

BLACK MEN STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY: FINDING A SENSE OF BELONGING AT  
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

by

MARION ASHBY SADOWSKI

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The presence of Black student-athletes among colleges and universities within the United States is on the rise (Simiyu, 2012). Black men students are recruited for their athletic ability, and a large number struggle with transitioning this capability into the classroom (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012). Although increased efforts have been centered around student-athlete academic improvement, there has continued to be a lack of support when it comes to Black men student-athletes and their academic potential (Bimper et al., 2012). Academic achievement can be impacted by a student's sense of belonging, which is critical for college success (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn (2012) expressed how sense of belonging has continued to be a goal or ending desire for Black men students, which is negatively impacted when enrolled at a Predominately White Institution (PWI). The purpose of this study was to understand and explore the challenges of Black men student-athletes' sense of belonging at Georgia Tech (a PWI). This study examined the challenges that could potentially decrease Black men student-athletes' sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus and answered what factors influenced a decreased sense of belonging for this population. The data for this project was collected through quantitative methodology via an

online questionnaire, utilizing Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) revised Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS). This study has given scholar practitioners a brief look into the support needed to create a strong culture of belonging to the institution, through faculty and peer support as well as the environment of the classroom.

INDEX WORDS:     Black, men student-athletes, Sense of belonging, Sense of belong scale, Identity, Development, Predominately White Institution, Division I athletics, Quantitative research

BLACK MEN STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY: FINDING A SENSE OF BELONGING AT  
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

by

MARION ASHBY SADOWSKI

B.S., Kennesaw State University, 2013

M.A., Appalachian State University, 2016

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

© 2022

MARION ASHBY SADOWSKI

All Rights Reserved

BLACK MEN STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY: FINDING A SENSE OF BELONGING AT  
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

by

MARION ASHBY SADOWSKI

Major Professor:	Merrily S. Dunn
Committee:	Georgianna L. Martin
	Diane L. Cooper

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott  
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2022

## DEDICATION

to

Kelly Marie Condon Sadowski

My Mother, My Guardian Angel

August 17, 1963 – May 4, 2004

To my mother, Kelly. I miss you, every single day. You touched so many lives through your beauty, wisdom, care, spirit, and unconditional love. Your strength and courage taught me to never give up and to chase my dreams. You have inspired me to act with passion, help others, and live with purpose. I love you with all my heart. Rest In Peace. Until we meet again.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I can see my graduation in sight, I could not have had a better support group during this journey. Continuing my education has always been a goal of mine, but I would not be where I stand today without the love, care, and support from my family, friends, and colleagues. Many thanks go out for giving me the time I needed to learn, grow, and progress through the path towards my doctorate degree. Countless hours of reading, writing, and research have now come to an end. Although I have completed this educational goal, I will never stop learning and growing within my field of student affairs. Now, here I stand to become Marion Ashby Sadowski, Ed.D.

**My maternal grandparents.** David and Sharon Condon are also known as Papa and Deedee: these two souls are a huge part of a WHY. Without them, I would not be where I am today. The two of them practically reared me, teaching me to live with intention and to never stop learning. They have always been my biggest cheerleaders with ears to listen and shoulders to lean upon. I am forever grateful for their wisdom, love, and guidance.

**My younger sister, Britny.** She is my Gemini twin, as we share the same birthday. She is a free-spirit and a creative individual. Our relationship complements one another, and she has remained in my corner since day one. She has always been someone special to me, and I have always appreciated her authenticity. Britny, I hope that my drive has created a fire in you to never give up, chase your dreams, and know that you can always accomplish whatever desire with unyielding determination.

**My handsome fiancé, Ben Stone.** To my partner in life, thank you for sacrificing our time together so I can complete this dream of mine. Your patience has not gone unnoticed, and I am looking forward to more quality time together moving forward. This achievement has been easier, knowing it will better our future. I love you with all my heart, and I am looking forward to what is to come. Now, let's go get married!

**UGA SAL '22 Cohort.** To my fierce colleagues, I could not have done it without you! YOU are the only ones who truly understand. As the various personalities have come together for class time, the laughter kept me afloat! We were one powerful cohort and a company of companions, with everyone's wisdom, knowledge, and professional years of experience combined. Thank you for your support and encouragement in times of need. There were multiple times that I wanted to shut my computer and throw it out of the window, but I kept my cool. We did it! GO DAWGS!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	V
LIST OF TABLES .....	IX
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Institutional Context.....	4
Purpose.....	6
Research Questions .....	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
College Students' Sense of Belonging.....	8
Factors that Affect Sense of Belonging .....	9
Student-Athlete Identity .....	12
Black Men in Higher Education .....	14
Theoretical Perspectives and Influence of Racial Identity Development .....	17
Chapter Summary .....	20
3 METHODOLOGY .....	23
Survey Research.....	25
Data Collection and Analysis.....	29
Data Analysis and Procedures .....	32
Protection of Subjects .....	36

Researcher Reflexivity.....	37
Chapter Summary .....	40
4 FINDINGS.....	41
Participant Demographics.....	41
Research Questions.....	45
Conclusion .....	57
5 DISCUSSION.....	59
Summary of Study .....	59
Limitations .....	61
Discussion of Findings.....	62
Implications for Scholarly Practice.....	65
Recommendations.....	66
Areas of Future Research.....	72
Conclusion .....	73
REFERENCES .....	76
APPENDICES	
A QUALTRICS SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE.....	88
B PARTICIPATION INVITATION LETTER.....	92
C CONSENT LETTER .....	94
D GEORIGIA TECH HEAD COACHES & COMPLIANCE CONSENT.....	96
E GEORGIA TECH LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION CONSENT .....	97
F PERMISSION TO USE SENSE OF BELONGING INSTRUMENT .....	98
G QUESTIONNAIRE AS SEEN BY PARTICIPANTS .....	99

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants Sport Played.....	42
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Participants Class Standing .....	43
Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Participants Familial Education Status.....	43
Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Participants Scholarship Status.....	43
Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Participants Financial Confidence .....	44
Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Off-Campus Involvement.....	44
Table 7: Sense of Belonging Subscale: Perceived Peer Support .....	46
Table 7.1: Perceived Classroom Comfort.....	47
Table 7.2: Perceived Isolation.....	48
Table 7.3: Perceived Faculty Support.....	49
Table 7.4: Sense of Belonging Subscale Breakdown .....	50
Table 7.5: Overall Measurement of Sense of Belonging.....	50
Table 8: Analysis of Variance: Perceived Isolation.....	53
Table 8.1: Perceived Isolation vs. Sport Played .....	53
Table 9: Correlation Coefficient: Financial Confidence vs. Sense of Belonging.....	56

CHAPTER 1

BLACK MEN STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY: FINDING A SENSE OF BELONGING AT  
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Terrell L. Strayhorn's theory of college students' sense of belonging presents belonging as "a critical dimension of success at college" and "it can affect a students' degree of academic achievement, aspirations, or even whether a student stays in school" (Strayhorn, 2019, p.3). Focusing on college students, Strayhorn (2019) further defined sense of belonging and referred it to "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 4). Sense of belonging is a segment within a motivational framework that supports the psychological needs of individuals. Fulfillment of these needs directly influences behaviors, and elements of social environments impact how the needs are met (Strayhorn, 2019). Thus, a student's sense of belonging is positively related to acceptance and achievement.

Understanding Strayhorn's definition of sense of belonging, one would believe that collegiate student-athletes are a population who experience an increased sense of belonging based on being part of a community and team dynamic who dedicate endless time and energy into their practice and performance. A collegiate student-athlete is an individual who is a member of an athletic team that represents the institution and competes at the varsity level,

receives financial support from the institution, and must meet academic requirements to maintain their status as a student and an athlete (The College Board, 2017). Several associations oversee varsity sports and the largest and most well-known is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), who is a non-profit organization that has a mission to develop young adults as both students and athletes, to best prepare them during their collegiate years and for life afterwards (What is the NCAA, 2019). The three priorities of the NCAA (2020) focus on academics, well-being, and fairness; thriving to provide an opportunity for learning and earning a degree, keeping college sports safe by promoting safety, excellence, and holistic well-being, while giving all student-athletes a fair opportunity both on and from the field.

Within the NCAA, each year more than 460,000 student-athletes compete in 24 sports, and eight out of ten student-athletes will earn their bachelor's degree and over 35% will earn a postgraduate degree (NCAA, 2020). Among Division I athletic programs, 89% of their student-athletes graduate with a degree, which has been the highest rate to date (NCAA, 2020). The only known measure that compares student-athletes with the general study body is the federal graduation rate. Utilizing this measure, in 2021, the student-athlete population graduate at the same rate as the general study body population: 69% (NCAA, 2020). Focusing on all demographic groups, student-athletes graduate at higher rates than their peers, except for White men (NCAA, 2020). Black men student-athletes have a 54% federal graduation rate, with only 44% of Black men graduating among the general student body (NCAA, 2020). Since 1984, the federal graduation rate among Black men student-athletes has increased from a 35% rate to a 59% rate. (NCAA, 2020). These federal rates demonstrate the continuing academic achievement of student-athletes, especially for Black men.

Among this high-profile climate of devotion to athletics, students undertake the unyielding balance of being a student and athlete into their sense of identity (Murdock et al., 2016). Collegiate student-athlete identities are developed and supported through the circumstances of academic institutions and sport teams, with their development being steadily influenced by the context of being involved in athletics (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). As student-athletes undergo personal development during their college years, most of that development is about finding their own meaning of being both a student and an athlete. These student-athletes take on dual roles and responsibilities, which end in self-awareness uncertainty, and identity conflicts (Lu, Heinze, & Soderstrum, 2018).

The presence of Black student-athletes among colleges and universities within the United States is on the rise (Simiyu, 2012). In 2017, 55.9% of NCAA student-athletes were African American, and specific to Division I, this population accounted for 53% of basketball players and 44.2% of football players (Lapchick, 2017). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), from 2000 to 2016 the total college enrollment rate for Black young adults increased from 31% to 36%. From the report totals, Black men enrollment increased from 25% to 33% (NCES, 2018). African Americans have overcome historical barriers when it comes to getting an education, and statistics report a continued rise in optimism, projecting a 26% increase in higher education enrollment by 2022 (Cokey, Obaseki, Moran-Johnson, Jones, & Vohra-Gupta, 2016). Yet, 59% of Division I universities graduate Black men student-athletes at a lower rate than undergraduate Black men who were not associated with an intercollegiate sports team (Harper, 2018).

The gap between intercollegiate athletics and higher education's mission continues to widen, and to some, athletics is the principal part of a young adult's education. Black men

students are recruited for their athletic ability, and a large number struggle with transitioning this capability into the classroom (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012). Scholars have found that Black men are brought up to value sports at a young age being aware of the potential financial benefits provided by colleges and universities dependent upon their athletic success as well as the positive impacts that affect Black men's psychological well-being and post-graduate career transitions (Harper, 2018). Increased efforts have been known to explore the racial differences between Black men and their White male teammates, and scholars have found academic preparation disparities among Black and White student-athletes (Harper, 2018). Harper (2018) noted that Black student-athletes were most often from less prestigious high schools with deficient resources that underprepared them for college-level academics.

As admission and eligibility requirements continue to enhance competitiveness, the NCAA has implemented policies and programs to increase graduation rates and academic excellence for all student-athletes. Although increased efforts have been centered around student-athlete academic improvement, there has continued to be a lack of support when it comes to Black men student-athletes and their academic potential (Bimper et al., 2012).

### **Institutional Context**

Situated in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia, Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) is the number five top public university (by U.S. News and World Report). Georgia Tech educates more than 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students in engineering, computing, sciences, business, design, and liberal arts, and is a leading research university in the United States (About Georgia Tech, 2020). Georgia Tech's vision is to "be leaders in influencing major technological, social, and policy decisions that address critical global challenges" (Mini Fact Book, 2019). Moreover, "the Georgia Tech community—students, staff, faculty, and alumni—

will realize our motto of ‘Progress and Service’ through effectiveness and innovation in teaching and learning, our research advances, and entrepreneurship in all sectors of society” (Mini Fact Book, 2019).

Tech campuses expand internationally and are in Metz, France and Shenzhen, China. Georgia Tech is known for its rankings in academic excellence, #4 in Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs, #19 in Undergraduate Business Programs, and #1 in Computer Science (Rankings, 2020). The institution’s strong work ethic is balanced by an atmosphere that celebrates collegiate sports and campus traditions, while offering 400+ student organizations, and 50+ Greek organizations. Georgia Tech’s NCAA Division I athletics programs is one of the oldest and most distinguished in the country, celebrating their prized Yellow Jackets who compete in 17 sports.

The student population at Georgia Tech is 40.27% White, 25.10% International (Non-U.S. Resident), 18.85% Asian, 6.06% Hispanic/Latino, and 5.02% Black/African American, with 69.39% identifying as male and 30.61% identifying as female (Mini Fact Book, 2019). Historically, one can perceive Georgia Tech as a Predominately White Institution; however, the institution has been moving towards a traditionally White institution. Bourke (2016) simplified “predominately White means that more white students are enrolled at the institution than are students who are members of underrepresented racial groups” (p.13). “Predominately White Institution (PWI)” proposes property rights that are deep-rooted to whites with no official designation; this label applies to scholarly work where race-based issues in higher education is the research of focus (Bourke, 2016). The word “predominant” in PWI considers the continued social practice of whiteness maintaining a place of supremacy over people of color.



Moving towards a traditionally White institution, Bourke (2016) suggested that “what is at play is merely a product of historical patterns of enrollments of White students” (p.16). This traditional predominance of whiteness has been a result of slow progression over time, not from favoring or producing whiteness as normative, but still subjugate students of color (Bourke, 2016). Power can be compromised through students’ interactions within campus culture; “present in power dynamics is the mindfulness by the subjugated that the dominant can wield their power in myriad ways, which might result in harm” (Bourke, 2016, p.16). Examples of such harm can include verbal or physical attacks, intimidation, and stereotype threats, which can result in alienation and isolation with students of color.

Asserted by Bakari (1997) PWIs “often fail to meet the challenges of cross-cultural student development for Black students” (p.101). Harper and Quaye (2007) concluded that Black students face many obstacles at PWIs that include racism, isolation, socio-cultural barriers, and academic difficulties. Due to these challenges, Ritchey (2014) voiced how “Black students become aware of the implications of what it means to be Black during college among their White peers” (p. 100).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand and explore the challenges of Black men student-athletes’ sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. Furthermore, this study examined the challenges that decrease Black men student-athletes’ sense of belonging on Georgia Tech’s campus and answer what factors influence a decreased sense of belonging for this population, through quantitative research methodology. As Black men student-athletes face many challenges, this study will further observe other elements that influence their sense of belonging. It is crucial

for a PWI to be well-informed in Black identity development, as it can contribute to Black students' sense of belonging.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this dissertation are:

1. What is sense of belonging for these student-athletes, in their role as a student, at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?
2. What is the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?
3. Are there any differences between participant demographic variables and the total score on the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature presented here provides an understanding of the concept of collegiate student-athlete sense of belonging. The first section contains information about college student sense of belonging and student-athlete identity role conflict, and the balance between athletic obligations and academic expectations. The second section focuses on Black men in higher education, delving into racial identity development's relationship to sense of belonging, and the climate on a Predominately White Institution (PWI). The final section addresses the foundation of the study, influence of racial identity development, and Cross's Nigrescence model.

#### **College Students' Sense of Belonging**

Belongingness is the basic human motivation of feeling connected and mattering to others; the emotional state of fitting in and not being alienated (Strayhorn, 2012). Having a decreased sense of belonging can result in low self-esteem, dejection, frustration, and ultimately, discontentment with life. Academic success is influenced by community support, persistence, engagement, self-respect, relationships, and overall well-being; all of which can foster a healthy sense of belonging for a student pursuing higher education (Pittman, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). In fact, a student's sense of belonging is a critical issue in the field of student affairs within higher education. As students transition into college, many experience similar situations and hardships, but not all possess the same reactions, beliefs, or ability to work through them. Higher education professionals have a commitment to each student, in hopes of easing their college transition. A commitment to build trusting relationships and provide support and guidance, with the hope that

all of this combines to cultivate a sense of belonging. Removing the barriers that can impede a student's sense of belonging can open the door towards achievement and success (Pittman, 2017).

### **Factors That Affect Sense of Belonging**

#### **Campus Climate, Student Engagement, and Peer Interactions**

There are a variety of connections that contribute to a student's sense of belonging. Research focusing on students' sense of belonging within a campus environment shows that belonging is linked to persistence and well-being. As a result, institutions work to help students gain those (Supiano, 2018). Focusing on collegiate environments, peer interactions can help or hinder the sense of belonging for students. Supiano (2018) concluded in a 2014 study that student satisfaction and belonging has been further linked to their experiences with a diverse group of peers as well as their sense of campus climate. Renn and Reason (2013), (affirmed by Renn & Patton, 2010), stated that campus climate is defined as "the overall ethos or atmosphere of a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement within the environment, and value as members of a community" (p. 99). Renn and Reason (2013) explained that campus climate is a result of the environment along with the person's interactions within it, a "felt" concept (p. 100). Moreover, as climate is measured by individual student perspectives, demographics, and behavior, statistics have been proven to be important measures. The four dimensions for understanding campus climate are the following: an institution's historical provision of inclusion or exclusion of diversity, structural diversity, psychological attitudes and perceptions between diverse groups, and the inter-campus behavior (Renn & Reason, 2013).

Tinto (2012) concluded that sense of belonging is affected by the varying interactions students have with campus communities, and how supportive the experiences are from the students' perspectives. Tinto (2017) voiced that students who see themselves as members of a community that value their participation feel a sense of mattering and belonging. Sense of belonging is reflected from students' past experiences, but mostly are created by the campus climate and peer interactions (Tinto, 2017). Students who feel a sense of belonging persist more because of increased motivation and inclinations to engage in various ways towards greater persistence.

### **Student Persistence and Classroom Experience**

College student success is partly related to whether students feel welcomed in certain collegiate environments; such as, the classroom (University Center for the Advancement of Teaching, 2019). Student engagement, persistence, course grades as well as motivation are all factors related to sense of belonging. The Center for the Advancement of Teaching (2019) further stated how students' cognition, affection, and behaviors combined contribute to whether a student feels that he or she belongs. College students experience belongingness distinctly because of identities and experiences. Moreover, academic performance and classroom preparation can either raise or lower a student's belonging awareness. Tinto (2017) claimed that persistence is a manifestation of motivation, and students need the desire to persist and spend the effort when challenges arise.

Sense of belonging within the classroom is dynamic and ever-changing, due to class transitions from year-to-year as a student who feels confident in one class may doubt himself in another course (Sense of Belonging in the College Classroom, 2019). Due to this, it is important for professionals and instructors to work with students throughout the semester to help them

foster a sense of belonging to aid in persistence and classroom success. Class-level sense of belongingness can be fostered through warmth and openness, participation encouragement, and organization from the instructor (Walton & Cohen, 2007). With improvement over time, students can overcome failure and, ultimately, reach persistence and success within the classroom environment.

### **Student Demographic Populations**

Interactions with peers from other cultural backgrounds and beliefs have been positively associated with increases in sense of belonging (Supiano, 2018). Supiano's research was centered on racial/ethnic minorities when navigating collegiate environments; yet, first year and first-generation student populations were the focus when providing transition and developmental experiences in order to aid in cultivating a sense of belonging. Existing challenges make it difficult for these students to persist and succeed: one being that they are reared in communities that have fewer resources for academic preparation (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Focusing on Black men, Strayhorn (2012) suggested, from his earlier studies, that sense of belonging is important for this group, as their "belonging experiences" significantly impact their sense of belonging and educational success (p.82). Sense of belonging has continued to be a goal or an ending desire for Black men students, while being a motivation for positive academic achievement and social behaviors (Strayhorn, 2012). From Strayhorn's (2012) qualitative studies, aspiring to have a sense of belonging in college, most Black men must dedicate a significant amount of time to studies to achieve academically and exceed beyond the expectations of their educators. In addition, seeking out formal mentoring relationships as well as taking part in campus clubs and organizations help Black men negotiate sense of belonging; all

which give them the opportunity to interact with individuals who share similar cultural values, perspectives, and experiences.

### **Student-Athlete Identity**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a non-profit organization that has a mission to develop young adults as both students and athletes, to best prepare them during their collegiate years and for life afterwards (What is the NCAA, 2019). To compete in NCAA sports at the Division I level, student-athletes must meet eligibility standards that include successful progress-towards-degree (PTD) as well as a minimum grade-point average (GPA) (Play Division I Sports, 2019). Ting's (2009) study on risk factors that Division I collegiate student-athletes possess, includes pressures from high demands of academic achievement while trying to keep punctilious training schedules. Within this high-profile climate of devotion to athletics, students undertake the unyielding balance of being a student and an athlete into their sense of identity. These student-athletes take on dual roles and responsibilities, which end in self-awareness, uncertainty, and identity conflicts (Lu, Heinze, & Soderstrum, 2018).

### **Athletic Obligations**

Athletic identity is a student-athlete's attainment of an identity and sense of self that goes beyond athleticism, as each will spend an endless amount of time and effort perfecting his sport (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Lu et al. (2018) further agreed with Lally, Kerr, and Miller's suggesting "that student-athletes 'over-identify' with the athlete role" (p. 216). Division I student-athletes spend endless amounts of time in practice and competition, team meetings, strength and conditioning sessions, and community outreach (Poux & Fry, 2015). These activities take place with teammates and coaches, creating the sport culture as a constant identity. This sport culture then creates an advantageous environment for achieving elevated levels of athletic

performance, considering that greatness is not achieved without this level of dedication. The more top-performing a student-athlete becomes on his or her team, the more probable he or she will hold a strong athletic identity (Lu et al., 2018).

An analysis conducted by Lu et al. (2018) reported that over 39% of student-athletes felt more like an athlete, outside of sport play, because of appearance and dress. Team apparel and physical appearance are visible characteristics, signifying their status as an athlete, overall aiding in the feeling of separation and negative attention from others. Top performing athletes receiving attention from the athletic look reference it positively; as opposed to other student-athletes reporting their choice not to wear team apparel to be taken more seriously as a student (Lu et al., 2018).

### **Academic Expectations**

Division I student-athletes with a high level of athletic identity have been found to invest less in their academic endeavors because of the increased demands of their sport (Poux & Fry, 2015). The time commitments and demands of competitive play can diminish their ability to explore areas outside of sport participation (Poux & Fry, 2015). Moreover, the greater the student identifies as an athlete, the more his identity is obstructed at the institution, academically. Parsons (2013) reported on a Simons et al. survey stating that faculty made negative comments about athletes that ranged from “expecting special treatment” to “only interested in sports” to “not academically qualified” (p. 403). When there is an athletic stigma on campus, an athlete’s identity is highly valued in the athletic field, but devalued in the academic field (Parsons, 2013).

In addition, student-athletes who have high identity conflict are more likely to experience stressful situations and interactions because of the mental and emotional struggles of trying to balance multiple roles (Lu et al., 2018). One simple struggle from a student-athlete perspective is



deciding when to study or sleep versus practicing the sport. Moreover, lack of attending review sessions and faculty office hours, time constraints around certain classes, and the inability to pursue a specific degree have all been reported as situations of identity conflict (Lu et al., 2018).

Further, Lu et al. (2018) concluded that student-athletes are more likely to hold identities that give them positive responses, separating themselves from the identities that give them negative support. From this, Lu et al. (2018) identified that the stronger their academic performance, the greater the likelihood the student-athlete will identify as a student. Killeya-Jones' (2005) findings examined student-athletes who empathically valued their role as a student and were more likely to show greater congruence between the student and athlete roles.

### **Black Men in Higher Education**

In comparison to their same-race peers as well as White males, Black men remain under-represented within higher education (Harper, 2006a). As of 2014, Black men only accounted for 4.3% of total enrollment at higher education institutions in the United States (Palmer et al., 2014). Harper (2006a) further added that 67.6% (more than two-thirds) of Black men who begin college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest rate of completion between both sexes as well as all racial/ethnic minority groups pursuing higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the percentage of Black students pursuing post-secondary education increased from 10% in 1976 to 14% in 2016, with the 2016 percentages reflecting a decrease since 2011. Moreover, 38% of the total Black student post-secondary enrollment population identify as male, and only hold 4% of the 1.5 million bachelor's degrees awarded (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Strayhorn, 2008). An outstanding statistic to note: 87.5% of Black students who pursue higher education enroll at a Predominately

White Institution, and Black men only account for 2.8% of the student population at PWIs (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Harper, 2006a).

Black men who are gifted athletes have access to higher education. However, they are working within a system that does not always value them as individuals and as students. They are often valued more for what their athlete abilities can bring to the institution (Anthony & Swank, 2018). This is noticeably true in Division I athletics, as Black men stand for roughly 22% of the student-athlete population who compete at this highest level in the NCAA (Lapchick, 2017). From the two most revenue-generating sports, Black men represent almost 54% of football and almost 60% of men's basketball teams (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Lapchick, 2017; Harper, 2006a). Harper (2006a) accurately concluded that “unfortunately, higher representation among players does not render equitable representation of Black men among graduates” (p.16).

### **Racial Identity Development's Relationship to Sense of Belonging**

Only one in four Black men attempting a college degree complete a college degree (Wilson, 2007). One reason for the departure from college for those who do not finish their education is the lack of a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). Moreover, sense of belonging has also been related to educational outcomes like academic achievement, retention, and persistence towards degree completion (Rhee, 2008). Aside from the public education system and its failure to adequately engage and prepare young Black men for college access and success, there has been less focus on the educational experiences of those who enroll as well as the factors that explain their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008).

**Climate on a Predominately White Institution.** In the United States, Black minority students who attend Predominantly White Institutions face identity challenges as these settings are most often unprepared to effectively support them (Stewart, 2015). Researchers concluded

that these challenges resulted in feelings of alienation and isolation, racism and discrimination, and incompatibility with the surrounding environment in a Predominately White Institution (Harper, 2006a). Scholars have concluded that Black men have been described as “dangerous, endangered, not educable, and lazy, which generally reinforce negative stereotypes to which some non-Black peers, teachers, and faculty subscribe” (Strayhorn, 2008, p.502). Black men internalize and accept such false beliefs, which become self-fulfilling, self-defeating, and self-threatening (Steele, 2000).

When analyzing this identity development among college students, race is the most salient identity for students of color. This is reflected in Black students’ perceptions of their treatment on college campuses (Jones & Abes, 2013). To be successful, Black students often find support with each other because they are not likely to find it elsewhere (Ritchey, 2014). Tatum (as cited in Ritchey, 2014) stated that “joining with one’s peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy. What is problematic is that the young people are operating with very limited definitions of what it means to be Black, based largely on cultural stereotypes” (p. 100).

Other scholars concluded that some Black men dis-identify with academic achievement, which links self-esteem and academic achievement (Ogbu, 2003). Black men perform better if their self-esteem directly relates to performing well academically (Rawls, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Strayhorn (2008) stated how self-esteem can depend on non-academic factors such as feeling included on campus or not “acting White,” as some Black men will intentionally underachieve to avoid negative stereotypical labels such as being called an “oreo” or “sellout” for achieving success academically (p.503).

### **Theoretical Perspectives & Influence of Racial Identity Development**

Higher education and its systematic makeup within the United States, while aiming to be inclusive, has continued to reinforce White dominance and reconstruct a community that is innately discriminatory (Hiraldo, 2019). To decrease systems of oppression, higher education professionals must work together to achieve a process towards social justice. Hiraldo (2019) voiced that “this unity is difficult to achieve because those who identify with dominant identities (ex. White, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, or male) do not see themselves having a role in social justice or are paralyzed by shame when engaging in difficult conversations” (p. 2).

The evolution of theories within student development and identity development has moved from the absence of racial inclusion to more of a focus on underrepresented groups, having an understanding that race, ethnicity, and culture are just as developmentally important (Jones & Abes, 2013). Societal influence and demographic changes brought on this evolution, increasing diversity among college campuses, all of which influenced a shift for rectitude. Due to the growing population of underrepresented students, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is often used in studies to further explore the experiences of these students (Jones & Abes, 2013). As Critical Race Theory places race at the center of the research, understanding race is key. Race is constructed both biologically and socially; and social, historical, and political contexts make meaning of race beyond the physical differences (Jones & Abes, 2013). Helms (as cited in Jones & Abes, 2013) defined racial identity as a developmental evolution, referring to it as “the perception of a shared racial heritage with members of a particular group and the belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership” (p.168). Critical race theorists have concluded that an individual’s identity is not solely based on social construction of race, but multifaceted and converges with experiences (Jones & Abes, 2013).

## **Black Identity Development**

Helms (1990) defined racial identity as a “sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p.128). Moreover, Willie (2003) concluded that “race is about which differences match up with the behaviors that are expected from each racial group...; regardless of how much our behavior may contradict racial stereotypes, we each still have to navigate the expectations of others” (p.241). Due to this, racial socialization becomes a key component in the development of racial identity through negotiation of affirmation and conformation of race (Stewart, 2015). Negative stereotypes about Black culture from the media have continued to affect Black students, as the mainstream media is a predominant way for others to attain knowledge about Black culture (Ritchey, 2014). Gendered racial microaggressions continue to influence the quality of young Black men, their lives, and their collegiate experiences (Smith et al., 2016). Racial-related microaggressions are large-scale, system-related stressors that become highly publicized and could lead to traumatic events. In the recent #BlackLivesMatter movement, Smith et al. (2016) concluded that Black men have recognized their environment as stressful and diminishing to their sense of control because of chronic racial micro and macroaggressions. A consequence of today’s social environment has Black individuals, particularly Black men, continually allotting time and energy into the responses of others that turn into stressors, what it was motivated by, and how or if they should respond. These stressors built up can result in, what Smith et al. (2016) described above, as racial battle fatigue.

Foundational studies on Black identity development have focused on the movement through different stages that individuals progress, from lack of awareness to understanding the implications of race, to exploration that leads to a secure sense of self culturally (Harper &

Quaye, 2007). Once accessing college, Black students must navigate and negotiate within an environment organized to intrude on one's sense of self, while attempting to successfully regulate both internal and external identity development processes (Stewart, 2015). Benjamin, Constantine, Richardson, and Wilson (1998) confirmed the Black identity development and its model help "Blacks begin to shed a poor self-worth and move toward embracing a positive Black self-definition" (p.96). This healthy transformation is achieved when an individual can overcome racism, domination, and privilege that is entwined into society; all of which can result in stress that can be experienced at different levels: individually, culturally, and institutionally (Ritchey, 2014).

**Nigrescence.** This five-stage psychological process, later becoming four-stages, and theoretical model of becoming Black was introduced by William Cross in 1971. Cross (1991) termed Nigrescence as the "process of becoming Black" (p. 157). Moreover, Cross (1971) described Nigrescence as "a 'resocializing experience' in which a preexisting identity is transformed from non-Africentrism to Africentrism to multiculturalism" (p. 129). The psychology of Nigrescence represented stages from Negro-to-Black identity transformation that was experienced by many during the Power period (Cross, 1991). After the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the rise of Black Power within the community began. From this, efforts at Nigrescence model building were attempted, especially in the field of psychology. While the original model was designed to explicate psychological metamorphosis and identity change within social movements, recent significance has been proven as useful with developmental issues unrelated to social change, shifting focus to an explanation of the Black identity and consciousness process for Black individuals (Cross, 1991; Ritchey, 2014).

The five stages of the Nigrescence model are the following: Pre-encounter (stage 1), illustrates the identity to be changed; Encounter (stage 2), an experience that compels the individual to change; Immersion-Emersion (stage 3), an extreme period of transition when the change is trying to discard the old identity while trying to accept the new identity; and Internalization and Internalization-Commitment (stage 4), the adaption and internalization of the new identity (Cross, 1991). Briefly understanding the five stages, Cross (1991) explained that an individual can hold different attitudes in the Pre-encounter stage that span from low salience to race neutrality to anti-Black. Little attention is given to race, and focus is on occupation, lifestyle, and religion being more salient. During the encounter stage, an individual must dodge his ideas and worldviews. Cross (1991) explained how direction towards re-socialization or transformation is provided by others, and certain events can change an individual's view of his race as he begins to personalize. Considering the Immersion-Emersion stage, a Black individual begins to depart from old worldviews and shift towards new world views, taking new information learned about race. This individual has not changed, but does commit to change (Cross, 1991). Ending with the final stage, Internalization-Commitment, an individual transitions by working through the obstacles of a new identity, and the insecurities have now shifted to confidence in personal standard of Blackness, along with dedication and long-term commitment to a sense of destiny, Black pride, and self-love (Cross, 1991).

### **Chapter Summary**

Collegiate student-athlete identities are established and supported through the circumstances of academic institutions and sport teams, with their development being steadily influenced by the context of being involved in athletics (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Student-athletes undergo personal development during their college years and most of that development

is about finding their own meaning of being both a student and an athlete. The different parts of a student-athlete's identity overlap and affect one another, as student-athletes try to balance both the student and athlete identity. Meeting the demands of athletics, academics, and social relationships add to the continual identity conflict among Division I, high-profile student-athletes. Understanding how student-athletes experience multiple dimensions of identity, how they make meaning of each identity, and how athletic and campus environments affect their conceptions of being a student-athlete will aid in their overall success.

The gap between intercollegiate athletics and higher education's mission and values have continued to widen; yet, some scholars believe athletics is a dominant element of a student's educational career (Eitzen, 2003; Simon, 2008). Scholars have used the Critical Race Theory to help explain the phenomena of Black men student-athletes in college, studying the challenges they are confronted with as they pursue success both athletically and academically. The challenges that they face while pursuing athletic success, while obtaining an education, are set within the racial burdened learning environment that identifies the Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in the U.S. (Simiyu, 2012). The early experiences of prejudice of Black individuals in American society reflect the place of Black individuals in the United States (Simiyu, 2012). Dubois (1964) argued how "Black individuals must strive to help oneself, unless the striving be aroused and encouraged by the initiative of the richer and wiser envioning group, one cannot hope to succeed in life" (p. 41). The Black community then focuses on athletic success as it has been a positive response to the negative stereotypes that have shaped their identity regarding institutional racism, as they are socially accepted athletically on campus (Simiyu, 2012).



Recognizing and applying Cross's (1991) Nigrescence theory can provide understanding of developmental issues that occur with a Black student regarding his racial identity and sense of belonging in college. As institutions continue to move towards increasing their multicultural student population, higher education professionals should be aware of Black identity development as well as being competent in Nigrescence as Black students and their relationships with peers, faculty, and staff continue to be affected (Ritchey, 2014). A student's race and cultural identity development does not end overnight; it is a process that evolves and develops as he interacts with others from various backgrounds (Pope-Davis et al., 2014). Moreover, Strayhorn (2012) believes that there is still more information that is needed in the role of sense of belonging in Black men and their collegiate success, factors related to their sense of belonging, along with campus climate and educational experiences that impact their sense of belonging in college. The goal of this paper was to conduct a study that adds to the growing literature on the conceptualization and critical analysis of Black men identity among student-athletes. This includes the conversation of race, college athletics, and sense of belonging in a Predominantly White Institution.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to understand and explore the challenges associated with Black men student-athletes' sense of belonging. I introduce the methodology, the instrument used, the site of the study, the student participants involved, data collection and analysis, and procedures. In addition, I provide personal worldviews, experiences, and histories, being transparent to not interrupt the quality or validity of the research. To conclude, I provide a brief summary of the chapter.

Through this study, I used quantitative methodology to understand and explore the challenges associated with Black men student-athletes' sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. I identified three main research questions to guide this study: 1) What is sense of belonging for these student-athletes in their role as a student at Georgia Tech? and 2) What is the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech? and 3) What are the contributions of the demographic variables to sense of belonging?

The decision to focus my research on Black men student-athletes was based on literature that confirms student-athlete identity role conflict to the relationship of sense of belonging and the climate on a Predominately White Institution's campus. The study was guided by Strayhorn's theory on college students' sense of belonging and the data used was derived from Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) revised Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS). Refocusing the current problem on Georgia Tech's campus, Black men student-athletes have a decreased sense of belonging as they

navigate the PWI campus climate while trying to balance and meet the demands of athletics, academics, and social relationships.

I chose a quantitative design for this study because answering my research questions relied on a quantitative data collection process, utilizing Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) revised Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS). Quantitative research consists of numerical data, following the confirmatory scientific method and its focus on hypothesis and theory testing, studying the relationships between variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Punch, 2003). Johnson and Christensen (2017) further stated that cognition and behavior are predictable and explainable in quantitative research, meaning circumstances are determined by one or more causes. While quantitative researchers operate under the assumption of objectivity, it is assumed "that there is a reality to be observed and that rational observers who look at the same phenomenon will basically agree on its existence and its characteristics" (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 36). Standardized questionnaires are often used to measure what is observed, reducing measurement to numbers. This statistical criterion that is used to form conclusions, ultimately, led this research to be conducted using a survey.

Strayhorn (2011) conducted a study "to measure the effect of participating in a SBP (Summer Bridge Program) on preparation for college among a sample of historically underrepresented students—specifically, economically disadvantaged students of color at a highly selective, research-extensive, Predominately White Institution (PWI)" (p. 144). Quantitative methods were carried out and one of the measures used was Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) SBS. The data analysis progressed through three stages, with a paired-samples *t* test conducted to evaluate whether participation in the SBP affected students' sense of belonging. Utilizing the SBS, results specified that students' sense of belonging was positively influenced

post-program (Strayhorn, 2011). In addition to the SBS, Strayhorn utilized other measures that focused on academic self-efficacy, academic skills, and social skills. Sense of belonging was the fourth influence researched, and the SBS was the best instrument approach.

Prior to Strayhorn's study, Morrow (2004) conducted a quantitative study on college adjustment and sense of belonging of first-year students, comparing learning community and traditional students. To measure sense of belonging, she utilized Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) SBS along with two other measures through a web-based survey. The SBS found few significant differences between learning community and traditional students; yet, the SBS found significant differences among gender (Morrow, 2004). Morrow (2004), ultimately, concluded with the intention to persist being significantly related to sense of belonging among academic and social environments. Finding that there was a significant difference among gender, results indicate the need to explore demographic differences and sense of belonging in intention to persists and ways to reduce such differences.

For this study, I used Strayhorn's (2019) working definition of Sense of Belonging referring to

students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers. (p.4)

### **Survey Research**

There is an abundance of literature on survey methods, as the term "survey" is broad, covering many types, used in different ways, and in multiple contexts (Punch, 2003).

Collecting data that is built around a self-administered questionnaire is the most common method of data collection within quantitative surveys. In this research study, the questionnaire used is introduced with seven demographic questions that are followed by the 26 set questions that are part of Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) revised Sense of Belonging Scale. A strength from using a quantitative survey is the breadth and flexibility it provides, suitable for different contexts and a wide variety of research problems, as it is valued in many areas of social research (Punch, 2003). Some advantages of quantitative surveys include their being less costly to reach larger samples, more ideal for questions about opinions and attitudes, guaranteeing anonymity, being highly suitable for probability sampling and more accurate generalizability, respondents being able to answer at their own pace, and being the method best for sensitive and personal topics (Nardi, 2018).

### **Survey Instrument Construction**

Focusing on the initial instrument development, two measures were constructed to assess “sense of belonging” to a collegiate institution, 50 items exploring student-peer relationships and 35 items looking into student-faculty relationships (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). The conclusion of these 85 items were gathered from existing literature as well as the analysis, results, and evaluation from 24 focus groups (between 15 to 30 students each) with first-year students at the University of Rhode Island (Part One of the study). The topics discussed in the focus groups were guided by Tinto (1975) and Astin's (1984) theoretical framework that helped construct questions recognizing perceptual and behavioral qualities of students' college experiences. Topics include peer relationships, faculty experiences, participation in campus activities, changes and challenges faced, stressors, satisfaction with the institution, and intentions to persist. Analyzing the transcripts from each focus group, major themes and patterns emerged that were

related to institutional commitment and the intention to persist. Factors that contributed to the themes were based on the “quality” of relationships among peers and faculty (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). Further analyzing the study, the quality of relationships is built on social support, academic support, classroom comfort, perceptions of faculty, and perception of value—all of which contribute to a student’s sense of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003; Strayhorn, 2019; Tovar & Simon, 2010).

Part Two of the study included a three- part questionnaire (205 students total- 144 women and 61 men), with students between the ages of 18 to 20 years old, 85% Caucasian, 2% African American, 2% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 9% identifying as Other. Of those first-year students, 83% lived on-campus and 53% were classified as in-state residents. Part One consisted of demographic information (age, gender, race, residency status, academic year, classroom environment); Part Two (student-peer relationships) and Three (student-faculty relationships) included the sense of belonging scales that were produced from the focus group study. The scale was made up of 33 “positively worded items” and two “negatively worded items” (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). Items on the scale were ordered randomly, with respondents having five available responses: Completely Untrue (1), Mostly Untrue (2), Equally True and Untrue (3), Mostly True (4), and Completely True (5). Out of the 448 completed questionnaires, there were 20 transfer students and 77 students beyond their first year, all enrolled in a general psychology course.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted by Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) to refine the “sense of belonging” measurement. The purpose was to identify main conceptual elements of the instrument, to decrease the number of single scales necessary to effectively measure the elements, and to produce evidence that the elements null the conceptual distinction of “sense of

belonging” grounded in literature. Statistically, the process when developing the measure comprised of three parts: developing the student/peer measure, developing the student/faculty measure, and refining the sense of belonging instrument. Post changes during the refining stages of the study, five factors of the Sense of Belonging (SB) scale were identified: Perceived Peer Support, Perceived Faculty Support/Comfort, Perceived Classroom Comfort, Perceived Isolation, and Empathetic Faculty Understanding (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) found that sense of belonging, specific to the institution, derives from perceptions of “valued involvement” in the college environment (p. 249-251). Moreover, the authors found solid evidence for the value of the Sense of Belonging instrument and its capacity to generalize knowledge about the factors that influence a student’s persistence in college. Utilizing the scale, institutional communities were able to find common challenges and stressors among students, facilitate and encourage the development of relationships within academic and social environments, and help create meaningful connections that lead to increased comfort and the ability to balance the demands of transitioning to college (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003).

Presently, Hoffman et al.’s (2002-2003) revised Sense of Belonging Scale consists of 26 items among four subscales assessing characteristics of student belongingness in a collegiate climate (See Appendix A). The items involve Perceived Peer Support, Perceived Classroom Comfort, Perceived Isolation, and Perceived Faculty Support (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003; Tovar & Simon, 2010). The items are measured using a Likert-type scale. The five available responses remain: Completely Untrue (1), Mostly Untrue (2), Equally True and Untrue (3), Mostly True (4), and Completely True (5). Lower scores indicate a lower sense of belonging. The internal consistency of the subscales are the following: Perceived Peer Support ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), Perceived

Classroom Comfort ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), Perceived Isolation  $\alpha = 0.85$ ), and Perceived Faculty Support ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003).

**Reasoning for Selection of the SOB Scale.** The Sense of Belonging Scale shows promise and is specified by moderate degrees of internal consistency. The data for its development came from students who attended a Predominately White Institution. The most widely used method to evaluate students' sense of belonging has been through three items in a one-dimensional scale originally outlined by Hurtado and Carter (1997). Tovar and Simon (2010) stated how a single score measuring sense of belonging may be enough in specific collegiate research studies, but it is insufficient to measure how belonging varies in relation to student interactions among campus environments and chosen groups. Moreover, researchers within the field have reported the relativity of this scale with ethnically diverse student populations (Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). Due to Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) multidimensional construct and its relativity with diverse student populations, using this instrument was a significant advantage in my research. Utilizing this scale was useful in assessing the Black men student-athletes' perceptions of belongingness at Georgia Tech. As a student affairs and collegiate athletics professional, I have the power to enhance student perceptions of belonging and mattering, and the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale had a strong impact on this study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### **Research Site, Sampling, and Recruitment Plans**

Georgia Tech, specifically within Athletics, where the survey data was collected was selected based on two primary factors: my ability to access the targeted student-athlete population, and a significant number of Black student-athletes attending the Predominantly



White Institution. Since Fall 2020, Georgia Tech has recorded nearly 14,000 undergraduates and 6,200 graduate students in total. Out of the total study body, 60.3% identify as male, and 39.7% identify as female (College Results Online, 2021). To add, 7.1% (roughly 1,011 students) identify as Black. Further investigating the student-athlete population, 594 students are active on a team roster, and of this population, 147 student-athletes identify as Black (roughly 24%). A little over 21% of Georgia Tech's student-athletes identify as Black men.

Conducting the research at Georgia Tech was necessary for me because of the conversations I have had with Black men student-athletes that led to the perception of their decreased sense of belonging. Formerly, working with the football student-athlete group for three seasons and getting to know them as individuals, as Black men student-athletes, they sought relationships and social interactions outside of the institution. The athletic department was “home” for them; yet, something was missing on Georgia Tech's campus where they felt the need to connect with local institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's).

### **Sampling and Participants**

For this study, all first-year and continuing student-athletes who identified as Black men at Georgia Tech, beginning Fall 2021 and earlier were invited to participate in the research. Participants in the study were of traditional age, 18 years or older, and were active on a team roster at the time of the study. The participants were full-time students, as student-athletes must remain in a minimum of 12 credit hours to remain eligible to compete in their sport.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, was used to generate a collection of participants to provide an accurate and specific perspective (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Nardi, 2014). Utilizing purposive sampling allowed me to designate a group of participants for selection, knowing all met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study.

This method of non-random sampling allowed me to solicit student-athletes with certain characteristics to participate. Participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria: 1) they identified as a Black man, 2) they were an active student-athlete, and 3) they were enrolled at Georgia Tech. For my study, Black was inclusive of all cultural variations including African American, indigenous, multi-ethnic African, and individuals whose racial experiences and preferred identity were Black.

The participants in this study included student-athletes who represented football, men's basketball, men's track and field, and baseball at Georgia Tech. These four sport teams were included in the sample because they all had active student-athletes who identified as Black men, as no other sport at Georgia Tech had active Black men on their roster during the time of my study. When recruiting participants, I kept in mind the possible scheduling conflicts as not all student-athletes who identified as Black men were able to participate in the study. Moreover, because the football roster was significantly larger than the men's basketball, men's track and field, and baseball, there were more football student-athletes included in the sample. Yet, it was important that all who took part agreed and consented to participating.

**Recruitment of Participants.** Being an employee of Georgia Tech, I had access to internal GT Reports. I ran an institutional report that listed all students who identified as a student-athlete, then further filtering the report to those who identified as Black men. Initially, I sent out an introductory communication via email (see Appendix B) to this cohort, introducing myself and the reason for this research study to spark participant interest. To reduce conflict of interest, I had no personal relationships with the student-athletes whom I recruited for the study. Although I oversaw Olympic sport teams, there was a distance, as I did not work individually with the selected Black men cohort.

**Participation in Study.** Prior to participation, the invitation letter via email (see Appendix B) to the Black men student-athlete pool explained the reason for my research, the research questions I was seeking to answer, their willingness to take part in the survey, and any additional information that guided them through the survey. The survey began with a consent for the participant to proceed with answering the questions. Informed consent is a choice that a person makes in which they are notified of another party or individual's desire to use information about them (Jones, 2019; Tene & Polonetsky, 2013). With consent, not only does the participant give the researcher permission to include them, but there is a mutual rapport between both parties that explains responsibilities and expectations throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To recruit participants for this study, I relied on my introduction, education on the need to conduct this study, and participant willingness to proceed with the survey. There was no monetary incentive, but an immeasurable appreciation for their participation. I was sure to communicate my passion and willingness to each participant to address the problem, purpose, and hopeful recommendations based on my findings.

### **Data Analysis and Procedures**

Utilizing the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale, this study was conducted using a quantitative survey/questionnaire. I reached out to all co-authors of the scale and received approval to move forward with using the scale from Dr. Jayne Richmond. Moreover, I sought out approval from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as Georgia Institute of Technology IRB because this study involved human subjects research, and approval is always required when using human subjects. The survey was conducted using Qualtrics XM platform, which also stored the data collected. Qualtrics is software that improves the experiences organizations provide, allowing users to design and

implement research programs. I had free access to Qualtrics not only through my student email, but my professional email, too.

To reflect my focus on the characteristics that influence sense of belonging, I chose to add five demographic questions as well as three involvement questions during survey construction. These questions were asked before the Sense of Belonging Scale in the questionnaire. The demographic questions asked were the following: 1) What is your class standing? 2) In what sport do you participate? 3) Are you the first in your family to attend college (family includes mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles)? 4) Are you a scholarship student-athlete? and 5) Do you feel as if you are financially able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them? The involvement questions asked were the following: 1) Are you involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics? 2) What organizations are you involved in on campus? and 3) What organizations or groups are you involved in off campus? (See Appendix A).

To draw a sample from a population, specifically individuals that identify as Black men, I ran a report through GT Reports. GT Reports are only available to Georgia Tech employees and needed to access student data to perform job responsibilities effectively. This report houses all current student-athletes at Georgia Tech, including student managers and graduate assistants. To narrow down my criteria, I unchecked all but student-athlete name, sport, gender, race, and age. Age is important, as I only collected data from student-athletes who were 18 years or older, not requiring parental consent. To confirm, the names of the student-athletes remained confidential and were only used for the participant pool and initial communication. Data collection and analysis took place during the fall 2021 academic semester.

## Analysis

After data collection, I used descriptive statistics to explain my findings as well as inferential statistics, using probabilities to draw conclusions about populations based on sample data (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). SPSS Statistics is the statistical software platform that I used to help me organize, analyze, and understand my data. After all questionnaires were complete, I downloaded the results into an Excel spreadsheet, then download the Excel spreadsheet into SPSS. From there, I looked at my findings from the questionnaire in combination with the demographic data. Results differed based on demographic questions that included their class standing, sport, whether they were a first-generation college student, and if they were on an athletic scholarship. It is important to understand the data due to demographic differences.

## Procedures

**Research Question 1.** The first research question in this study was: What is sense of belonging for these student-athletes in their role as a student, at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale? To answer this question, I analyzed using t-tests to compare the means of the total Sense of Belonging score as well as each SOB subscale for each demographic variable.

**RQ1.1:** Are there differences in Perceived Peer Support based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status? I analyzed using a t-test to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference.

**RQ1.2:** Are there differences in Perceived Classroom Comfort based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic

scholarship status? I analyzed using a t-test to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference.

**RQ1.3:** Are there differences in Perceived Isolation based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status? I analyzed using a t-test to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference.

**RQ1.4:** Are there differences in Perceived Faculty Support based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status? I analyzed using a t-test to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference.

**Research Question 2.** The second research question in this study was: What is the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale? The elements included on-campus involvement, off-campus involvement, and financial confidence.

**RQ 2.1:** Is there a relationship between on-campus involvement and sense of belonging scale score? To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient test to show the relationship between on-campus involvement and sense of belonging.

**RQ 2.2:** Is there a relationship between off-campus involvement and sense of belonging scale score? To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient test to show the relationship between off-campus involvement and sense of belonging.

**RQ 2.3:** Is there a relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging scale score? To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient test to show the relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging.

**Research Question 3:** Are there any differences between participant demographic variables and the total score on the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale? To answer this question, I ran a t-test for independent samples to show how class standing and sport played influence sense of belonging. I also ran a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to show how first-generation college student and scholarship status influence sense of belonging.

### **Protection of Subjects**

This study asked for participants from the targeted population of student-athletes previously detailed. There was no involvement of vulnerable populations as well as any student under the age of 18 years old. Previously stated, a report of active student-athlete participation was run from the athletic department within the academic center. Each student-athlete within this targeted population was contacted from the researcher via email through TeamWorks as well as any verbal needs or clarification through coaches. TeamWorks is an athlete engagement software platform where scheduling, communication, and document storage take place between student-athlete, athletic or coaching staff as well as tutors. The email contained information about the purpose of the study and a link to the participant consent form and survey instrument. The online questionnaire was composed using Qualtrics and included the Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale, keeping in mind that the instrument was unaltered. There were demographic items that exist at the beginning of the survey, but no personal information was collected. Although IP addresses were collected, they were discarded by the researcher once the data was downloaded from the server. As the survey and data collected were contained in

Qualtrics, all data was protected and only the researcher had access; therefore, the risk of others accessing the data was minimized. Once the data was collected, the researcher downloaded and transferred the results to a personal laptop for data analysis, which was kept secured. Ultimately, it is crucial to know that the data downloaded did not contain the IP addresses as well as did not contain identifiable information of the participants. Moreover, there were no potential risks to the subjects (physical, psychological, financial, legal) including likelihood or seriousness.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

A subjectivity statement was provided so the researcher's experiences, personal histories, and worldviews were presented transparently (Preissle, 2008). This further ensured that the reader critically assessed the research as being bias free, positively affecting the validity as the researcher occluded assumptions to explain the findings and their own inherent system of meaning. As the researcher taking part in this study of Black men student-athletes and their sense of belonging at a Predominately White Institution (PWI), I have had personal and professional life experiences that have constructed my views of sense of belonging that must be set aside to study the circumstances from a fresh lens. I am a White, middle-class female who has lived in the state and surrounding metropolitan neighborhood in which the data were collected for most of my life. In addition to being born and reared in the area, I currently work at the same institution where the participants were educated and competed in their sport. I was involved in many areas of the athletic and campus community including academics, student development, diversity and inclusion, and transition programs. Not only is Georgia Tech's campus culture understudied, but much of its representation is still governed by stereotypes. Historically understood as a PWI, Georgia Tech is known for its prestige in engineering and computing. My



mission, as the researcher, was to present a more evidence-based study of the campus environment in which this specific cohort experiences, both as a student and an athlete.

Prior to pursuing my doctorate degree, I have worked in collegiate athletics for over five years supporting student-athletes both in the classroom and on the playing field. Over the years, I have monitored their progress-towards-degree and athletic eligibility. In addition, I have been an advocate for their personal development and holistic well-being. While serving as a mentor, I have played an influential role being a campus liaison to educate the student-athletes on the various programs and services offered to them for added support as well as engagement and involvement opportunities.

Much of my experience working with student-athletes has been specifically with student-athletes from minoritized groups who identify as men. My experience with this cohort began at Appalachian State University (App State), where I graduated with a master's degree in Higher Education Administration. During my time at App State, I was a student-athlete mentor for the football team. As a mentor, I provided engagement, transition, and academic support to the first-year student-athletes, encouraging them to achieve their goals while acclimating to the life of being a student-athlete. Post-graduation, I worked as an intern for Kennesaw State University's football team as an Academic Assistant where I learned the policies, rules, and regulations that athletic staff, coaches, and student-athletes must follow to stay active and eligible in order to compete. I worked one-on-one with the at-risk population, helping them with time management, reading comprehension, writing techniques, and learning strategies.

Upon starting my professional career at Georgia Tech, I was a Tutorial Program Coordinator. In that role, I assisted with hiring peer tutors, supervised, and evaluated tutorial sessions, and handled the day-to-day scheduling and operations of the tutoring program.

Transitioning, I worked as an Academic Coordinator for the football team, assisting the at-risk and first year students with their collegiate transition, academic progress, and personal development. Now, as an Assistant Director of Academic Services, I oversee the Olympic sport teams. I manage the timeline, from recruiting prospective student-athletes, pre-certifying them for admission, guiding them through registration, monitoring their progress-towards-degree and athletic eligibility, while providing other support through graduation for over 250 student-athletes.

I was reared in a family of collegiate and professional athletes, knowing the time and dedication it takes to be a successful athlete. As a White woman, I understand and am aware of my role and responsibilities supporting student-athletes at a PWI; yet I lack any understanding of what it is like to be a Black man student-athlete and how they experience their collegiate life differently when compared to other student-athletes. I want to understand more about how this population experiences their academic careers at Georgia Tech, what their involvement consists of outside of athletics, and how they describe their relationships with coaches, professors, and other peers. This research will help me better serve the Black men student-athlete population at Georgia Tech, whom my colleagues work with closely. The knowledge I learn from my research and applying a theoretical framework will be essential for finding the answers, filling in the gaps, and changing the way Black men student-athletes experience Georgia Tech. Afterall, student experiences, collegiate environments, and peer interactions impact sense of belonging (Renn & Reason, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Supiano, 2018; Tinto, 2017; Tinto, 2012). During this research process, I remain self-aware of my personal beliefs, judgements, and practices and how they influence my understanding of the research. I will simply address what I know from current and

earlier research, acknowledge what I learn from my research findings, and make honest recommendations.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study included one form of data collection, a quantitative questionnaire. I conducted this study that utilized data collected through the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale, of which is a valid and reliable instrument. The data used presented a targeted group of student-athletes at Georgia Tech, reflecting the research about their common experiences they chose to share regarding their sense of belonging. My findings and implications focused on Black men student-athletes as a population, in an effort to become more aware of the challenges they face to provide recommendations for a future of increased sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus. To establish trustworthiness, my researcher reflexivity was presented as well as the consent and protection of my research participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to use quantitative methodology to (1) examine the sense of belonging for these student-athletes in their role as a student at Georgia Tech, 2) to examine the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech, and (3) to determine whether demographic variables contribute to sense of belonging. This chapter will provide descriptive statistics of participant demographic attributes as well as provide the results of the statistical analyses used to inquire into the research questions stated above.

#### **Participant Demographics**

A total of 49 Black men student-athletes responded to the demographic questions and the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging scale. With 49 respondents out of 111 total Black men student athletes, this research study had a 44.1% response rate. Out of those 49 respondents, only 45 of the questionnaires were included in the sample. The other 4 responses were discarded due to the respondents starting but not completing 100% of the questions asked.

#### **Athletic Team**

Table 1 shows the percentage from each sport team who fully completed the survey. Student athletes from Sport One made up 11.11% of participants. Student-athletes for Sport Two made up 6.67% of participants. Student-athletes from Sport Four made up 11.11% of participants. Lastly, student-athletes from Sport Three made up 71.11% of participants. The actual sport played is not listed to protect participant identity.

**Table 1***Percentage of Participants based on Sport Played*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Sport 1	5	11.11%
Sport 2	3	6.67%
Sport 3	32	71.11%
Sport 4	5	11.11%

*N* = 45.

**Class Standing**

In Table 2, first-year students made up 33.33% of participants; sophomores made up 17.78% of participants; juniors made up 22.22% of participants; and seniors made up 26.67% of participants.

**Table 2***Percentage of Participants based on Class Standing*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
First-year (less than 30 credit hours)	15	33.33%
Sophomore (30+ credit hours)	8	17.78%
Junior (60+ credit hours)	10	22.22%
Senior (90+ credit hours)	12	26.67%

*N* = 45.

**First-Generation College Student**

Table 3 illustrates that 15.56% of participants were first-generation college students: participants who were not first-generation college students at 84.44%.

**Table 3**

*Are you the first in your family to attend college (family includes mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles)?*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	7	15.56%
No	38	84.44%

*N = 45.*

### **Scholarship Recipients**

In Table 4, participants who were on an athletic scholarship made up 84.44% of participants, and 15.56% of the participants were non-scholarship student-athlete.

**Table 4**

*Are you a scholarship student-athlete?*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	38	84.44%
No	7	15.56%

*N = 45.*

### **Financial Status**

Participants were asked if they felt financially able to participate in activities outside of their sport that had costs associated with them. From the sample, 68.9% of participants felt that they were not financially able to participate in activities outside of their sport; 31.1% of participants reported that they felt financially able to participate.

**Table 5**

*Do you feel like you are financially able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them?*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	14	31.11%
No	31	68.89%

*N = 45*

### **Involvement**

Participants were asked if they were involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics. Shown in Table 6, 91.11% of participants were not involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics. Only 8.89% of participants reported that they were involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics. For on-campus involvement, Greek Life, Student Organizations, Volunteer or Service-related Activities, and Political or Multicultural organizations were pursued. Regarding off-campus involvement, roughly 55% participants were not involved in any off-campus activity. Participant off-campus involvement from the other 45% was made up of the following activities: Civil Participation/Non-Profit Organization, Religious Group, Student Club/Organization at a HBCU, Neighborhood Association, Sport/Social Club, and Other.

**Table 6**

*Are you involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics?*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes (continue to Question 6)	4	8.89%
No (skip to Question 7)	41	91.11%

*N = 45.*

## Research Questions

### Research Question 1

**RQ1:** *What is sense of belonging for these student-athletes in their role as a student at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?*

#### *Sense of Belonging Scale*

To review, lower scores indicate a lower sense of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003).

**Perceived Peer Support.** Looking at Table 7, seven items within the Perceived Peer Support subscale had a relatively high mean. This confirms that the participants had a higher sense of belonging through Perceived Peer Support. The means from the items on the subscale translate into participants answering between “equally true and untrue” and “mostly true.” On average, participants tended to rate Perceived Peer Support items towards “mostly true,” which is towards the higher end of the scale. Focusing on the lowest, the participants did not seem to discuss personal matters with students whom they met in class.



**Table 7***Perceived Peer Support*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam.	45	1	5	3.64	1.351
I could contact another student in class if I had a question.	45	1	5	3.60	1.195
If I miss class, I know student who I could get notes from.	45	1	5	3.58	1.305
I have developed personal relationships with other students in class.	45	1	5	3.31	1.328
Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are approaching.	45	1	5	3.13	1.236
I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates.	45	1	5	2.87	1.217
I invite people I know from class to do things socially.	45	1	5	2.64	1.351
I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class.	45	1	5	2.33	1.168

*N* = 45.

**Perceived Classroom Comfort.** Looking at Table 7.1, all four items within the Perceived Classroom Comfort subscale had a higher mean, over 3 (translating between “equally true and untrue” and “mostly true”). The two highest were “I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions” as well as “I feel comfortable asking a question in class.” As all items had a higher mean based on the total scale score, this suggests that the participants had a higher sense of belonging through Perceived Classroom Comfort on campus—feeling comfortable enough to contribute, ask questions, volunteer, or speak up in class.

**Table 7.1**

<i>Perceived Classroom Comfort</i>					
	<i>n</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
I feel comfortable asking a question in class.	45	1	5	3.40	1.116
I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions.	45	1	5	3.38	1.134
I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinions in class.	45	1	5	3.29	1.100
Speaking in class is easy because I feel comfortable.	45	1	5	3.27	1.250
<i>N</i> = 45.					

**Perceived Isolation.** Looking at Table 7.2, all four items within the Perceived Isolation subscale had a higher mean based on the total scale score. Regarding Perceived Isolation, a higher mean suggests a higher feeling of isolation. Most items had a mean over 3, which translate between “equally true and untrue” and “mostly true”. The items with the highest mean

were the following: “No one in my classes knows anything personal about me,” “I rarely talk to other students in class,” and “I know very few people in my class.” Based on these findings, participants were not introducing themselves to classmates nor having personal conversations with other students.

**Table 7.2**

<i>Perceived Isolation</i>					
	<i>n</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
I know very few people in my class.	45	1	5	3.33	1.044
No one in my classes knows anything personal about me.	45	1	5	3.11	1.133
I rarely talk to other students in class.	45	1	5	3.04	0.976
It is difficult to meet other students in class.	45	1	5	2.69	0.973

*N* = 45.

**Perceived Faculty Support.** Looking at Table 7.3, all ten items within the subscale had a higher mean based on the total scale score. One average, the participants rated the items on the subscale more towards “mostly true” and “completely true.” This higher mean suggests a higher sense of belonging. The three items that had the highest mean were as follows: “I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material,” “I feel like a faculty member would take the time and talk to me if I needed help,” and “If I had a reason, I would feeling comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours, etc).” These results suggest that the participants had a higher sense of belonging through Perceived Faculty Support.

**Table 7.3***Perceived Faculty Support*

	<i>n</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material.	45	1	5	3.60	1.214
I feel that a faculty member would take the time to talk to me if I needed help.	45	1	5	3.49	1.058
If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours, etc.).	45	1	5	3.42	1.055
I feel comfortable seeking help from a teacher before or after class.	45	1	5	3.40	0.986
I feel that a faculty member really tried to understand my problem when I talked about it.	45	1	5	3.13	0.944
I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty.	45	1	5	3.11	1.191

I feel comfortable socializing with a faculty member outside of class.	45	1	5	2.98	1.158
I feel that a faculty member would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them.	45	1	5	2.96	0.952
I feel that a faculty member would be sympathetic if I was upset.	45	1	5	2.87	1.036
I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem.	45	1	5	2.51	1.100

---

N = 45.

### The Scale Measurements as a Whole

Focusing on Table 7.4, the participants' sense of belonging subscale results show all four subscales having a mid-to higher mean. With a higher mean comes a higher sense of belonging. Equating the ranges into the mean difference, Perceived Classroom Comfort, Perceived Faculty Support, and Perceived Peer Support were the three subscales with the higher means. Ultimately, Perceived Faculty Support had the highest mean (higher sense of belonging). Now looking at Table 7.5, the participants' mean sense of belonging score was ~82 (lowest 38 and highest 109). This suggests that the participants had an overall higher sense of belonging at Georgia Tech.

**Table 7.4**

#### *Sense of Belonging Subscale Breakdown*

---

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Perceived Peer Support	8.00	40.00	25.11	7.72

Perceived Faculty Support	10.00	43.00	31.47	7.44
Perceived Classroom Comfort	4.00	20.00	13.33	4.05
Perceived Isolation	4.00	20.00	12.18	3.26

---

$N = 45$ .

**Table 7.5**

*Overall Sense of Belonging*

---

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Sense of Belonging	38.00	109.00	82.09	14.11

---

$N = 45$ .

**RQ1.1:** *Is there a difference in Perceived Peer Support based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status?* I analyzed using either a t-test or a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference. The t-test for independent samples is one of the most common statistical significance tests (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This test is run to determine the difference between two groups. One-way ANOVA is a statistical test used to compare two or more groups.

**Class standing.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between class standing and Perceived Peer Support,  $F(3, 41) = 0.759, p = 0.524$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between class standing and Perceived Peer Support.

**Sport Played.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between sport played and Perceived Peer Support,  $F(3, 41) = 1.20, p = 0.322$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between sport played and Perceived Peer Support.

**First-Generation College Student.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-generation college student status of the participants and Perceived Peer Support,  $t(43) = .117, p = .907$ .

**Scholarship Status.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between scholarship status of the participants and Perceived Peer Support,  $t(43) = -1.357, p = .182$ .

**RQ1.2:** *Are there differences in Perceived Classroom Comfort based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status?* I analyzed using either a t-test or a one-way ANOVA to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there was a statistical difference.

**Class Standing.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between class standing and Perceived Classroom Comfort,  $F(3, 41) = 1.16, p = 0.334$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between class standing and Perceived Classroom Comfort.

**Sport Played.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between sport played and Perceived Classroom Comfort,  $F(3, 41) = 1.87, p = 0.15$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between sport played and Perceived Classroom Comfort.

**First-Generation College Student.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-generation college student status of the participants and Perceived Classroom Comfort,  $t(43) = 0.067, p = .947$ . There was no difference between first-generation college student status of the participants and their Perceived Classroom Comfort.

**Scholarship Status.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-scholarship status of the participants and Perceived Classroom Comfort,  $t(43) = -0.572, p = .570$ . There was no difference between scholarship student status of the participants and their Perceived Classroom Comfort.

**RQ1.3:** *Are there differences in Perceived Isolation based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status?* I analyzed using either a t-test or a one-way ANOVA to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there was a statistical difference.

**Class Standing.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between sport played and Perceived Classroom Comfort,  $F(3, 41) = 0.87, p = 0.461$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between class standing and Perceived Isolation.

**Sport Played.** The analysis of variance showed that there was a significance between sport played and Perceived Isolation,  $F(3, 41) = 3.53, p = 0.02$  (Table 8). Furthermore, I ran a follow-up Post Hoc test, which is a modified Tukey method. This procedure was used to determine which pairwise comparison of means contributes to the overall significant difference that is observed in the computation of the F statistic. The conclusion states that there was a difference between sport played and Perceived Isolation.

**Table 8**

*ANOVA*  
*Perceived Isolation*

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	95.903	3	31.968	3.536	0.023
Within Groups	370.675	41	9.041		
Total	466.578	44			

**Table 8.1**



*Perceived Isolation based on Sport Played*

		95% Confidence Interval for Mean						
	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Sport 1	5	12.00	2.12	0.95	9.37	14.63	9.00	15.00
Sport 2	3	16.00	2.00	1.15	11.03	20.97	14.00	18.00
Sport 3	32	11.44	3.07	0.54	10.33	12.54	4.00	18.00
Sport 4	5	14.80	3.63	1.62	10.29	19.31	10.00	20.00
Total	45	12.18	3.26	0.49	11.20	13.16	4.00	20.00

$N = 45.$

**First-Generation College Student.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-generation college student status of the participants and Perceived Isolation,  $t(43) = -0.281, p = 0.780$ . There was no difference between first-generation college student status of the participants and their Perceived Isolation.

**Scholarship Status.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between scholarship status of the participants and Perceived Isolation,  $t(43) = 0.405, p = .687$ . There was no difference between scholarship student status of the participants and their Perceived Isolation.

**RQ1.4:** *Are there differences in Perceived Faculty Support based on the demographic items: class standing, sport, first-generation college student, and athletic scholarship status?* I analyzed using either a t-test or a one-way ANOVA to compare the means of the demographic variables to determine if there is a statistical difference.

**Class Standing.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between class standing and Perceived Faculty Support,  $F(3, 41) = 0.21, p = 0.88$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between class standing and Perceived Faculty Support.

**Sport Played.** The analysis of variance showed that there was no significance between sport played and Perceived Faculty Support,  $F(3, 41) = 1.75, p = 0.17$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between sport played and Perceived Faculty Support.

**First-Generation College Student.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-generation college student status of the participants and Perceived Faculty Support,  $t(43) = 0.204, p = .839$ . There was no difference between first-generation college student status of the participants and their Perceived Faculty Support.

**Scholarship Status.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between scholarship status of the participants and Perceived Faculty Support,  $t(43) = -1.20, p = .234$ . There was no difference between scholarship student status of the participants and their Perceived Faculty Support.

## Research Question 2

**RQ2:** *What is the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech, as measured by Hoffman et al.'s (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?*

**RQ 2.1:** *Is there a relationship between on-campus involvement and sense of belonging?*

To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient to show the relationship between on-campus involvement and sense of belonging. The findings showed that there is no statistical significance, and the two variables had a negative/weak correlation,  $r(45) = -.222, p = .143$ .

**RQ 2.2:** *Is there a relationship between off-campus involvement and sense of belonging?*

To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient to show the relationship between off-

campus involvement and sense of belonging. The findings showed that there was no statistical difference between off-campus involvement and sense of belonging and a positive correlation,  $r(43) = 1.492, p = .143$ .

**RQ 2.3:** *Is there a relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging?* To answer this question, I ran a correlation coefficient to show the relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging. From the findings, there was a statistical significance and a negative correlation,  $r(45) = -.412, p = .005$ . As the financial confidence decreases among the participants, their sense of belonging lessens.

**Table 9**

*Correlation between Financial Confidence and Sense of Belonging*

	Do you feel like you are financially able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them?	Sense of Belonging
Do you feel like you are financially able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them?	1 45	-.412** 0.005 45
Sense of Belonging	-.412** 0.005 45	1 45

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Research Question 3

**RQ3:** *Are there any differences between participant demographic variables and the total score on the Hoffman et al. (2002-2003) Sense of Belonging Scale?* The t-test for independent samples or a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used depending on the demographic variables: class standing, first-generation college student status, scholarship status, and sport played.

**Class Standing.** The analysis of variance showed that there was not a significance between class standing and sense of belonging,  $F(3, 41) = 0.69, p = 0.56$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between class standing and sense of belonging.

**Sport Played.** The analysis of variance showed that there was not a significance between sport played and sense of belonging,  $F(3, 41) = 1.74, p = 0.17$ . The conclusion states that there was no difference between sport played and sense of belonging.

**First-Generation College Student.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between first-generation college student status of the participants and sense of belonging,  $t(43) = 0.12, p = .90$ . There was no difference between first-generation college student status of the participants and their sense of belonging.

**Scholarship Status.** The t-test showed that there was no significance between scholarship status of the participants and sense of belonging,  $t(43) = -1.45, p = .15$ . There was no difference between scholarship status of the participants and their sense of belonging.

### Conclusion

The results of my study indicated that the participants mostly experience a higher sense of belonging. One finding that was shown to be statistically significant is that there is a relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging. As a participant's financial

confidence decreases, their sense of belonging lessens. When looking into the contributions of the demographic variables to sense of belonging, there were no differences found. However, participants' sense of belonging subscale results show all four subscales having a mid-to-high mean. With a higher mean comes a higher sense of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2003). When looking into the subscales, Perceived Faculty Support had the highest mean of the four; therefore, participants experience the highest sense of belonging regarding this area on Georgia Tech's campus. Examining the subscales further, there was a difference between sport played and Perceived Isolation.

Overall, the participants' mean sense of belonging score was ~82 (lowest score being 38 and highest being 109), which further suggests that the participants have an overall higher sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. Looking forward to Chapter 5, I will summarize the study, discuss limitations, provide recommendations, discuss implications for scholarly practice, and define areas for future research pertaining to Black, men student-athletes and their sense of belonging at Georgia Tech.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview and discussion of the results presented in the previous chapter. This chapter includes a summary of the research study, an explication of the research questions, discussion of the findings, reasons the findings are significant as well as how the findings can inform student affairs professionals, and close with suggestions for future research.

#### **Summary of Study**

The purpose of the study was to understand the sense of belonging of Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech. The researcher composed a questionnaire that included the Hoffman et. al (2003) Sense of Belonging Scale to understand how the participants felt about their experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Demographic questions were designed to further understand the participants, creating context around class standing, sport played, scholarship status, and first-generation college student status. The demographic questions were asked to determine if there were any significant differences found. The scale followed the demographic questions, composed of four subscales that were focused on Perceived Peer Support, Perceived Classroom Comfort, Perceived Isolation, and Perceived Faculty Support.

The sample for this study was compiled using the researcher's employment credentials, running an institutional report and filtering students down to their status as a student-athlete to further focus on only those who identified as Black men. The researcher then recruited participants by directly emailing them an introduction to participate in the study via TeamWorks. Through this method of recruitment, 111 participants were contacted and 49 responded. Out of

49 respondents, only 45 were utilized in the study because they completed all demographic and instrument questions (four participants did not complete every instrument question).

The researcher analyzed the data and conducted statistical analysis to answer the research questions that guided this study. Descriptive statistics and frequency tables were run to examine the demographic variables that provided some context to experiences of the participants at Georgia Tech: athletic team, class standing, first-generation college student status, scholarship status, financial confidence as well as on-campus and off-campus involvement. An independent samples t-test was run to determine the difference between first-generation college student status and sense of belonging (along with each subscale) as well as the difference between scholarship status and sense of belonging (along with each subscale). Moreover, an independent samples t-test was also run to compare the means of off-campus involvement and sense of belonging. A t-test for correlation coefficients was run to show the relationship between on-campus involvement and sense of belonging as well as to show the difference between financial confidence and sense of belonging. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine differences between class standing and each of the subscales as well as sport played and each of the subscales.

The results of the study indicated that the participants experience a relatively high sense of belonging (~82 mean, 38 being the lowest and 109 being the highest). The contributions of the demographic variables to sense of belonging showed no statistical differences; however, there was a relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging. Participants' sense of belonging subscale results shows all four subscales having a mid-to-high mean. Stated previously, a higher mean comes a higher sense of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2003). Out of the four subscales, Perceived Faculty Support had the highest mean of the four; therefore, participants experience the highest sense of belonging through faculty support on Georgia Tech's

campus. Studying the Perceived Isolation subscale, results showed the participants having a higher sense of isolation. Isolation relates to participants experiencing difficulties meeting other students in class, not knowing or talking to other students in class as well as classmates not knowing personal information of the participants. Further, there was a difference between Sport Played and Perceived Isolation. This means that participants felt more isolated depending on the sport they played. Most importantly, the participants' mean sense of belonging score being ~82 further suggests that the participants have an overall higher sense of belonging at Georgia Tech.

### **Limitations**

For professionals in the field wanting to use the research findings, they must consider the limitations of the study. The sample size in quantity was limited due to the number of participants who responded. Although a 41% response rate was high, 70 participants (out of 119) did not respond. Out of the total number of Black, men student-athletes, 59% did not participate. It is likely that the results could have differed if more student-athletes participated. Statistical tests may not have identified significant relationships within the data set due to the response rate. The importance of sample size is greater in quantitative studies compared to qualitative studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Basing this study in a larger and more adequate sample size may yield more accurate results.

Moreover, although this study found that Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech have a high sense of belonging, the study cannot explain why. The data found was centered around the Hoffman et al. (2003) Sense of Belonging scale and its subscales, which focus on faculty and peer support, classroom comfort, and isolation—all of which take place on campus, and outside of athletics. However, the question remains, what has been done on campus for these participants to feel a high sense of belonging?



### **Discussion of Findings**

The study focused on what sense of belonging is for Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech. Within this specific population, the researcher wanted to further examine demographic variables and involvement to determine if there were any statistical differences. Surprisingly, much of the findings involving the differences between the demographic variables and sense of belonging were not statistically significant. There was no difference between demographic variables analyzed and Perceived Peer Support. There was no difference between demographic variables and Perceived Classroom Comfort. There was no difference between class standing, first-generation college student status, and scholarship status and Perceived Isolation. However, there was a difference between sport played and Perceived Isolation. Depending on the sport played, participants felt that it was difficult to meet other students in class, or develop relationships with classmates, rarely having conversations with students in class, and knowing very few people in their classes. Lastly, there was no difference between demographic variables and Perceived Faculty Support.

Looking into involvement and sense of belonging, the findings revealed that there was no significance between on-campus involvement or off-campus involvement and sense of belonging. Confirmed in the previous chapter, 91.11% of participants were not involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics. Only 8.89% of participants reported that they were involved outside of athletics. Out of the participants who reported that they were involved, over 55% of them stated that they did not participate in any off-campus opportunities. The few off-campus opportunities that were reported consisted of a sport or social club, religious group or student club/organization at a HBCU in the community. Participant involvement on-campus was

very minimal, with activities mostly consisting of a volunteering or service-related activity and/or a student organization (academic, educational, religious, spiritual).

### **Financial Confidence**

The finding that was statistically significant was the relationship between financial confidence and sense of belonging. There was a negative correlation between variables, as a participant's financial confidence decreases his sense of belonging is reduced. From other research, findings have shown that sense of belonging behaviors can be shaped by financial circumstances (Nguyen & Herron, 2021). McClure and Ryder (2018) found that 51.2% of low-income students admitted that they are unable to participate in social activities because they require a cost. As social activities are a way to get involved and develop and maintain relationships, low-income students may be constricted, ultimately affecting connection. Student-athletes may receive a scholarship award or have accepted a financial aid package, but without a connection to the staff or campus community, they lack the confidence to create a supportive educational environment (Patturelli, 2021). Although Strayhorn's work has been beneficial in understanding ways that students can feel a sense of belonging in their collegiate environment, very few studies have considered how a student's financial confidence contributes to belongingness, just access to involvement opportunities/activities (Nguyen & Herron, 2021).

### **Sense of Belonging Scale**

Among the demographic variables examined, there was no difference between each variable and the sense of belonging scale score. Yet, calculating the total mean from the participants answering the sense of belonging scale questions (overall SOB, mean of ~82), it is clear the participants experience a higher sense of belonging (see Table 7.5). Within the four subscales, Perceived Faculty Support included the highest mean, resulting in the highest sense of

belonging (see Table 7.4). These experiences can include participants being comfortable speaking to faculty because of a problem or asking the faculty for help on any misunderstandings, participants feeling that faculty members are sensitive to their difficulties and are sympathetic, and participants being comfortable socializing with faculty outside of class time (Hoffman et al., 2003). As many student-athletes enter college at a lower academic level than their peers, faculty should be encouraged to understand their situation and be willing to work with these students to help them identify what factors could be impeding their academic development and self-identity (Harrison et al., 2006). The quality and nature of communication and faculty interactions with student-athletes is essential for sense of belonging and the collegiate experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). With the data confirming that Black, men student-athletes have a higher sense of belonging through Perceived Faculty Support, this shows that Georgia Tech's faculty are taking the time to support this population.

The second highest mean out of the four subscales was Perceived Peer Support (see Table 7.4). These experiences from participants can include meeting with classmates outside of class, sharing lecture notes and reviewing the material together, reminding one another of assignment deadlines, and developing personal relationships with other students in class (Hoffman et al., 2003). It is a strong and important finding, that the participants of this study show a higher sense of belonging through peer support. This finding does not support what the literature has found in the past. Ritchey (2014) reflected on the reality of Black students finding support from only each other because they cannot find it from peers outside of their race. Oppositely, these findings further suggest Tinto's statement of how sense of belonging is affected by the interactions students have with peers, and students who see themselves as members of a supportive community of peers feel more of a sense of belonging (2012).

### **Implications for Scholarly Practice**

The findings of this study suggest that Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech have a higher sense of belonging on campus. These results contradict what previous literature has stated regarding Black, men student-athletes and their belonging at a Predominantly White Institution. Stewart (2015) and Harper (2006a) explained that Black students who attend PWIs face challenges as these settings most often are underprepared to effectively support them. Further, studies have concluded that Black men have experienced the application of negative stereotypes by non-Black faculty and peers (Strayhorn, 2008). As there is evidence to suggest that Georgia Tech's Black, men student-athletes have a higher sense of belonging, the researcher can only surmise that the institution created a climate where these participants feel supported in specific places and through specific activities that were measured by the instrument used in this study. Georgia Tech should take this as a positive but look further into the "why" or the reason why this population feels an increased sense of belonging on campus.

Based on these findings, the question remains as to what professionals within the field should be studying? Previous literature has stated that Black individuals are only valued for their athletic talent on campus and need to self-strive to succeed (Simiyu, 2012; Dubois, 1964); yet, this is not what this study's results show. This study shows that Black, men student-athletes on Georgia Tech's campus have a stronger sense of belonging through faculty and peer support as well as classroom comfort. As a scholar practitioner, I must examine why the participants feel a strong sense of belonging in an academic setting on campus, and how I can transfer these circumstances to athletics within the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services department.

### **Student-Athlete Academic Support Services (SAASS)**

Georgia Tech's SAASS office provides quality support services for academic enrichment and life-long learning, creating opportunities for personal growth of every student-athlete. Their vision is to develop the young people who will change the world with their vision to inspire and empower student-athletes to be everyday champions in academics, competition, and life. Goals of the SAASS staff are to provide an open and positive learning environment, while upholding the rules and regulations of the Institute, NCAA, ACC, and the Georgia Tech Athletic Association. The staff's priority is to develop and advise student-athletes by teaching skills necessary for academics and for life. The department's interaction and outreach to the student-athletes, faculty, and staff will be fair, ethical, and extended with utmost respect. Ultimately, the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services staff strives to be positive role models, providing all student-athletes a holistic, goal-centered programming approach to college life and their student-athlete experience.

To start, introducing a similar sense of belonging scale within the context of athletics and designing topic-specific subscales would be useful and benefit both Black, men student-athletes as well as the support services staff. Studying the participants' sense of belonging from an athletic standpoint through academic support services would help the researcher more effectively work with Black, men student-athletes. A scale such as this and the data it provides would be beneficial to all staff working with Black student-athletes.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, recommendations have been purposefully created for Georgia Tech and its athletic department to take responsibility for understanding the sense of belonging of its Black, men student-athletes within the context of their participation as athletes.

The following recommendations summarized below include improving educational opportunities through assessment of current student-athlete support programs already in place. As the data shows that the Black, men student-athletes who participated in this study have a relatively higher sense of belonging among faculty and peer support and within the classroom, there are sites which can potentially create a similar sense of belonging for student-athletes. Assessing current practices that could have an impact on sense of belonging for these Black, men student-athletes is a good starting point for understanding if environments within athletics are as positive as possible. Assessment data help staff understand the current situation as well as provide valuable information for how to make improvements.

### **JumpStart Jackets**

Georgia Tech Athletics Association's student-athletes support services staff has implemented a 5-week series of interactive workshops called "JumpStart Jackets" that aids in the ease of collegiate transition for the incoming fall first-year student-athletes in the form of a summer bridge program (with a shortened workshop series for student-athletes who enroll during the spring semesters). The program is designed to acclimate the incoming class to all aspects of Georgia Tech, with topics that cover institutional history and traditions, career/major exploration, academic integrity, research and citation, campus resources, professor communication, classroom success, health and well-being as well as nutrition and sports medicine. The support services staff collaborate with campus professionals, partnering to lead these presentations and workshops. Integrating athletics into campus provides an opportunity to create professional partnerships, fostering a pursuit of comprehensive excellence through the holistic development of each student-athlete. Cultivating partnerships is one way to increase appreciation and engagement. When all campus constituents are invested in the collegiate experience and success

of the institution, transparency can occur and connections can be made that will allow student-athletes to engage in developing relationships outside of their sports. The annual JumpStart Jackets program is the first site for assessment of a program that could have a substantial impact on sense of belonging for Black, men student-athletes.

### **Excel@TECH**

Excel@TECH is the support structure in place for all first-year student-athletes who enroll at Georgia Tech. Student-athletes who are considered at-risk, outside of first-year status, are also included in Excel@Tech (low grade point average, on academic warning or probation, athletically ineligible, or in jeopardy of being athletically ineligible due to progress-towards-degree). This structure includes weekly academic meetings with Academic Support Coordinators, mandatory study hall hours, head coach meetings, midterm progress report meetings as well as required textbook and academic material financial assistance. The purpose behind this structure is to ensure that every student-athlete is receiving adequate, one-on-one support during their early (and sometimes later) collegiate career to set them up for success both inside and outside of the classroom. Excel@TECH is the second site for assessment of a program that could have an impact on sense of belonging for Black, men student-athletes.

### **Student-Athlete Advisory Board (SAAB)**

The Student-Athlete Advisory Board (SAAB) within athletics gives Georgia Tech's student-athletes an opportunity to engage with campus and serve on the institution's campus-wide student advisory board. SAAB is a bridge between coaches, administration, and the NCAA, who also collaborates with the student body on campus. Collaboration between advisory boards provides an opportunity to enhance the student-athlete experience on campus and inside the classroom, creating a voice for identifying student-athlete issues and fostering a positive student-

athlete image. Giving a voice for student-athletes to tell their stories ensures that the concerns of the athletic community are heard. Fostering connections with campus constituents provides an opportunity for athletics and campus to learn more about one another's mission and values, which can positively lead to a future of community. SAAB is the third site for assessment of a program that could have an impact on sense of belonging for Black, men student-athletes, if they are involved on the board.

### **Faculty Outreach**

A large factor of a student-athlete's experience on campus involves their interaction with faculty, which can positively or negatively impact their academic success (Harrison et al., 2006). Although there is a stigma that athletic identity overrules student identity in the classroom, student-athletes do wish to pursue meaningful relationships with faculty. This is where athletic visibility on campus and professor outreach can positively impact a student-athlete's academic experience. Milem and Berger (1997) concluded that student-athletes greatly benefit from out of classroom communication with faculty members and are more likely to have an increased level of academic integration and belonging into the institution. Student-athletes must focus on the quality of the relationships rather than the frequency of interaction, as knowing personal qualities can have a significant influence on the relationship built (Harrison et al., 2006).

First, the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services Staff sends an introductory email correspondence to all faculty who teach Georgia Tech's student-athletes a few weeks into every semester. This communication includes an awareness of the student-athletes in the classroom, their commitment to both academics and athletics, possible time constraints during in-season competition, and the pursuit for collaboration to best support the student-athletes and their academic success. From the researcher's professionally experiencing working within Student-



Athlete Academic Support Services, faculty have been responsive and willing to communicate with the support staff if any concerns arise. This communication has provided an opportunity for open dialogue, which has resulted in constructive feedback to build a better understanding of what is needed to support the academic successes of the student-athletes.

In addition, the department of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services extends invitations to faculty through the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) to athletic events throughout the academic year. The FAR is a member of the faculty who serves as the liaison between campus and the athletics department. This individual cannot hold an administrative or coaching position within the athletic department. One major role of a FAR is to ensure that the institution establishes and maintains a balance between academics and athletics. Collaborating with faculty gives them the opportunity to recognize and explore the student-athlete experience during sport as well as give the student-athletes the opportunity to show appreciation for their faculty (scheduled Faculty Appreciation games). Inviting faculty not only show to them an appreciation for their dedicated careers in education but gives them a chance to acknowledge the student-athlete's situation. Having faculty feel an appreciation towards the student-athlete experience will help them identify factors that can assist in the academic and self-development of those athletes. This partnership supports the needed integration of college athletics into the academic and social culture of the institution. As this study has shown, faculty support has proven to increase sense of belonging for the participants: This outreach is the fourth site for assessment that could have an impact on sense of belonging for Black, men student-athletes.

### **Recommendations Continued**

It is recommended that Student-Athlete Academic Support Services collaborate with academics on campus regarding what measures have been taken for Black, men student-athletes

to feel a strong sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. This is where a qualitative research approach can greatly benefit future study, further investigating the personal experiences from the student-athlete participants. Moreover, research involvement from faculty regarding Black, men student-athlete participation in class would construct future lessons for Student-Athlete Academic Support Services staff to best support this population. A plan must be put in place to share knowledge and to serve as a resource to then equip professionals within the athletics association towards empowering its Black, men student-athletes and enhancing their experiences.

### **Name, Image, and Likeness Policy.**

On June 30, 2021, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors approved an interim name, image, and likeness (NIL) policy. This policy allows for student-athletes to be compensated for their NIL and it became effective in the state of Georgia on July 1, 2021. Each state and institution can have specific NIL rules; therefore, it is important for student-athletes to work closely with their coaching staff and compliance department to ensure rules and regulations are followed. As this policy allows student-athletes the right to profit from the use of their own name, image, and likeness, they can now be paid for their autograph, developing/modeling clothing apparel (athletic and non-athletic), promoting products and services, and making personal appearances. With Georgia Tech student-athletes now being able to monetarily benefit from this opportunity, how can this impact their financial confidence moving forward? This policy became a hot topic among collegiate athletics as of recent, but with the policy being brand new, there are still many questions that can only be answered with time and experience. It will be interesting to see how the NIL policy will evolve within the industry and how it will impact Division I student-athletes in the future. It would be recommended for Georgia Tech to investigate the Black, men student-athletes who are benefiting from the NIL policy and see if

their financial confidence has been positive impacted, and if so, are there any differences between their financial confidence and sense of belonging on campus.

### **Areas of Future Research**

This study explored sense of belonging of Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech and what factors contributed to their belonging. More research should be considered on pre-college factors and how those factors could influence their identity and belonging. Factors to consider are community, educational experience, family background, media influence, school environment, and socio-economic status. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need to further explore additional factors that could be contributing to their increased sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus.

Among the findings, 33.3% of participants classified as first-year students. Further research should have a close-to-equal number of participants from each class standing cohort (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior), exploring the differences of their sense of belonging. To add, 84.4% of participants were on full scholarship. Further research should explore the differences in sense of belonging of Black, men student-athletes who are not on scholarship and those who are on scholarship.

From the findings, there was no significance between demographic characteristics and the sense of belonging scale score. It is astounding that the results showed no significance. The question remains that if I had chosen a qualitative study using narrative inquiry, would I have gotten the same results? As some participants may not have previously had experience with questionnaires, should I have taken a qualitative methods approach and restructured the questions asked? Although this study focused on belonging, is this population experiencing negative stereotypes and other challenges on campus outside of this instrument's questions? A

qualitative study could offer more meaningful conversation and further explanation of experiences.

Looking ahead, it will be necessary to explore Black, women student-athletes and their sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. This population has also been marginalized and their educational experiences have been impacted, especially on the topic of gender inequality. I believe that all student-athletes who identity as Black should be considered for future studies, regardless of their gender identity.

### **Conclusion**

While research on Black, men student-athletes and sense of belonging on Predominately White Institution campuses is still limited, this study contradicts the existing research on the topic of belonging with this under-represented population. Literature has stated how Black male students are recruited for their athletic ability, alone, and a large number struggle with transitioning this capability into the classroom (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012). This study presented evidence to suggest that Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech have an increased sense of belonging among faculty and peer support as well as within the classroom. The findings are based on Strayhorn's (2019) definition of sense of belonging, the use of Hoffman et al.'s (2007) Sense of Belonging Scale as an instrument, and the statistical tests run. Based on the findings in this study, several factors contradict the current research and literature that exists on the experiences of Black, men student-athletes and their sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) expressed how sense of belonging has continued to be a goal or ending desire for Black male students. Moreover, division I student-athletes who have a high level of athletic ability have been found to invest less in their academic endeavors due to the demand of their sport (Poux & Fry, 2015). This study found the opposite; now it is just a matter of "why?"

The results suggest that this population has an increased sense of belonging but failed to show significant findings between sense of belonging and the demographic variables presented as well as sense of belonging and on-campus and off-campus involvement. It is important to look further into why Black, men student-athletes at Georgia Tech have an increased sense of belonging. Too, it is important to research deeper into other possible opportunities for involvement, if any, as a student's involvement in college yields greater degrees of learning and development and increased satisfaction of his collegiate experience (Reed & Silva, 2007; Astin, 1999).

Continuing to create structures and support systems in place to support Black, men student-athletes is critical work. To attain a more holistic view on the lives and belonging of Black, men student-athletes, there is a need for future, qualitative research to take a closer look into the variables that affect this increased sense of belonging. As Georgia Tech and the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services staff continue to support Black, men student-athletes, it will be crucial to understand if such factors are making an impact on this population. With a better understanding, Student-Athlete Academic Support Services staff can make professional decisions on what programs and services need to be continued or restructured to best support its Black, men student-athletes and their belonging in their collegiate experiences.

This study has given scholar practitioners a brief look into the support needed to create a strong culture of belonging to the institution, through faculty and peer support as well as the environment of the classroom. Looking into development through the lens of a student-athlete, practitioners should have a greater appreciation and recognition of the strengths these young men possess. Improving educational opportunities through assessment will positively impact the belonging and collegiate experiences of this population. The initiatives that the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services staff take will hopefully confirm why this population has a higher

sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus. The commitment to support Black, men student-athletes is present; however, it is just a matter of taking the necessary steps to evaluate whether such measures are successfully validating their sense of belonging.

---

As I have placed race at the center of this research, I am aware that as a White female researcher, I will never fully understand the breadth of how my privilege could affect future studies pertaining to this population. Although a researcher subjectivity statement is not traditionally included within a quantitative research study, I must acknowledge my personal bias and commit to supporting this population and advocating the need for change.

## REFERENCES

- About Georgia Tech (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.gatech.edu/about>
- Anthony, C.E., & Swank, J.M. (2018). Black college student-athletes: Examining the intersection of gender, and racial identity and athletic identity. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 12(3), 179-100. Doi:10.1080/19357397.2018.1525133
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- Astin, A. W. (1977). *Four critical years*. Jossey-Bass.
- Bakari, S. (1997). African American Racial Identity Development in Predominately White Institutions: Challenges for Student Development Professionals. *Different Perspectives on Majority Rules (1997)*. Paper 19.
- Benjamin, E., Constantine, E., Richardson, T., Wilson, J. (1998). An overview of Black racial identity theories: Limitations and considerations for future theoretical conceptualizations. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 75, 95-99.
- Bimper, A., Harrison, L., & Clark, L. (2012). Diamonds in the rough: Examining a case of successful Black male student athletes in college sport. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 39(2), 107-130.
- Black Student Athlete Summit. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.bsasummit.org>
- Bourke (2016). Meaning and implications of being labelled a predominately white institution. *College & University*.

Bureau of the Census (2002). "Measuring survey nonresponse by race and ethnicity,"

[https://nces.ed.gov/FCSM/pdf/IHSNG\\_asa02\\_DG.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/FCSM/pdf/IHSNG_asa02_DG.pdf)

Cokley, K., Obaseki, V., Moran-Jackson, K., Jones, L., & Vohra-Gupta, S. (2016). College access improves from Black students but which ones? *College of Access and Opportunity*, 97(5), 43-48.

College Results Online. (2021). Retrieved from

<http://collegeresults.org/collegeprofile.aspx?institutionid=139755>

Cooper, J.N. (2016). Excellence beyond athletics: Best practices for enhancing Black male student athletes' educational experiences and outcomes. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 49(3), 267-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2016.1194097>

Cooper, J.N., & Cooper, J.E. (2015). I'm running so you can be happy and I can keep my scholarship: A comparative study of black male college athletes' experiences with role conflict. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 8(2), 131-152.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/jis.2014-0120>

Cooper, J.N., Corral, M., Macaulay, C., Cooper, M., Nwadike, A., & Mallery, M. (2019).

Collective uplift: The impact of a holistic development support program on black male former college athletes' experiences and outcomes. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(2), 21-46. Doi: 10.1080/09518398.2018.1522011

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.

Cross, W. E., Jr. (1971). Toward a psychology of Black liberation: The Negro-to-Black conversion experience. *Black World*, 20, 13-27.



- Cross, W. E. (1991). *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Temple University Press.
- Dubois, W. E. B. (1964). *The Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches*. Greenwich, Conn: A Crest Book.
- Duncan, I. & Oakley, M. (2016). The significance of student involvement on campus. *Counseling Concepts and Applications for Student Affairs Professionals*. CNS 577. Paper 50.
- Eitzen, D. (2003). *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.
- Gratton, C., & Jones, I. (2010). *Research methods for sport studies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Harper, S. R. (2018). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA division I college sports: 2018 edition*. University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center.
- Harper, S. R. (2006a). *Black male students at public universities in the U.S.: Status, trends and implications for policy and practice*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.
- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 127–144.
- Harrison, C., Comeaux, E., & Plecha, M. (2006). Faculty and male football and basketball player on university campuses: An empirical investigation of the “intellectual” as mentor to the student athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 77(2), 277-284.

- Helms, J. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. Greenwood Press.
- Hiraldo, P. (2019). Future scenario: Praxis in critical race theory in higher education and student affairs. *The Vermont Connection*, 40, 141-147.
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002-2003). Investigating “sense of belonging” in first-year college students. *J. College Student Retention*, 4(3), 227-256.
- Holloway-Friesen, H. (2021). The role of mentoring on Hispanic graduate students’ sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 20(1), 46-58. Doi: 10.1177/1538192718823716
- Howe, J. (2020). Manifestations of athletic identity in Black male collegiate student-athletes: Introduction of a model. *Journal of Amateur Sport*, 6(2), 107-135.
- Jang, M., & Vorderstrasse, A. (2019). *Socioeconomic status and racial or ethnic differences in participation: Web-based survey*. JMIR Publications, Inc. Doi. 10.2196/11865
- Johnson, R. & Christensen, L. (2017). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Jones, K. (2019). Learning analytics and higher education: A proposed model for establishing informed consent mechanisms to promote student privacy and autonomy. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(24), 1-22.
- Jones, S.R., & Abes, E.S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. Jossey-Bass.
- Killeya-Jones, L. A. (2005). Identity structure, role discrepancy and psychological adjustment in male college student-athletes. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(2), 167-185.

- Kruse, S., Rakha, S., & Calderone, S. (2017). Developing cultural competency in higher education: An agenda for practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(6), 733-750.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1414790>
- Lapchick, R. (2017). *College sport: Racial and gender report card*. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.
- Leonard, J. & Schimmel, C. (2016). Theory of work adjustment and student-athletes' transition out of sport. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 9, 62-85. Retrieved from  
[http://csrijiia.org/old/documents/publications/research\\_articles/2016/JIIA\\_2016\\_9\\_04\\_38\\_7.pdf](http://csrijiia.org/old/documents/publications/research_articles/2016/JIIA_2016_9_04_38_7.pdf)
- Lounsbury, J. W. & DeNeui, D. (1996). Collegiate psychological sense of community in relation to size of college/university and extroversion. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 381-394.
- Lu, L., Heinze, K., & Soderstrom, S. (2018). Playing multiple positions: Student-athlete identity salience and conflict. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 11(2), 214-241. Retrieved from  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2018-0034>
- Marler, E., Bruce, M., Abaoud, A., Henrichsen, C., Suksatan, W., Homvisetvongsa, S., & Matsuo, H. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on university students' academic motivation, social connection, and psychological well-being. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*. Advance online publication.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/stl0000294>
- McClure, K., & Ryder, A. J. (2018). The costs of belongingness: How spending money influences social relationships in college. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55, 196-209. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2017.1360190>

Milem, J.F., & Berger, J.B. (1997). A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's theory of student departure. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38, 387-400.

Mini Fact Book (2019). Retrieved from

[https://irp.gatech.edu/files/FactBook/mini/mini\\_fb\\_2019.pdf](https://irp.gatech.edu/files/FactBook/mini/mini_fb_2019.pdf)

Morrow, J. (2004). College adjustment and sense of belonging of first-year students: A comparison of learning community and traditional students. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychology, Old Dominion University.

Murdock, J., Strear, M., Jenkins-Guarnieri, M., & Henderson, A. (2016). Collegiate athletes and career identity. *Sport, Education, and Society*, 21(3), 396-410.

doi:10.1080/13573322.2014.924920

Nardi, P. (2018). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Routledge.

Nardi, P. (2014). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Paradigm Publishers.

National Center for Education Statistics (2019). Fast facts: Enrollment [Online report]. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_302.60.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_302.60.asp)

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2019). Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2021). NCAA adopts interim name, image and likeness policy. Retrieved from <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2021/6/30/ncaa-adopts-interim-name-image-likeness-policy.aspx>

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2020). D1 college athletes reach 90% graduation rate.

Retrieved from <https://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/di-college-athletes-reach-90-graduation-rate>

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2020). Our work. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/>

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2020). Student-Athletes. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes>

Nguyen, D. J., & Herron, A. (2021). Keeping up with the Joneses or feeling priced out?:

Exploring how low-income students' financial position shapes sense of belonging.

*Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(3), 429-440.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000191>

Ogbu, J. (2003). *Black Americans in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*.

Routledge.

Palmer, R., Wood, L., Darcy II, T. E., & Strayhorn, T. (2014). Black male collegians: Increasing access, retention, and persistence in higher education. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 40(3). Jossey-Bass.

Parsons, J. (2013). Student athlete perceptions of academic success and athlete stereotypes on campus. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 36(4), 400-416.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Patturelli, A. (2021). Text messaging: The enrollment management strategy for increasing enrollment and promoting a sense of belonging for low-income students. *College and University*, 96(4), 61-64, 66.

- Pittman, E. (2017). Strategies for creating a sense of belonging on campus [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://www.kipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Strategies-for-Creating-a-Sense-of-Belonging-on-Campus.pdf>
- Play Division 1 Sports (2019). The National Collegiate Athletic Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/play-division-i-sports>
- Pope-Davis, D.B., Liu, W.M., Ledesma-Jones, S., & Nevitt, J. (2000). African American acculturation and Black racial identity: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 28(2), 98-112.
- Poux, K. & Fry, M. (2015). Athletes' perceptions of their team motivational climate, career exploration and engagement, and athletic identity. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 9, 360-372. doi:10.1123/jcsp.2014-0050
- Preissle, J. (2008). *Subjectivity statement*. *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 845-846). SAGE Publications, Inc. DOI:10.4135/9781412963909.n439
- Punch, K. (2003). *Survey research: The basics*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Rankings (2020). Academic excellence. Retrieved from <https://www.gatech.edu/about/rankings>
- Rawls, J., Jr. (2006). School identification: How young African American males in an urban elementary school come to identify with school. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 67(07A), 135.
- Reed, W. & Silva, S. (2007). The relation between college student involvement and satisfaction. *Modern Psychological Studies*, 12(2), 21-33.
- Renn, K. A., & Patton, L. (2010). Campus ecology and environments. In J. D. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. L. Harper (eds.). *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 242-256). Jossey-Bass.

- Renn, R., & Reason, K. (2013). *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rhee, B. (2008). Institutional climate and student departure: A multinomial multilevel modeling approach. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(2), 161-183.
- Ritchey, K. (2014). Black identity development. *The Vermont Connection*, 35(12), 99-105.
- Roithmayr, D. (1999). *Introduction to critical race theory in educational research and praxis*. *Race is...race isn't: Critical race theory & qualitative studies in education* (pp. 1-6) Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Sense of Belonging in the College Classroom. (2019). University Center for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved from <https://ucat.osu.edu/bookshelf/teaching-topics/shaping-a-positive-learning-environment/sense-of-belonging-in-the-college-classroom/>
- Simiyu, W. (2012). Challenges of being a Black student athlete on U.S. college campuses. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 5, 40-63.
- Simon, R.L. (2008). Does athletics undermine academics? Examining some issues. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2, 40-58.
- Smith, W., Mustaffa, J., Jones, C., Curry, T., & Allen, W. (2016). 'You make me wanna holler and throw up both my hands!': Campus culture, Black misandric microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(9), 1189-1209. Doi:10.1080/09518398.2016.1214296
- Spanierman, L., Soble, J., Mayfield, J., Neville, M. A., Khuri, L., De La Rosa, B. (2013). Living learning communities and students' sense of community and belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 50(3), 308-325. Doi:10.1515/jsarp-2013-0022
- Steele, C.M. (2000). "Stereotype threat" and black college students. *AAHE Bulletin*, 52, 3-6.

- Stewart, D.L. (2015). Know your role: Black college students, racial identity, and performance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(2), 238-258.  
doi:10.1080/09518398.2014.916000
- Strayhorn, T. (2008). Fittin' in: Do diverse interactions with peers affect sense of belonging for Black men at predominately white institutions? *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Journal*, 45(4), 501-527.
- Strayhorn, T. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(22), 142-159. Sage Publications. Doi: 10.1177/0002764210381871
- Strayhorn, T. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2019). *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- Student Athlete Knowledge Community Strategic Plan. (2019). Retrieved from [https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/SAKC\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2016\\_to\\_19\\_Final.pdf](https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/SAKC_Strategic_Plan_2016_to_19_Final.pdf)
- Supiano, B. (2018). How colleges can cultivate students' sense of belonging. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Colleges-Can-Cultivate/243123>
- Tene, O., & Polonetsky, J. (2013). Big data for all: Privacy and user control in the age of analytics. *Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Privacy*, 11(5), 239-273.



- The College Board (2017). Playing sports in college: Your options [online resource]. Retrieved from <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/campus-life/playing-sports-in-college-your-options>
- Ting, S. M. R. (2009). Impact of non-cognitive factors on first-year academic performance and persistence of NCAA division I student-athletes. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 48, 215-228. Doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1939.2009.tb00079.x
- Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2017). Through the eyes of students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19, 254-269. doi:10.1177/1521025115621917
- Tovar, E., & Simon, M. (2010). Factorial structure and invariance analysis of the sense of belonging scales. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 43(3), 199-217. Doi: 10.1177/0748175610384811
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82-96.
- What is the NCAA? (2019). The National Collegiate Athletic Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa>
- Willie, S. S. (2003). *Acting Black*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wilson, V.R. (2007). On equal ground: Causes and solutions for lower college completion rates among Black males. In National Urban League (Ed.), *The state of Black America 2007: Portrait of the Black male* (pp. 123-135). *National Urban League*.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A. (2014). Students and athletes? Development of the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS). *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 3(2), 89–101.

APPENDIX A  
QUALTRICS SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your class standing?
  - a. First-year (less than 30 credit hours)
  - b. Sophomore (30+ credit hours)
  - c. Junior (60+ credit hours)
  - d. Senior (90+ credit hours)
2. What sport do you play?
  - a. Baseball
  - b. Basketball
  - c. Football
  - d. Track, Field, and Cross-Country
3. Are you the first in your family to attend college (family includes mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. Are you a scholarship student-athlete?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Partial

5. Are you involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics?
  - a. Yes (continue to Question 5)
  - b. No (skip to Question 6)
6. What are you involved in on campus?
  - a. Greek Life
  - b. Student organizations (including academic, educational, religious, or spiritual organizations)
  - c. Undergraduate Research
  - d. Volunteer or service-related activities
  - e. Political or Multicultural organizations
  - f. Media and publication organizations
  - g. Student government or council
  - h. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What, if any, are you involved in off campus?
  - a. Civil participation, nonprofit partnerships, or community service
  - b. Religious group
  - c. Student club or organization at a Historically Black College and University
  - d. Neighborhood association
  - e. Sport or social club
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. I'm not involved
8. Do you feel like you are financial able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them?

- a. Yes
- b. No

### **SENSE OF BELONGING SCALE—REVISED**

Hoffman, M.B., Richmond, J.R., Morrow, J.A., & Salomone, K. (2002-2003). Investigating “sense of belonging” in First-Year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3), 227-256.

- 1- Completely Untrue
- 2- Mostly Untrue
- 3- Equally True and Untrue
- 4- Mostly True
- 5- Completely True

### **Perceived Peer Support (8 items)**

- 9. I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam
- 10. If I miss class, I know students who I could get notes from
- 11. I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates
- 12. I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class
- 13. I could contact another student from class if I had a question
- 14. Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are approaching
- 15. I have developed personal relationships with other students in class
- 16. I invite people I know from class to do things socially

**Perceived Classroom Comfort (4 items)**

- 17. I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions
- 18. I feel comfortable asking a question in class
- 19. I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinions in class
- 20. Speaking in class is easy because I feel comfortable

**Perceived Isolation (4 items)**

- 21. It is difficult to meet other students in class
- 22. No one in my classes knows anything personal about me
- 23. I rarely talk to other students in class
- 24. I know very few people in my class

**Perceived Faculty Support (10 items)**

- 25. I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty
- 26. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material
- 27. I feel that a faculty member would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them
- 28. I feel comfortable socializing with a faculty member outside of class
- 29. I feel that a faculty member would be sympathetic if I was upset
- 30. I feel that a faculty member would take the time to talk to me if I needed help
- 31. If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours, etc.)
- 32. I feel comfortable seeking help from a teacher before or after class
- 33. I feel that a faculty member really tried to understand my problem when I talked about it
- 34. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem

APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Hello invitee,

My name is Ashby Sadowski, Assistant Director of Academic Services for Georgia Tech Athletics. I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia studying Student Affairs Leadership (SAL) within the Mary Francis College of Education. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Black men student-athlete identity development: Finding a sense of belonging at Georgia Institute of Technology. This research will contribute to generalizable knowledge, with intentions to become aware of other elements that influence sense of belonging for this cohort at Georgia Tech.

The study involves completing basic demographic and involvement questions and a questionnaire that includes the revised Sense of Belonging Scale (Hoffman et al., 2002-2003). Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be required to provide your name or any other identifying information. Moreover, if you decide to participate (or not to participate) it will not impact your grades, class standing, or athletic eligibility.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below. To begin the study, click the survey link at the end of this communication. Your participation in the research will be of great importance. The potential benefits to the participants and surrounding community include an increased awareness of the challenges of Black, men student-athletes sense-of-belonging among higher education, specifically at a Predominately White Institution. With an awareness comes the possibly of understanding these challenges; ultimately, ensuring that this population is receiving adequate support to aid in their personal, athletic, and academic success and overall sense of belonging during their collegiate years and beyond.

**Estimated time commitment is less than 10 minutes.**

Thank you for your time and participation.

Go Jackets,

Ashby Sadowski

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact the individuals below-

**Principal Investigator-**

Name: Dr. Merrily Dunn

Phone: 706-255-8691

Email: [merrily@uga.edu](mailto:merrily@uga.edu)

**Co-Investigator-**

Ashby Sadowski

Phone: 770-547-0666

Email: [mas19953@uga.edu](mailto:mas19953@uga.edu)



## APPENDIX C

### LETTER OF CONSENT

University of Georgia

#### Black Men Student-Athlete Identity: Finding a Sense of Belonging at Georgia Institute of Technology

Dear Participant,

My name is Ashby Sadowski and I am a student in the department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia, under the supervision of Dr. Merrily Dunn. I am inviting you to take part in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to understand and explore the challenges of Black men student-athletes sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. Furthermore, this study will investigate some factors known to increase student-athlete identity conflict, two of which include athletic and academic demands. The following research questions that will guide this study are 1) What is sense of belonging for these student-athletes, in their role as a student, at Georgia Tech? 2) What is the relationship of elements, external to athletics, and sense of belonging for Black men student-athletes at Georgia Tech? and 3) What are the contributions of the demographic variables to sense of belonging?

I am looking for individuals who are full-time students at Georgia Tech, active on a varsity team roster, identify as a Black man, and over the age of 18 years old. Each participant will be asked to complete an online questionnaire via computer or smartphone. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete the questionnaire at your earliest convenience, which should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to withdraw will not negatively impact you in any way. Moreover, your decision to participate will have no impact on your status as a Georgia Tech student-athlete. No risks are associated with your participation in this study. There may be questions that make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

The potential benefits to the participants and surrounding community include an increased awareness of the challenges of Black, men student-athletes sense-of-belonging among higher education, specifically at a Predominately White Institution. With an awareness comes the possibly of understanding these challenges; ultimately, ensuring that this population is receiving adequate support to aid in their personal, athletic, and academic success and overall sense of belonging during their collegiate years and beyond.

To recruit participants for this study, an institutional report was run that included your name and student status. This list will be destroyed once we have finished collecting information from all participants. Your answers and identity will not be used or distributed for future research. There will be limits to data security that can be guaranteed when using online methods of data collection. I will protect the data, once received, and downloaded, by removing IP addresses.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Co-Investigator, at 770-547-0666, [asadowski@athletics.gatech.edu](mailto:asadowski@athletics.gatech.edu) or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Merrily Dunn at [merrily@uga.edu](mailto:merrily@uga.edu) . If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu).

Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Ashby Sadowski

## APPENDIX D

## GEORGIA TECH HEAD COACHES AND COMPLIANCE CONSENT



**Student Researcher:** Ashby Sadowski (Assistant Director of Academic Services)

**Title of Project:** Black, Men Student-Athlete Identity Development: Finding a Sense of Belonging at Georgia Institute of Technology

**Date(s) of Research:** Fall 2021

**Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this study is to understand and explore the challenges of Black, men who are student-athletes and their sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. Furthermore, this study will look into some factors known to increase student-athlete identity conflict, two of which include athletic and academic demands. This study will make an effort to examine the challenges that decrease Black, men student-athletes' sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus. As Black, men student-athletes face many challenges, this study will further observe other elements that influence their sense of belonging.

**Additional Notes:** The student-athletes who will be participating will be provided an informed consent form, which will be used to provide information regarding the research and to document written informed consent/minor consent. The participants will know the time required, any risks or/benefits, and how their confidentiality will be maintained. Participation from your student-athletes in this study is voluntary.

**By signing this form, I am attesting that I have met with Ashby Sadowski, understand the purpose of the project, and freely give my consent for her to conduct research on my student-athletes.**

Head Coach/Name (Print)	Sport/Department	Signature
Josh Pastner	Men's Basketball	DocuSigned by: Joshua Pastner
Geoff Collins	Football	DocuSigned by: h / C / K /
Grover Hinsdale	Men's Track & Field	CBCFD6F90CC440B... Grover Hinsdale
Danny Hall	Baseball	FFB6892A5FC844A... [Signature]
Lance Markos	Assistant Athletic Director of Compliance	7B55B86D4280412... DocuSigned by: Lance Markos

Student Researcher (Print)	Signature
Ashby Sadowski	DocuSigned by: Ashby Sadowski

## APPENDIX E

## GEORGIA TECH LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION CONSENT



**Student Researcher:** Ashby Sadowski (Assistant Director of Academic Services)

**Title of Project:** Black, Men Student-Athlete Identity Development: Finding a Sense of Belonging at Georgia Institute of Technology

**Date(s) of Research:** Fall 2021

**Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this study is to understand and explore the challenges of Black, men who are student-athletes and their sense of belonging at Georgia Tech. Furthermore, this study will look into some factors known to increase student-athlete identity conflict, two of which include athletic and academic demands. This study will make an effort to examine the challenges that decrease Black, men student-athletes' sense of belonging on Georgia Tech's campus. As Black, men student-athletes face many challenges, this study will further observe other elements that influence their sense of belonging.

**Additional Notes:** The student-athletes who will be participating will be provided an informed consent form, which will be used to provide information regarding the research and to document written informed consent/minor consent. The participants will know the time required, any risks or/benefits, and how their confidentiality will be maintained. Participation from your student-athletes in this study is voluntary.

**By signing this form, I am attesting that I have met with Ashby Sadowski, understand the purpose of the project, and freely give my consent for her to conduct research on my student-athletes.**


GTAA Staff Name	Title	DocuSigned by: Signature
Todd Stansbury	Director of Athletics	<i>Todd Stansbury</i> AEF5D4BD3FE4C4...
Phyllis LaBaw	Senior Associate AD/Student Services	<i>Phyllis LaBaw</i> 390D10E8719840E...
Chris Breen	Assistant AD/Student Services	<i>Chris Breen</i> 7EFD11199F5416...


  

Student Researcher	DocuSigned by: Signature
Ashby Sadowski	<i>Ashby Sadowski</i> 169D903D383C41F...

## APPENDIX F






## PERMISSION TO USE SENSE OF BELONGING SCALE

Hoffman et al. Sense of Belonging Scale Use




Jayne Richmond

Mon 12/6/2021 3:10 PM








To: Marion Ashby Sadowski

[EXTERNAL SENDER - PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY]






Hello Ashby

Yes you have my permission and best of luck with your research. Dr. Richmond



Marion Ashby Sadowski

Mon 12/6/2021 2:39 PM

To:

Dr. Richmond,

Hello there. I hope this email finds you well. My name is Ashby Sadowski, a Doctorate Candidate in the Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Georgia. My current research is focused on Black, men student-athletes and sense of belonging at Georgia Institute of Technology (where I currently work as an Assistant Director of Academic Services). I am utilizing Hoffman et al.'s Sense of Belonging Scale as my instrument. I wanted to reach out and ask for approval to move forward as well as see if the scoring instructions for the scale are available. Your guidance would be greatly appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

**Ashby Sadowski, M.Ed.**

*Doctoral Candidate, Student Affairs Leadership Ed.D. Program*  
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services | College of Education  
University of Georgia  
Pronouns: she/her/hers

## APPENDIX G

### QUESTIONNAIRE AS SEEN BY PARTICIPANTS

1. What is your class standing?

a. First-year (less than 30 credit hours)

b. Sophomore (30+ credit hours)

c. Junior (60+ credit hours)

d. Senior (90+ credit hours)

2. What sport do you play?

Baseball

Basketball

Football

Track and Field

3. Are you the first in your family to attend college (family includes mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles)?

Yes

No

4. Are you a scholarship student-athlete?

Yes

No

5. Are you involved in any clubs or organizations outside of athletics?

Yes (continue to Question 6)

No (skip to Question 7)

6. What are you involved in on campus?

Greek life

Student organizations (including academic, educational, religious, or spiritual organizations)

Undergraduate research

Volunteer or service-related activities

Political or Multicultural organizations

Media and publication organizations

Student government or council

Other:

7. What, if any, are you involved in off campus?

Civil participation, nonprofit partnerships, or community service

Religious group

Student club or organization at a Historically Black College and University

Neighborhood association

Sport or social club

Other:

I'm not involved

8. Do you feel like you are financial able to participate in activities outside of your sport that have costs associated with them?

Yes

No



9. Please select one of the following for each statement on the left regarding perceived peer support.

	Perceived Peer Support				
	Completely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Equally True and Untrue	Mostly True	Completely True
I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I miss class, I know students who I could get notes from.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could contact another student from class if I had a question.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are approaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have developed personal relationships with other students in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I invite people I know from class to do things socially.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please select one of the following for each statement on the left regarding perceived classroom comfort.

	Perceived Classroom Comfort				
	Completely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Equally True and Untrue	Mostly True	Completely True
I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable asking a question in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinions in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking in class is easy because I feel comfortable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please select one of the following for each statement on the left regarding perceived isolation.

	Perceived Isolation				
	Completely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Equally True and Untrue	Mostly True	Completely True
It is difficult to meet other students in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No one in my classes knows anything personal about me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rarely talk to other students in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know very few people in my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Please select one of the following for each statement on the left regarding perceived faculty support.

	Perceived Faculty Support				
	Completely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Equally True and Untrue	Mostly True	Completely True
I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a faculty member would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable socializing with a faculty member outside of class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a faculty member would be sympathetic if I was upset.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a faculty member would take the time to talk to me if I needed help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable seeking help from a teacher before or after class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a faculty member really tried to understand my problem when I talked about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>