felt this was because they may have been concerned about the attention being taken away from their son,

if they helped someone else. She described how one mother in particular reached out to help her because she understood how overwhelming the recruitment process was. Anya said,

I think that you know, some people will tell you things and some people just ain't gonna help you. They give you a little bit, you know, and that's it. You know. And some people- they will call ya. We have one, one my son's friends. He went to college to play football. Well he went, his mom, she did share a lot of information with me. She was like 'I learned the hard way, let me help you out girl.' I appreciated that because I had to look hard to find people I could ask that already knew what to do.

Finally, three mothers noted that they wished there had been some type of parenting network available to exchange information about recruiting. This discussion continued as the participants spoke about the transition from high school to college. The other mothers were just ask important after National Signing Day, as they were the years leading up to it.

"This was overwhelming": The Business of Recruiting

The final theme of the findings addresses the research question posed, "What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?" Throughout the recruitment process many of the mothers felt overwhelmed with what Wynn called, "nothing but a big business." For many of the mothers, what began as an enjoyable process, that would lead to deciding where their sons would play college football, turned into increased exposure and public attention on their families, consistent communication from coaches, and pressure on their son's to commit to a school as quickly as possible.

The first subtheme, *Exposure and public attention*, is a description of the increased amount of attention the athletes and their families received throughout the recruitment process, as a result of being highly recognizable and successful on the football field. This attention came

from friends, family, local media, as well as national media. The second subtheme, *Weekly communication*, relates to the frequent communication received from the coaches recruiting their sons. Communication from college coaches during the recruitment process came in the form of letters in the mail and phone calls, often times on a weekly basis. The final subtheme, *Aggressive coaches and pressure to commit*, details the mother's experiences with college coaches aggressively pursuing their sons in an effort to persuade them to commit to attending and playing football for their respective institutions.

Miah commented, "no one bothered to tell me after all this they do for recruiting to get your kid to sign that paper they just move on to the next group of kids they want." She also felt that unless your child went on to be a high profile athlete in college, they would never receive the same amount of attention again. Wynn's explained why she felt the college recruitment process was nothing more than a business transaction:

The reality is, I found out, this whole recruiting process was a business. They really don't care about your kid as much as you think they do and as much as they say they do. They just need to fill that roster with that most athletic kid. They are going to do everything they can be in your face to get your kid to go there.

Exposure and public attention

Miah and Yoni spoke in great detail about how they were unaware of how much attention their son's would receive once they had been labeled as a "top prospect" and were identified as one of the best players nationally. They also did not anticipate the consequences of such attention. Traveling to camps and visiting campuses exposed them to an enormous amount of attention from coaches, fans, and the media. Miah, the same mother who was approached multiple times by fans and reporters, encouraged her son to remain humble and focused on

school, despite the increased attention. She shared that keeping him grounded was one of her greatest challenges throughout the recruitment process. She explained:

Keeping him grounded. His head was so big and it's, I was constantly trying to keep him grounded because people are telling him, you're going to the NFL. You're this. The child wasn't even a senior in high school yet at this point. The reporters and phone calls, just keeping him grounded. Keeping him focused on his schoolwork because it was like he just lost sight of it all.

Yoni and her husband were well liked in the high school football community, however when her son began receiving more attention from college coaches and the local media she noticed that some of the other mothers started treating her differently. This became more evident throughout her son's senior year, after he sustained his season ending injury. Yoni described a time when she overheard another parent celebrating the fact that her son was hurt:

In the midst of all of this, you would think he wasn't going to be recruited anymore, that did not happen. The reporters kept talking to him, the coaches and schools kept calling him. Some teammates didn't like it and the parents too. I heard one say, 'Good, he's hurt, he's out of the way. We don't have to deal with him. Now my son might get a chance to play.'

Although they were overwhelmed by the increased attention, unlike Yoni and Miah, Anya and Wynn enjoyed it and had little to no negative experiences as a result. Wynn's youngest son received more local attention than her older sons did throughout their recruitment process. He was frequently contacted by reporters and featured in the local newspaper. During the one campus visit that Wynn accompanied him on they attended a men's basketball game; at one

point in the game the student section began chanting her son's name, as a way to encourage him to attend their university.

The level of attention Anya's son received was not as intense as Wynn's son, however Anya described her excitement when she saw stories about her son in the local newspaper:

The attention that he was getting. His school, they actually, each week after a game, they posted all the big pictures up. He was making the newspaper, girl. It was just about every week. And I thought that was just wonderful. I'm like, oh my goodness, Look at this!

This is great. This is all about you!

Tate also shared her feelings of pride when their local newspaper wrote a story about her son being the only high school football player in their county to sign with a Division I football program. She said:

I didn't know that it would be on [the local university] news. The high school. The local news. You know. Like it was in the newspaper. Then it was on TV. And I had, people calling me from other places like, hey, did you know that this- like they talked about- and I'm like, what?! Like, I wasn't prepared for that. And he wasn't prepared for the people who were all the way at his future college, that I don't even know if we knew them or not, like, we didn't know they were there, but just receiving well wishes from people um, via Facebook. Like, hey- heard you're coming and just wanted to tell you- we're excited...it was heartwarming, I loved that he was getting that attention.

Weekly communication

Another part of the recruitment process that overwhelmed many of the mothers was the frequent communication received from the coaches recruiting their sons. Communication from college coaches during the recruitment process came in the form of letters in the mail and phone

calls. Tate, Miah, Yoni, and Lola saved all of the letters their sons received in the mail. Of the four mothers, Tate and Miah kept the letters in a drawer, while Yoni and Lola both organized the letters and created a “keepsake” that was on display in their homes.

Over the course of one week Miah’s son received 25 letters from a single school in the Midwest. She recalled complaining to her husband that the mailbox was always full. She said her son was not interested in reading any of the letters, but she read everything. On a weekly basis he brought home piles of mail that had been delivered to his high school and would just “throw them in the drawer.” Yoni’s son also received letters at his high school and she admitted that he would throw his letters in the back seat of his car. Yoni echoed Miah’s sentiments when she said, “it was really overwhelming with mail. You’ll go to the mailbox and we couldn’t find our own mail because all this other stuff was in the mail from the schools.”

In addition to the frequent mailings coaches called their phones as often as the NCAA rules permitted, which Miah felt was excessive and distracting. Lola stopped answering the calls that came through to the house phone and deferred all calls to her husband. She said if she did not recognize the name or number of the caller, she assumed it was a coach. Yoni also began to screen the calls coming into their home, as well as her son’s cell phone. Due to the amount of traveling she did each week for work she said it was not uncommon for her to come home to a voicemail full of messages. The calls became so frequent, her and her husband encouraged their son to ignore the calls.

Aggressive coaches and pressure to commit

The third subtheme within the overwhelming business of recruiting was aggressive coaches and the pressure to commit. Four of the six mothers in the study expressed feeling uncomfortable with coaches who were aggressively pursuing their son’s. There were two

mothers, Tate and Anya, who acknowledged that some coaches were aggressive, but at no point did they find that behavior to be problematic. Miah described her experience with an overly aggressive coach, who had shown up to her job on multiple occasions,

The [university] coach actually showed up at my job and was waiting in the parking lot for me. I was like, ‘Well, hey.’ He was like, ‘Well, I wanted to meet with your son, but they said he was-’ I guess he thought I was going to talk to him right there in the parking lot. I was like, ‘No, you can follow me to [high school].’ I made him follow me all the way back almost an hour to [high school city]. We went to the school where the guys were practicing so that I could talk to him with the coaches present because I didn't feel comfortable. I'm like, ‘I don't know you.’ I had talked to him on the phone once, but I don't know you. Why you just going to show up at my job unexpectedly? It was crazy.

Miah also referenced another coach, from a local university who frequently arrived early in the morning to wait for her son to arrive for school. This was another coach she referred to as a “stalker.”

One mother, Wynn, actually requested that coaches meet her at her job because it was more convenient for her. However, she said one invitation to meet with her led to unannounced visits where they would “just so happen to be stopping there for lunch.” She did not realize that extending one invitation would be interpreted as an open invitation whenever they wanted to come talk to her about her son. This never caused a problem at her job, but Wynn attributes that to her status as a manager. She believed if she was not in a leadership position she potentially could have been disciplined for the number of times coaches showed up.

Yoni echoed similar sentiments as Miah and Wynn. Not only did coaches wait for her son outside of his school, they also spontaneously showed up at places her family often visited. For

example, one night at dinner they were enjoying a family meal and a coach from out of town arrived at the same restaurant. Considering it to be a coincidence Yoni did not make much of his presence, but when it occurred more than once she believed it to be intentional. Yoni said, “I’m just so sick of him, I didn’t know what to do. I felt like he was stalking us. I was like, please don’t let this man be in the bushes.”

Throughout the discussion about the aggressive coaches, the mothers and I discussed why they felt coaches were intensely pursuing their son’s. The pressure to get a player to commit to their program was a major piece of the discussion. Yoni’s assessment of why coaches behaved so aggressively was agreed upon with three other mothers. She stated, “Their livelihood is based on it. Some of these guys are young, too, and they’re desperate. Who you recruited, how well they’ve done is what keeps them with a job.” One coach, Lola perceived as “very arrogant” insisted that her son make a decision before the coach left their home. Lola expressed that they needed time to discuss the decision, as a family, but the coach wanted an answer right then and was not interested in waiting. In college football, “landing the best recruit” for the football coaches is a means to career stability, however it is important to understand how this behavior is interpreted and perceived by the mothers who are assisting their son’s throughout the recruitment process. Aggressive behavior that leaves mothers concerned and feeling uncomfortable is not likely to positively influence the athlete or his family.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, three major themes were presented. The themes were constructed from the interviews of six participants, Black mothers who navigated the college football recruitment process with their sons. The first theme "This is My Child": Mothering Responsibilities were

expressed in subthemes of *Mothering in life*, *Mothering in sports*, and *Mothering in Recruiting*. Within these subthemes it was revealed through the narratives that the Black mothers in the study felt obligated to take an active approach to ensuring that their son's were afforded the opportunity to reach their goals. These feelings of obligation led them to take on roles which resulted in the Black mothers: volunteering for their son's sports teams, driving their sons to practices, attending football games, creating and distributing recruiting materials, and accompanying their sons on college campus visits.

In the second theme "This was all about relationships": Establishing and Developing Relationships, the majority of the mothers spoke on the importance relationships serving as the means to obtaining knowledge about the recruitment process. When the mothers in the study had questions about the recruitment process they relied heavily on the relationships they established, developed, and maintained with their sons, the high school coaches, and other mothers. Although not all of these relationships were always positive, the mothers still found value in the negative relationships. For example, many of the high school coaches were not helpful, as a result the mothers actively became more involved in the recruitment process. Overall, the mothers expressed how instrumental their relationships with others were to the knowledge they obtained throughout the recruitment process.

The final theme, reflective of Black mothers' overall experience throughout the recruitment process was summarized as, "This was overwhelming": The Business of Recruiting. All of the mothers in the study felt overwhelmed with the process and these feelings were the result of the "business of recruiting." Increased public attention and exposure, frequent communication from coaches, and pressure to commit to the institution proved to be factors that mothers perceived as overwhelming aspects to the "business." Each of the themes presented in

this chapter provide a glimpse into the experiences of Black mothers throughout their son's college football recruitment process, the roles they played during this process, and how they obtained knowledge about the recruitment process.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process of their sons. In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are Black mothers' narratives about their sons' college football recruitment process?
2. How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?
3. How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?
4. What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

In this final chapter, I begin with a summary of the study. Next, I discuss how the study relates to the literature. Then I present conclusions of the study resulting from the analysis of the data. Finally, the chapter offers the implications of the study and further recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

A qualitative research design was employed for this study and the data were analyzed using narrative analysis. Black Feminist Thought served as the guiding framework for this study that expands upon current literature on the intercollegiate athletic recruitment process by giving attention to the narratives of Black mothers experiences. Six participants, Black mothers from

the United States were selected to participate in the study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) self-identifying as Black, 2) mother of a son who has completed the college recruitment process, and 3) mother of a son who accepted an athletic scholarship at a Division I four-year college or university. These Black mothers participated in face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interviews, ranging in length from one hour and 16 minutes and two hours and 35 minutes, were the primary source of data for this study. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Other sources of data for this study were artifacts, field notes, and memos. Prior to the analysis of the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995), each participant's interview data was used to construct individual narratives. From there, the narratives were analyzed thematically and theorized to make meaning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Roulston, 2010).

Three major findings of the study were communicated as themes. The first theme, "This is My Child": Mothering Responsibilities, had three sub-themes: mothering in life, mothering in sports, and mothering in recruiting. Within these subthemes it was revealed through the narratives that the Black mothers in the study felt obligated to take an active approach to ensuring that their son's were afforded the opportunity to reach their goals, academically and athletically.

The second theme, "This was all about relationships": Establishing and Developing Relationships, had three sub-themes: their sons, the coaches, and the other mothers. This theme speaks to the relationships mothers established and developed that served as a means to obtain knowledge throughout the recruitment process. The third and final theme, "This was overwhelming": The Business of Recruiting, had three subthemes: exposure and public attention, weekly communication, aggressive coaches and pressure to commit. This theme was reflective of

Black mothers' overall experience throughout the recruitment process, described as being overwhelmed as a result of the "business" aspects of the recruitment process.

Response to the Literature

This research study sought to address the significant gap in sports literature, which has made it difficult to locate Black mothers' perspectives and experiences within the context of sports. The absence of literature on Black mothers in college recruiting literature posed challenges when exploring this research area. As a result, the literature review for this study examined areas of scholarship that provide a foundational understanding of youth sports, Black mothers, and the football recruitment process. This discussion takes into account our broad understanding of these areas and "talks with" the findings of the present study.

Mothers in youth sports

Research on mothers in sport consistently reports that mothers play very specific background roles within the context of youth sport (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; de Lench, 2006; Palomo, 2009). Similarly, the findings of Coakley (2006) and Chafetz and Kotarba's (1995) studies on youth sports not only reproduce gender ideologies, but also reaffirm gender roles. In line with this literature, the Black mothers in the study filled traditional background roles that are heavily present in youth sports literature, these roles included: registering their sons to pay sports, driving their son's to and from practice, volunteering as "team mom", and cheering for them from the stands. Messner's (2009) study argued that youth sport has funneled men into leadership roles within youth sport while limiting mothers to roles of "team mom." Within this study only one participant served as a coach for her son's sports team.

Intercollegiate athletic recruiting

The purpose of intercollegiate athletic recruiting is to facilitate the attraction of highly talented athletes, ensuring their commitment to attend the institution and once enrolled, excel athletically to enhance the success and reputation of the school and its athletic program (Schneider & Messenger, 2012). College coaches are under intense pressure to attract talented athletes to join their program. College recruiting literature has limited us to the perspectives of athletes, coaches, and fathers. However, within the most recent literature, researchers have explored negative aspects of recruiting, which were evident throughout the experiences of the mothers in this study.

There were a number of common experiences among the participants and their son's throughout the recruitment process that are also discussed in modern day recruiting literature. Some of these experiences includes the use of technology for exposure and communication, campus visits, athletic scholarship offers, and, football media coverage of National Signing Day (Fondren, 2010; Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004; Paule, 2008).

The evolution of college football recruiting has significantly advanced in areas of communication and technology. Historically, coaches made few face-to-face visits during the recruitment process and would rarely send multiple pieces of mail to a recruit's home. The mothers in this study reported increased communication in the form of an overwhelmingly large number of mass mailings and in-person visits. The participant's mailboxes overflowed with letters from more than one coach per team on a weekly basis. Additionally, position coaches, recruiting coaches, and head coaches often made the maximum number of allowed in person visits to the mother's homes and jobs. This increased communication was accompanied by the

offering of competitive scholarship packages, which again historically was not always allowed in college athletics.

The technology used throughout the college football recruitment process provides opportunities for coaches, recruits, and their families to exchange information. Researchers have found that advances in technology allow for the use of technology to create athletic highlight film, gather information via online recruiting services, and build personal webpages (Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014; Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004; Murdock, 2013; Staples, 2013). Each participant in this study spoke of their experiences considering each of these advances in technology as part of their son's recruitment materials.

Black Mothering

The Black mothers in this study introduce us to a counter narrative to the commonly perpetuated negative and stereotypical images of Black mothers in the United States. Popular media's depictions of abusive, irresponsible, controlling, selfish, and single Black mothers are an inaccurate and incomplete representation of Black sports mothers. Media images feed into the ideas that Black mothers have to struggle to care for their children, alone, and must overcome the impossible just to raise her children. Additional, the misconception that Black mothers use their talented, athletic sons as meal tickets to "get out of the hood" is consistently perpetuated in today's society. As sports celebrities like, LeBron James, Kevin Durant, Teddy Bridgewater, and Ike Turner have noted, their own Black mothers have played an overwhelmingly positive and pivotal role in their personal and athletic success. The mothers in this study mirrored the athlete's accounts of the influence of their mothers and the individual narratives provide us with a more accurate perspective of how they have navigated the sports world as a Black woman. Contrary to

reports like Moynihan's (1965), the Black mothers in this study were not poor or domineering. They were self-sufficient, and when necessary, resourceful throughout the recruitment process.

The Black mother's in this study were central figures to their families, whether they were married or single and whether they had one child or three. McAdoo's (1977) study of the different levels of involvement and support given to Black mothers who were single as well as those who were married found that Black families have benefitted the most from social networks. The participant's experiences paralleled McAdoo's findings. Black mothers obtained knowledge of the football recruitment process from the social networks established through relationship building with coaches and other parents. Specifically, within the literature on Black mothers, "other mothers" are recognized as people who contribute to helping with Black mother's children. The "other mothers" who offered their assistance throughout the recruitment process mirror the concept of a "village" helping mothers raise their children.

This study's findings support literature that describes Black families as having strong kinship bonds, high work orientation, strong religious orientation, stability, and cohesive functioning (Billingsley, 1992; McAdoo, 1988, Staples, 1994). Participant's viewed sports as a way for their families to come together to show their support to the young Black men they were raising. Mother's also referenced their faith and belief in God to show favor in their son's lives, citing that the current state of Black men in the United States required prayer to keep them protected. They worked together with relatives and friends to provide guidance to their son's throughout the recruitment process. Their familial bonds strengthened especially during the decision making process.

Collins (1994) note that problematic White perspectives for Black mothers often were influential in determining whether they were a "good mother" or not was reflected within this

study. Hays (1996) discussed the expectation that mothers acquire detailed knowledge of what is considered appropriate “mothering” and they also must spend time and money attempting to meet those expectations. Mothers expressed the desire to “do what mothers are supposed to do,” however many of these standards for “mothering” are rooted in dominant cultural ideologies, which are primarily based on White mothers. Mainstream social science literature presents full-time, at-home, middle class White mothers as the norm (Boris, 1994), but none of the participants in this study fit those criteria. Therefore, they represent what this research suggests is a “new normal,” representative of Black mothers’ uniqueness.

Finally, contrary to Oliver’s (1980) findings, the Black mothers in this study made no reference to sport participation leading to a professional football career or referenced athletics as a means to lifelong success, when discussing their son’s athletic recruitment process. In fact, this study’s participants prioritized the academic and athletic goals of their son’s and did not solely focus on their athletic achievements or abilities. This prioritization supports Donner’s (2006) findings that Black parents view sports as a means to rewarding education, not as a means to a professional sporting career. All of the mothers had expectations of their son’s attending college regardless of the outcome of the college football recruitment process. In support of Krist’s (2006) findings, the Black football players in the study formed close bonds with their mothers who are highly influential in their aspirations to attend college and participate in sports.

Racialized Experiences

One noteworthy area of discussion is the ways in which each Black mother positioned herself racially within the context of the college football recruitment process. While this research focused on Black mothers, only two mothers spoke of any racialized experiences throughout this process. Consequently, these experiences primarily focused on their son’s being Black men in a

sport most often coached by white men, not being a Black woman navigating the recruitment process as a mother. One mother described the white coach's evaluation of talent, offering of scholarships, and authority over their sons as similar to the purchasing and ultimate ownership of slaves for profit. In the case of college football profit is equated to, large paychecks, championships, and national recognition.

Within their noted experiences the mothers did not discuss their own racial background as being a distinct part of the recruitment process. The lack of racial acknowledgement calls for more exploration into how Black mothers have navigated the world of college football recruitment without positioning themselves within a race conscious environment. In fact, four of the mothers made no mention of their own racial background, nor how that may or may not have influenced their experiences. This is noteworthy because there is empirical evidence that race plays a role in the recruitment process on the part of coaches seeking athletic talent for their teams.

Paule's (2011) examination of the role of race in intercollegiate athletic recruitment revealed that within the sport of football, along with track and field, the race of an athlete could impact whether or not a coach recruited that athlete to play a certain position. Additionally, within her study there was an admitted difference in the ways in which Black athletes are recruited compared to their white counterparts. Paule's research matched with headlines that read, *"In college football recruiting, mother knows best... right?"*, and *"Another mom ruins a recruit's plans,"* *"Donkey of the Day: football mom April Justin,"* all of which are stories about Black mothers on National Signing Day, are evidence of the negative portrayal of Black mothers in college football recruiting. These headlines, produced primarily by white male sportswriters

are narrowly focused on Black women and once again reiterate inaccurate accounts of Black mothers lived experiences.

Conclusions

Through data analysis and exploration of the findings, three major conclusions emerged from this study. The three conclusions from this research study were: 1) Black mothers are highly involved, active participants in their son's college football recruitment process, with a felt obligation to support their sons; 2) Black mothers develop and maintain relationships that are instrumental in helping them obtain knowledge to successfully navigate the recruitment process; and 3) Black mothers view the college football recruitment process as a business, which seeks to recruit the kid who will best serve the needs of the football team as quickly as possible.

Conclusion One: Obligation to Action

Black mothers within this research study were highly involved, active participants in their son's college football recruitment process, with a felt obligation to support their sons. This conclusion addresses the second research question: How do Black mothers articulate their role(s) throughout their sons' college football recruitment?

The reflection of the participant's attitudes towards the commitment to their son's and the felt obligation to support them in any way possible is at the center of this conclusion. This conclusion coincides with literature on the traditional roles of mother's in sports (Coakley, 2006; de Lench, 2006; Palomo, 2009). All of the mothers in the study described filling traditional "sports mom" roles throughout their son's sporting experiences. While mothers' actively participating in the college football recruitment process was the result of a lack of action on the part of others, it also was fueled by an intense desire to do their part in promoting their son's athletic talent and ability.

The participants in the study also felt obligated to support their son's personal, academic, and athletic goals. The goal for their son's to attend college was also part of the motivation for taking an active role as a parent. Sport was viewed as a vehicle to accomplish the goal of higher education. In this particular study parent behavior did affect the athletes chance of being recruited and the mothers ultimately served as what Magnusen et al (2011) refer to as "unofficial agents."

Mothers expressed a lack of trust with fans, coaches, and other outsiders; therefore they were protective over their son's. The feeling that fans and coaches are simply interested in the athletic contributions of their sons to the football team, reinforced each mother's effort in serving as a guide throughout the recruitment process. Mother's in this study refuted the inherent belief that their son belongs to the university football team with comments such as, "he is my child" and "he belongs to me." In line with Kovic's (2014) recommendations, Black mothers not only take serious their roles as a mother and supporter, they also are willing to take the necessary steps to assist in one of their child's more important life decisions.

Conclusion Two: Human Resources

The Black mothers in this develop and maintain relationships that are instrumental in helping theme obtain knowledge to successfully navigate the recruitment process. This conclusion addresses the third research question: How do Black mothers obtain knowledge about the college football recruitment process?

While Black mothers in the study expressed a lack of trust in the intentions of coaches and other parents, the primary source of obtaining knowledge about the recruitment process was through conversations with those same two groups of people. For the majority of the mothers this was the first time they were navigating the college recruitment process. Admittedly, they were

not knowledgeable about the recruitment process and intentionally sought out important information.

Hoch's (2006) suggested list of information that parents should be provided with cites multiple responsibilities of high school coaches. He contends that most parents have little to no understanding of the recruitment process and one way for them to learn about the process is from high school coaches. In this research study, half of the mothers did not find high school coaches to be of help, despite attempting to form positive relationships with them. The majority of mothers felt that the high school coaches were investing time in assisting some families, while leaving others out.

In addition to high school coaches, the mothers solicited advice from other mothers and friends who had previous experience navigating the recruitment process. Advice from other mothers was not limited to conversations initiated by the participants in the study. There were mothers who understood the inherent challenges that families face throughout the recruitment process and they reached out to the mothers in the study to offer their insight. Friendships between mothers whose sons were on the same team proved to be beneficial for obtaining knowledge and navigating the recruitment process.

Conclusion Three: Seal the Deal

Black mothers in this study view the college football recruitment process as a business, which seeks to recruit the kid who will best serve the needs of the football team as quickly as possible. This conclusion addresses the fourth research question: What are Black mothers' perceptions of the college football recruitment process?

According to the mothers in the study, various aspects of the recruitment process mirror business transactions, resulting in the acquisition of a player for the football team. Black mothers

described navigating the “business of recruiting” as overwhelming. Increased exposure and public attention on their families, consistent communication from coaches, and pressure on their son’s to commit to a school as quickly as possible were deemed as major factors in the process being exhausting for each family. As previously mentioned, private family decisions have now become a highly publicized decision making process for recruits and their families.

The media coverage of National Signing Day combined with the constant attention on recruits have left many families wanting to end the grueling process as quickly as possible. Thus, families often advised their sons to end the decision making process prior to their senior year, by verbally committing to a university football program. A verbal commitment to an institution is a common practice meant to identify where a prospective student athlete intends to play college football. However, as recruiting practices have developed over the years, coaches will continue to pursue an athlete who has verbally committed in hopes of swaying him to change his mind.

This led to what the mothers in the study described as aggressive, desperate coaches pressuring recruits to commit. Scholars have criticized the practice of early recruitment in Division athletics (Paule & Flett, 2011). This practice functions under the premise that if a coach can get an athlete to commit early enough, they have gained an edge over the competition. Aggressive behavior and a lack of patience on the part of college football coaches made not of the mothers in the study uncomfortable with the undue pressure to make a decision.

Recommendations for future research

Scholars researching in the area of intercollegiate athletics and the recruitment process suggest the need for ongoing research highlighting various aspects of modern day recruiting. With changes in technology, increased visibility of prospective student-athletes, and new policies and procedures, the college recruitment process continues to evolve. Locating and exploring the

role of parents and student-athletes throughout this process is especially critical. My study brings forth the continual need to address issues of race and gender in sports literature. Based on popular media's incomplete and often "deficit focused" representation of Black mothers in sports, specifically college football, there should be more research highlighting the experiences of Black mothers in sports.

The college recruitment process has shifted from a private family decision to a displayed spectacle. It is no longer acceptable to minimize the presence of Black mothers in college football recruiting to one-dimensional, incomplete representations. Additional research should be conducted to further explore how parents, athletes, and coaches navigate this public process. To date, academic literature has failed to highlight the experiences of Black mothers and their roles within the college recruitment process. A call to focus more on Black mothers' experiences in primarily male dominated spaces like men's football is also recommended. Black mothers have valuable stories and unique perspectives. Scholars must be willing to answer the call to provide these mothers with a platform to share their stories within the academic literature.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the study, followed by a discussion of how the study relates to and connects with existing literature. Next, the conclusions of the study derived from were the analysis of the data and findings. The chapter concluded with recommendations for future research.

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APPENDIX A

Good afternoon,

My name is Ashley Baker, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Kinesiology. I am seeking your assistance as a gatekeeper in my dissertation study titled, *Black Mothers' Experiences throughout the College Recruitment Process*.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout their son's college athletic recruitment process. This study will examine Black mothers' knowledge of the college recruiting process including before, during, and after their son's commitment to a 4-year institution. In addition, the study will focus on understanding the various roles Black mother's filled throughout the college recruiting process.

My formal request is that you distribute email request(s) to your network of mothers in order to solicit Black mothers as potential participants for this study. My contact information will be included in the email solicitation and after they have contacted me directly, I will proceed with scheduling interviews.

Gatekeepers who are employed at institutions of higher education may be required to get permission from their institution prior to forwarding the participant recruitment email. It is imperative that you check with your institutions policies/procedures regarding solicitation of research participants. If your institution requires you to receive written permission prior to forwarding the recruitment email please obtain their documented permission prior to forwarding the recruitment email. I also request that once you receive this written permission you provide me with a copy for my records. If your institution needs to contact me regarding the research project, feel free to share my contact information provided below.

All information we discuss will be confidential and their identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with the study. No identifiers will be used for this research with the exception of a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Participation will include the following:

Individual In-Depth Interviews target participants: tentatively 10-12 Black women who have a son who has completed the college recruitment process by the signing of a National Letter of Intent (NLI) for participation in athletics at a NCAA Division I member institution between February 2009 and February 2015.

- One (1) scheduled interview with one (1) follow-up if necessary.
- I will audio-record interviews and take reflective notes throughout the conversation.
- I will transcribe interviews verbatim and provide each participant a copy of the transcribed interview for her records and review.
- Each participant will be interviewed separately.

- Interview length may range between one to two hours; participants may be asked for a follow up after the second interview.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call (419) 806-5440 or send an e-mail to abaker@uga.edu. The study has received approval through the UGA IRB process.

Ashley R. Baker
Ph.D. Candidate, Sport Management and Policy
University of Georgia

Billy Hawkins, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX B

Greetings,

My name is Ashley Baker, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Kinesiology. I am seeking your assistance as I conduct research for my dissertation study titled, *Black Mothers' Experiences throughout the College Recruitment Process*.

I am planning to conduct a research study exploring the experiences of Black mothers throughout their son's college athletic recruitment process. This study will examine Black mothers' knowledge of the college recruiting process including before, during, and after their son's commitment to a 4-year institution. In addition, the study will focus on understanding the various roles Black mother's filled throughout the college recruiting process

Details about the study are listed below. The names of participants will be confidential and at no point with their names be documented on any part of the study. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality. Following the analysis of the study all interview transcripts will be destroyed.

My study will involve:

Individual In-Depth Interviews (target participants: tentatively 10-12 Black women who have a son who has completed the college recruitment process by the signing of a National Letter of Intent (NLI) for participation in athletics at a NCAA Division I member institution between February 2009 and February 2015.

- One (1) scheduled interview with one (1) follow-up if necessary.
- I will audio-record interviews and take reflective notes throughout the conversation.
- I will transcribe interviews verbatim and provide each participant a copy of the transcribed interview for her records and review.
- Each participant will be interviewed separately.
- Interview length may range between one to two hours; participants may be asked for a follow up interview.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns. I hope to hear back from you soon regarding your participation in this study. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Ashley R. Baker
 Email: abaker@uga.edu
 Cell: 419.806.5440

Ph.D. Candidate, Sport Management and Policy
University of Georgia

Dr. Billy Hawkins
Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX C

Research Study Participant Consent Form

I, Ashley Baker, from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Billy Hawkins, Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia, am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruiting process of their sons. Specifically, this study will examine Black mother’s knowledge of the college recruiting process including before, during, and after their son’s commitment to an institution. In addition, the study will focus on understanding the various roles Black mother’s filled throughout the college recruiting process of their sons. Participants in this study will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Answer questions about their personal background and provide basic demographic information. Answer questions about their experiences as a mother who has experienced the college recruitment process of their son who is/was an athlete at a 4 year institution and received a scholarship. Participants will also answer questions about their experiences before, during, and after the college recruitment process.
- 2) Take part in 1-2 audiotaped individual interviews that will each last approximately one to two hours.
- 3) Potentially, take part in a follow up individual that will last between one to two hours.
- 4) Someone from the study may email the participant to clarify my information.

The benefits of this study to society include that participants can provide insight into the experiences of Black mothers throughout the college recruitment process. Participants will also be able to identify the ways in which they participated in their son’s college athletic recruitment process and contribute to a greater understanding of recruiting process. Findings from this study may lead to positive impacts on addressing broader social issues that face the U.S. society and more disparately the Black community.

No risk is expected but participants may experience some discomfort during the individual interview as the researcher in the room will be able to hear about my experiences. Participants

can choose not to speak up at any point during the study if they feel uncomfortable or otherwise do not choose to speak.

No individually identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without participants written permission, except if required by law. Participants will be assigned an identifying pseudonym. Participants understand that the interview will be audio recorded and this recording will only be heard by the two researchers. After transcription and analysis is completed on the video and audio recordings, these tapes will be destroyed. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

By signing below you agree to participate in a research study titled " Black Mothers Experiences throughout the college recruitment process" conducted by Ashley Baker from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Billy Hawkins, Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia (706-542-4427). Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, or if the investigator decides to terminate participation, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered. You will receive a signed copy of this consent form for your records.

Ashley R. Baker

Name of Researcher

Telephone: (419) 806-5440

Email: abaker@uga.edu

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Ashley Baker and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Kinesiology. Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black mothers throughout their son's college recruitment process. By hearing your stories, I hope to better understand your experiences and the recruitment process.

All information we discuss will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. No identifiers will be used for this research with exception of a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and the documentation of your demographic information.

I will audio-record our interview as well as take reflective notes throughout our conversation. I will transcribe this interview verbatim and am willing to send you a copy of the transcribed interview for your records and for your review.

You may end the interview at any point and may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also feel free to take a break during any portion of the interview. Please let me know if you need additional clarification or explanation about any of the questions. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Background:

I would like to hear about your experiences throughout your sons recruitment process but before we get to recruiting I would like to learn a little more about you and your family.

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, and your children?
 - Number of children, boys, girls?
 - Did or do your other children also participate in sports?
 - What were your personal experiences with sports in high school and/or college?
2. How important is sports to you and your family?

Sporting Experiences

I would like to hear more about you and your sons' experiences in sports

3. As you think back over your sons' sport experiences, share with me the moments that were important to you?
4. Describe for me what it is like being the mother of a son who was recruited to be a college athlete?

5. Take me back to the moment when you first become aware that your son had an opportunity to play sports in college? How did that make you feel to know it was a possibility that he could be a college athlete?

Recruitment Process

I would like to learn more about your experiences once your son was being recruited

6. How would you describe your overall experience throughout the recruitment process?

7. Share with me some of the highlights of the recruitment process for you?

8. Who were some of the people you shared your experiences with throughout the recruitment process?

9. If you had questions about the recruitment process, how did you go about getting answers to those questions?

10. Can you describe for me any challenges you felt you faced throughout the recruitment process?

Recruiting Milestones

11. Throughout the recruitment process athletes often go on campus visits, sometimes parents attend these visits and other times they do not. Will you share with me how you decided which campuses you would attend with your son and which ones you did not attend with him?

12. Take me through a campus visit, how did you get there, what do you do while you on campus, who did you meet?

13. It is common for universities to send letters to recruits and their families they also personally visit the recruits at their school or in their homes. Would you describe for me the ways in which coaches communicated with you and your son throughout the recruitment process?

14. Your son committed to (insert specific institution the son committed to) University, will you describe for me your role in that decision making process?

15. The final step in the recruitment process is the signing of the National Letter of Intent on National Signing Day, take me back to that day starting in the morning, what happened that day?

Is there any other information that you would like to share with me about yourself, your family, or the recruitment process that I did not ask you about?

Thank you for sharing your stories. The information you provided me will be extremely useful to my research. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns pertaining to this interview.