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A Culture of Collective Uplift: The Influence of a Historically Black University/College on Black Male Student Athletes' Experiences

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The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the organizational culture at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) on Black male student athletes' experiences. This in-depth qualitative case study involved an institutional document analysis, participant and site observations, and three focus group interviews. Data sources for the study included five institutional documents, a HBCU campus, three athletic events, and 17 Black male student athletes. Organizational culture theory (Schein, 2010) was applied as a theoretical framework to investigate the impact of key artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions within the culture of a HBCU on Black male student athletes' holistic experiences in college. Three basic assumptions were identified from the analysis of the data sources: 1) "Eastern Atlantic University (EAU) student athletes are students first," 2) "An expectation for student athletes' holistic development," and 3) "EAU is an extension of the African American community." Key findings revealed a congruency between the stated culture at the HBCU and Black male student athletes' socialization processes, which facilitated positive educational experiences. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

A major criticism of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions has been the overemphasis on the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics and the concomitant under emphasis on student athletes' academic achievement and personal development (Byers, 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 2000; Zimbalist, 2001). This charge has been particularly prevalent in research on Black male student athletes who attend Division I predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Hawkins, 2010; Lapchick, 2012, 2013; Singer, 2005, 2009). Critics have

asserted the primary reason these Division I PWIs recruit Black male student athletes has little to do with the educational missions of these institutions and more to do with the goal of exploiting these talented athletes for the revenue generation associated with their athletic abilities. Hence, the organizational culture at many of these Division I PWIs is driven by what Hawkins' (2010) described as the athletic industrial complex. Evidence of this complex is found in the disparate enrollment of Black male student athletes compared to Black students who are non-athletes at Division I PWIs. For example, in a study of 76 Bowl Championship Series (BCS) institutions, Harper, Williams, and Blackman (2013) found that between 2007 and 2010, Black males accounted for 2.8% of all full-time degree seeking undergraduate students, yet accounted for 57.1% of the football teams and 64.3% of the men's basketball teams. These disturbing trends raise questions about whether the organizational cultures at these Division I PWIs are designed to facilitate positive developmental outcomes for Black male student athletes or to exploit them for athletic revenue generation.

Coupled with these disparate enrollment trends, the athletic industrial complex (Hawkins, 2010) at Division I PWIs also appears to have a negative impact on Black male student athletes' academic outcomes (NCAA, 2012a) and psychosocial experiences (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Singer, 2005, 2009). Regarding academic outcomes, recent data on Division I graduation success rates (GSRs) revealed that African American male student athletes continue to graduate at rates considerably lower than their student athlete counterparts (NCAA, 2012a). Using data from a cohort of the entering class of 2005, a recent NCAA (2012a) report revealed the GSR for Division I African American male student athletes (62%) was at least 14 percentage points below their student athlete counterparts (overall student athletes (81%), White males (82%), White females (91%), and African-American females (76%). More specifically, among all sports, African American male football and men's basketball student athletes who attended Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions posted the lowest GSRs, 62% and 67% respectively.

Concurrently, the revenues generated from these two sports continue to increase at exponential rates. For example, in 2010, the NCAA negotiated a 14-year (2011-2024) multi-media broadcasting rights agreement with Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) Sports and Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. worth more than \$10.8 billion (NCAA, 2011a). Similarly, the BCS bowl games received an estimated \$150 million annually from the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) to broadcast the five BCS bowl games (Smith, 2013). Thus, the inverse relationship between the low GSRs among Black male football and men's basketball student athletes and the increasing revenues generated from these two sports suggests the organizational culture at these institutions prioritize athletic commercial interests more than the academic achievement among this group of student athletes (Byers, 1995). Moreover, research has identified that the athletic industrial complex is an extensive socialization process that begins from the point these athletes are recruited, reinforced during their college careers, and concludes with the exhaustion of their athletic eligibility (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Singer, 2009). Unfortunately, a common outcome of this process is Black male student athletes, many of whom leave school without a degree, feeling like "used goods" with few marketable skills to pursue positions in an increasingly competitive global economy (Beamon, 2008, p. 358). Collectively, these studies highlighted how the pervasive athletic industrial complex at many Division I PWIs contributes to negative educational outcomes for Black male student athletes particularly those in football and men's basketball.

In contrast, to Division I PWIs, historically Black college and universities (HBCUs) promote unique educational missions and cultivate distinct sociocultural environments aimed at enhancing Black students' (including student athletes) holistic development (Allen, Jewel, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007). As previous research has documented, Black male student athletes at Division I PWIs are often recruited for athletic purposes and once enrolled encounter campus climates where they are members of an underrepresented group and have few role models who share the same racial and sociocultural backgrounds (Singer, 2005, 2009). Contrarily, at HBCUs, Black male student athletes are often recruited as promising students who happen to participate in athletics and once enrolled are surrounded by a critical mass of Black faculty, administrators, coaches, and peers (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012).

In addition, a majority of the HBCUs in the NCAA are members of Division II (Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). Division II institutions are far less commercialized than Division I institutions and they promote a more student centered educational model rather than a corporate professional athletic model (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; NCAA, 2011b; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Hence, there is a need to gain a better understanding of how the unique educational and sociocultural environments at HBCUs influence Black male student athletes' educational experiences in college. In the next section, the author will describe the unique role of HBCUs in higher education and highlight the limited research on Black male student athletes' experiences at these institutions. Next, the theoretical framework for this study will be introduced. The author will then present the methodology and results for the current study. Following this section, the author will present a discussion of the key findings from the study, implications for policy and practice, and the conclusion with recommendations for future research.

The Uniqueness of HBCUs

Despite the abundance of research on the athletic industrial complex at Division I PWIs, there is a scarcity of research on the organizational cultures at HBCUs and their impact on Black student athletes' educational experiences (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). Unlike many PWIs, HBCUs operate under the guidance of culturally empowering mission statements designed to address the unique educational and sociocultural needs of African American students and foster their holistic development (Allen, Jewel, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007; Brown & Davis, 2001). In concert with these mission statements, HBCUs provide culturally relevant curricula (e.g., African Diaspora courses), artifacts (e.g., naming of buildings after famous African Americans, annual homecoming events, etc.) and institutional practices (e.g., nurturing interpersonal relationships) to its students (Allen et al., 2007). Another unique aspect of HBCUs is their role in providing quality educational opportunities for students regardless of their pre-college backgrounds (e.g., first-generation college students, low pre-college test scores, substandard primary and secondary educational history, low socioeconomic status, etc.) (Allen, 1992; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Hosick, 2011). The critical mass of Black faculty, administrators, staff, and students at HBCUs also enhances Black students' sense of belonging and holistic experiences in college (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2010). Collectively, these features highlight the critical role culture plays in the facilitation of positive developmental outcomes (e.g., academic, psychosocial, etc.) for Black students (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Young, 2010; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010).

Moreover, an emerging body of literature has examined the relationship between the cultures at HBCUs, their athletic programs, and Black student athletes' educational experiences (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). In a case study analysis of an academically focused Division I HBCU athletic program, Charlton (2011) found that culturally relevant policies, language, and rituals enhanced Black student athletes' experiences in college. Similarly, Cooper and Hawkins (2012) found that well-coordinated and intentionally designed academic support programs at a Division II HBCU contributed to Black male student athletes' academic achievement and positive college experiences. More recently, in a review of literature, Hodge, Collins, and Bennett (2013) provided a detailed history Black student athletes' experiences at HBCUs and highlighted how they felt supported and nurtured at these institutions.

In addition, there is graduation data to support the notion that Black student athletes at HBCUs experience positive academic outcomes compared to their peers. For example, using data from the 2002-2003 Division I GSR and Division II academic success rate (ASR) databases (NCAA, 2009), Hodge, Collins, and Bennett (2013) found the GSRs for Black student athletes at both Division I and Division II HBCUs graduated a higher rates than their peers who were non-athletes at these institutions. Additional evidence of positive academic gains was identified at Eastern Atlantic University¹ (EAU) (the HBCU involved in the current study). The most recent NCAA Division II data revealed, over a seven-year period (1999-2005), Black male football and men's basketball student athletes at EAU posted higher ASRs than the national average among a cohort of Division II schools² (NCAA, 2012b, 2013). The ASRs for football and men's basketball student athletes at EAU between 1999-2005 was 45.1% and 63%, respectively. Whereas, the national ASR average among a cohort of Division II for Black male football student athletes and men's basketball student athletes during the same period was 41.3% and 47.4%, respectively. Despite possessing limited financial resources and enrolling a large of number students with various pre-college backgrounds EAU continues to graduate their Black male student football and men's basketball athletes at higher rates than their peer institutions, which suggest the organizational culture at EAU has a positive impact on the retention and matriculation of Black male student athletes. As a result, the current study sought to examine how the organizational culture at EAU influenced Black male student athletes' educational experiences.

Organizational Culture Theory

The concept of organizational culture dates back to the 1970s (Pettigrew, 1973, 1979). It later became popularized and widely cited in business management literature with studies that examined factors associated with financially successful companies in the U.S. (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982). In recent years, several scholars in the field of sport management have found organizational culture theory to be a particular useful framework for analyzing the interworking and effectiveness of institutions that sponsor intercollegiate athletics (Charlton, 2011; Schroeder, 2010; Schroeder & Scribner, 2006; Scott, 2012; Southall & Nagel, 2003). The current study incorporates Schein's (2010) organizational culture theory to examine the influence of a Division II HBCU on Black male student athletes' educational experiences.

Schein (2010) described culture as "the foundation of the social order that we live in and of the rules we abide by" (p. 3). Organizational culture theory focuses on understanding how

shared and taken-for-granted meanings influence group members' behaviors and perceptions (Schein, 2010). Within this theory, there are three levels of culture: 1) artifacts, 2) espoused beliefs and values, and 3) basic assumptions. Artifacts refer to observable and/or tangible features that reflect the underlying principles of an organization. Examples of artifacts include physical environments, language, behaviors, symbols, documents, rituals/ceremonies, and climate. Espoused beliefs and values are shared aspirations and philosophies among an organization related to group actions that produce successful outcomes. According to Schein (2010), these beliefs and values are initiated by an individual, which is usually the group founder or leader, and then presented to group members. In order for these beliefs and values to guide organizational behavior, they must be verified through social validation, which involves the shared confirmation that these beliefs and values indeed contribute to successful outcomes for the organization.

Once successful outcomes and social validation are established, the espoused beliefs and values become taken-for-granted meanings known as basic assumptions. These basic assumptions serve as powerful socialization tools because new members entering the group will adopt desired behaviors in order to assimilate into the group's culture. In other words, basic assumptions create cultures that "tell their members who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel about themselves" and once established they are very difficult to change (Schein, 2010, p. 29). The purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of the organizational culture at a HBCU on Black male student athletes' experiences. The following research questions were investigated:

1. What is the organizational culture (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions) at a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?
2. How does the organizational culture of a historically Black college/university (HBCU) influence Black male student athletes' experiences?

Methods

Site Selection

EAU is a historically Black institution established in the early twentieth century with a primary goal of providing high quality educational opportunities for Black students. EAU is a four-year public university in the southeastern U. S. with a student enrollment around 4,500. The core purposes of EAU are teaching, research, creative expression, and public service. The delivery of these purposes incorporates innovative technology with diverse pedagogical strategies (traditional and non-traditional). EAU offers Bachelors, Master's, Education Specialist, and Associate degrees as well as a wide range of majors including business, criminal justice, education, fine arts, humanities, nursing, public administration, social sciences, and sciences. EAU is also an institution with a strong academic reputation. According to a recent U.S. News and World Report, EAU is ranked among the top 30 HBCUs in the U.S (U.S. News and World Report, 2013). In the state EAU is located, it ranks among the top 10 institutions out of approximately 30 state system schools in terms of Black students' graduation rates. In addition, as previously mentioned, EAU has produced higher ASRs among its Black football (45.1%) and men's basketball (63%) student athletes compared to their Division II counterparts (Black football (41.3%) and Black men's basketball (47.4%) student athletes) over a seven-year

period between 1999-2005 (NCAA, 2012b, 2013). EAU is also a member of the NCAA's Division II and sponsors 11 varsity men's and women's sports.

Data Sources

For the institutional document analysis, the following five institutional documents were analyzed: 1) the university mission statement, 2) the athletic department mission statement, 3) the athletic department academic support services mission statement, 4) the student athlete handbook, and 5) the athletic department compliance guidelines. Criterion sampling was used to select these documents as well as the institution and participants (Patton, 2002). Institutional documents were selected based on their relevancy to the phenomena of interest in this study (e.g., the organizational culture of a HBCU). Regarding the institution, EAU was selected based on the following criteria: 1) recognized as a HBCU in the U.S., 2) an active member of the NCAA's Division II, 3) demonstrated a history of positive academic gains in terms of graduating its student athletes at rates higher than schools within the same divisional classification, and 4) sponsored both football and men's basketball.

A HBCU was targeted for this study because of their unique educational and sociocultural environments and the fact that there is a dearth of research on student athletes at these institutions (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). Only NCAA member institutions were targeted because the NCAA is the largest and most visible governing body for intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. and a majority of HBCUs that sponsor athletic programs are affiliated with the NCAA (Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). Only Division II HBCUs were targeted because Division II institutions possess a reputation of a more student centered educational model compared to the corporate professional athletic model among Division I FBS institutions (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; NCAA, 2011b; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The history of positive academic gains among student athletes was important to ensure proven strategies and best practices were identified and examined. As mentioned earlier, evidence of positive academic gains was reflected in the fact that EAU has consistently graduated its Black male football and men's basketball student athletes at higher rates than its Division II counterparts between 1999-2005 (NCAA, 2012b, 2013). Black football and men's basketball student athletes were targeted for this study because historically these two sports post the lowest graduation rates among all student athlete subgroups (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). For the focus group interviews, participants (n=17) included nine football and eight men's basketball student athletes. The first focus group consisted of four football and four men's basketball student athletes; the second focus group consisted of four men's basketball student athletes; and the third focus group consisted of five football student athletes. Additional data sources included the EAU campus and three athletic events.

Data Collection

This in-depth qualitative case study included four data collection methods: 1) an institutional document analysis, 2) site observations, 3) participant observations, and 4) three focus group interviews. A comprehensive document analysis of five key institutional documents was conducted to gain insight into the institution's core values, goals, and objectives (Bowen, 2009). All documents were retrieved online via the institution's websites. Over an eight-month period, the researcher engaged in numerous visits to the campus and various athletic events.

These visits included observations of the campus climate at the HBCU specifically within the athletic department (e.g., team practices, meetings, and games) and the participants' day-to-day interactions and behaviors. The site observations also included an analysis of the physical environment of the campus such as the athletic facilities, the athletic department's academic support center, and academic department buildings. The site observations allowed the researcher to ascertain a better understanding of the culture of the HBCU as reflected in its observable artifacts (Patton, 2002). Similarly, the participant observations were useful because the researcher sought to understand how participants' day-to-day interactions and behaviors within their academic and athletic environments at the HBCU compared to the overall culture of the athletic program.

By conducting three semi-structured focus group interviews with the participants, the researcher was able to investigate how Black male student athletes internalized the culture at a HBCU and reflected this culture in their behaviors (Patton, 2002). Three separate focus groups were conducted. The first focus group included eight participants, four football and four men's basketball student athletes. The second focus group included four men's basketball student athletes. The third focus group interview included five football student athletes. Cox and Blake (1991) suggested focus group "decision quality is best when neither excessive diversity nor excessive homogeneity are present" (p. 51). The authors explained how diverse groups possess a broader and richer range of experiences to draw from to address a specific problem. Thus, the first focus group was integrated to include a broader and richer range of experiences from participants from two different sports. Conversely, the second and third focus groups were homogenous in terms of sport participation background because the researcher sought to investigate in-depth how the organizational culture at EAU influenced the educational experiences of participants from two different sports in independent settings. In addition, having participants from the same sport participate in a separate focus group was purposeful in an effort to increase the participants' level of comfort with answering the interview questions. The use of the three different focus groups enhanced the researcher's confidence in inferences in emergent themes across data sources (Patton, 2002).

During the focus group interviews, all participants were prompted to answer each of the pre-established questions of the semi-structured interview protocol to ensure each participant's experiences and perspectives were documented as they pertained to the key topics of inquiry. This round robin approach was useful because it afforded each participant the opportunity to share their experiences while contrasting their responses with their peers. As a result, the researcher was able to examine areas of consensus or dissent among the participants based on the content and sequence of their responses. Furthermore, this approach created a level of comfort among the group so when probing questions were asked for elucidation, each participant felt comfortable expressing their experiences since they already had an opportunity to speak and did not feel limited in any way. The researcher also directed various probing questions to multiple participants throughout each focus group to ensure no one participant dominated the interview.

Data Analysis

Both data sets were analyzed using a thematic analysis procedure, which included open, axial, comparative, and selective coding processes (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989). Throughout the analysis and coding processes, extensive field notes and memos were documented to create an audit trail of the

researcher's thoughts and observations as well as to enhance the transparency of the research process (Roulston, 2010). In addition, a peer group of three researchers with an expertise in qualitative research reviewed the analyses to verify the coherence and relevancy of the findings (Patton, 2002). Regarding the focus groups, member checks were conducted with the participants (Roulston, 2010). Each participant was provided with a copy of the interview transcripts and analyses and they were solicited for their feedback to ensure accuracy and clarity of the reported findings. Once feedback was received, both the transcripts and analyses were updated. Pseudonyms for the institution, previous school references, and participants were assigned to preserve anonymity. Findings from each method were then triangulated for data convergence and emergent themes were identified (Patton, 2002).

Results

An analysis of the data sources revealed EAU placed a high priority on academic and athletic excellence, student athletes' holistic development, and the sustainment of the strong bond between EAU and the African American community. EAU cultivated an environment where these priorities were manifested through the establishment of well-coordinated and intentionally designed formal policies, culturally relevant programs, and nurturing informal practices. Using levels of the Schein's (2010) organizational culture theory, the results section highlights the key artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions associated with the EAU educational culture.

Artifacts

EAU Athletic Complex. Upon entering, the main athletic complex at EAU, there is a collection of archival portraits celebrating the success of former EAU student athletes, coaches, and administrators. In addition, to recognizing athletic excellence, there are also portraits and commentary dedicated to student athletes' academic accomplishments. For example, there are pictures and listings of former student athletes and teams that earned all-academic honors at the conference and national levels. Located on the second floor of the building are pictures of famous African Americans in U.S. history. At many institutions, the celebration of Black success beyond athletics in this manner is often only highlighted during Black History Month in February, if at all, and even then it is usually limited to the African American studies department or multicultural diversity office. Yet, at EAU, these symbols of Black excellence and perseverance were intentionally placed within the main athletic complex to serve as a form of inspiration and positive identity affirmation for current student athletes. The presence of a balanced emphasis on academic and athletic accomplishments coupled with the portraits of famous African Americans in U.S. history reflected the unique organizational culture at EAU, which recognized and celebrated African American accomplishments in areas beyond athletics. This purposefully designed area reinforced to the Black student athletes at EAU that their success and development was connected to a broader historical legacy of African Americans.

Athletic Study Hall. Located on the second floor of the main athletic complex next to the athletic department offices and the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) academic department are four classrooms, which are used for the athletic study hall. The purposeful location of the athletic study hall on the same floor as the EAU athletic administrators' and HPER faculty' offices not only facilitated effective oversight of the study

hall program, but also increased positive and frequent interactions between student athletes and faculty/administrators. It was commonplace to see the athletic director, a faculty member, or an administrator stop in study hall and talk with the student athletes about their lives beyond academics and athletics. Thus, the athletic study provided both a favorable environment for completing academic tasks, but also a positive and supportive environment whereby student athletes could establish and strengthened meaningful relationships with the EAU faculty and administrators who served as role models.

Academic Study Tables. Another academic support program for EAU student athletes located in a facility on the main part of campus is the Academic Study Tables (AST) program. The AST program is a university-wide academic support program designed to provide all EAU students with a structured environment to complete their academic tasks and receive academic assistance. This program is managed by the Office of Student Affairs and the Academic Retention Center at EAU in conjunction with the EAU athletic department's academic support services. Key features of this program include the participation of professors and specialized peer tutors to assist students with their academic needs. According the AST website, the creation and structure of this academic support program was based on research, which found students tended to perform better academically when they spent at least two hours studying every day, worked in small peer groups, engaged in one-on-one interactions with their professors, and spent time with a tutor. The central location on campus was convenient for enhancing student athletes' integration into the campus culture beyond their athletic involvement. In addition, the program's year-around seven days a week operating schedule was conducive to the student athletes' hectic schedules both in-athletic season and out-of-season.

Annual Sports Banquet. The Annual Sports Banquet is held every April to honor the academic and athletic achievements of EAU student athletes. Attendance at the Annual Sports Banquet is mandatory for all student athletes. The head coaches for each team determines award recipients based on university, athletic department, and team expectations. All scholar athletes who maintained a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) or higher are recognized. In addition, as institutional members of the National Student Athlete Honors Society, EAU also honors juniors and seniors who earn a 3.4 GPA or higher. These forms of recognition explicitly signal to student athletes that academic achievement is valued and celebrated. Athletic awards are provided to student athletes who demonstrated exemplar sportsmanship and overall improvement in different statistical categories. The Athlete of Year and Eagle³ awards are the most prestigious and recognize those student athletes who excelled at the highest level among their teams athletically and academically.

Annual Homecoming Events. Another key artifact of the EAU athletic culture is the annual homecoming events. At EAU, there are two homecoming events each year, football and basketball. These annual events are unique from other athletic events because they are accompanied by a week full of culturally empowering events such as the historic battle of the bands competitions, step shows, professional development workshops, health fairs, parades, music concerts, fashion shows, tailgating, and community service outreach (Moore, 2012). Given the fact that HBCUs are located in predominantly African American communities, the success and visibility of these events provide various benefits to local residents and businesses, which reflects the unique connection between HBCUs and the broader African American community. More specifically, these cornerstone events are a core part of the HBCU experience and serve as sites of Black cultural empowerment, expression, and unity (Archer & Watson, 2005). The participants cited these culturally empowering events as one of the primary reasons

they chose to attend a HBCU. The presence of a critical mass of Black students, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, and community members coming together to celebrate the richness and uniqueness of African American culture symbolized the *culture of collective uplift* present at EAU. In other words, these annual events signaled to Black male student athletes' that their racial and socio-cultural heritage was valued, recognized, and celebrated, which enhanced their sense of belonging, connection, and commitment to EAU.

Espoused Beliefs and Values

The EAU mission statement is unique in the sense that it explicitly states the institution's goal of providing quality educational opportunities and culturally relevant programs and services for African American and underserved students. The EAU mission statement outlines the following core values:

- EAU is committed to delivering quality educational experiences to underserved populations in the region, state, and nation;
- EAU is committed to recognizing and preserving the historical and culturally distinctive traditions which define African American culture;
- EAU is committed to providing a comprehensive array of programs in health care services, community development, human disabilities, cultural enhancement, business and economic development, international trade and entrepreneurship;
- EAU is committed to graduating marketable students through technologically advanced academic programs and through undergraduate research, study abroad, internship, service learning, and pre-professional opportunities.
- EAU is committed to enhancing the quality of life of African-American males through the educational, research, intervention, and service programs coordinated through the Institute for African American Males (IAAM)⁴.

The analysis of the four different data sources (institutional documents, participant observations, site observations, and interview data) revealed a congruency between EAU's stated values and the participants' interpretation of these values. Participants internalized these beliefs by understanding the significance of their roles as student athletes at a HBCU. For example, Kelvin, a sophomore football player, described his feelings about the culture at EAU:

I enjoy going to a HBCU because of the pride and the community, and the fraternities, and the campus involvement. There's nothing like it at any other school to me. I feel that as a race Black people are more involved and help support each other to succeed in any which way you want to.

The explicit focus on addressing the unique challenges facing the African American community is emblematic of the foundation of HBCUs. Everything at EAU from the formal documents (e.g., culturally relevant mission statements, etc.) to the informal practices (e.g., enrollment of a critical mass of Black students, culturally empowering artifacts and events, etc.) was connected to and reflected their unique founding principles.

Basic Underlying Assumptions

There were three basic assumptions that guided the actions in EAU's athletic culture. The first basic assumption was "EAU student athletes are students first," which refers to the educationally based athletic culture at EAU. The second basic assumption was "an expectation for student athletes' holistic development," which refers to EAU's focus on equipping their student athletes with valuable skills beyond athletics to help them succeed in life after college. The third basic assumption was the notion that "EAU is an extension of the African American community," which refers to the unique mission and role EAU and its athletic department fulfill in terms of the cultural perseverance and uplift of the African American community. Collectively, these basic assumptions created the EAU athletic culture.

EAU Student Athletes are Students First. The first basic assumption of "EAU student athletes are student first" was reflected in each of the athletic department's core documents. For example, in the Code of Conduct section of the student athlete handbook, one of the key principles stated is "student athletes have the responsibility to be students first and foremost." More specifically, within the handbook there was a clear prioritization of academic achievement over athletic responsibilities. In the focus group interviews, the participants reiterated this "student first" mantra, which indicated their social validation of this stated value. For example, in response to a question regarding whether the participants identified themselves as a student athlete or an athlete student, Malik, a freshman football player, described how he viewed himself as a student first:

I'm a student athlete. 'Cause the student part is always going to come into place. Like you're always going to have class and you're always going to have homework. Like I remember when we were on the road and I think we were playing Lakefield College⁵... I had a paper due that same night that we got checked into a hotel... So, I'm basically... always doing work [academic tasks].

Although, participants acknowledged that athletics was a major part of their lives, the consensus regarding their role at EAU was that they were "students first" and primarily there to pursue their education and earn a degree.

Moreover, there were several unique features of the organizational culture at EAU that fostered the development of the "student first athlete second" mentality among the participants. The consensus among the participants as the most influential feature about being at a HBCU that enhanced their educational experiences was the presence of a critical mass of Black faculty who nurtured and supported them. Robert, a senior basketball player, described how benefitted from his relationships with the professors at EAU:

My college experience here has been great... I really enjoy a HBCU, because like they say, the teachers are more understanding. Because, like, they know what you're going through. So, it's really more hands on with us.

When Robert said "they know what you're going through" he was referring to the fact that a majority of the professors at EAU were Black and could relate the various challenges he faced as a Black male in the U.S. Similarly, Malcolm, another senior basketball player, expressed his positive feelings about his professors at EAU:

[B]ut coming to HBCU they're more...they just understand. They understand your situation...They really care about your wellbeing after school and moving forward...They're not going to just try to give you a grade to give you a grade, but they're going to give you something and let you move on forward with.

These sentiments reflect the notion that the professors at EAU valued the participants as “students first” and were invested in their success holistically. Related to this point, participants also mentioned how many of their professors were EAU alumni. Therefore, not only could their professors relate to them on a racial and sociocultural level, but also from a perspective as a former EAU student. This heightened sense of connection enhanced the quality of the participants’ educational experiences, sense of belonging, and commitment to excelling because they felt a part of the EAU legacy.

Another unique feature of the EAU culture that enhanced the participants’ “student first” mentality was the presence of a purposefully designed academic support program called the Academic Study Tables (AST). The AST program is a centrally located university-wide academic support service designed to provide EAU students with a place where they could complete their academic tasks and receive quality academic assistance. The AST program is operated by the Office of Student Affairs and the Academic Retention Center at EAU in close conjunction with the athletics department to ensure optimal student athlete participation. For example, all student athletes are required to complete 10 hours per week of mandatory study hall both in-season and out-of-season and they have the option of attending the AST program or the athletic study hall to fulfill this requirement. Unique features of the AST program include the regular attendance of professors and specialized peer tutors. Robert described how working with the specialized peer tutors with the AST program helped him:

Because like most of the time a professor they'll teach you something the way they know how to do it. That's the way they want it done. Most likely, if my classmate will tell me, “OK, you can do it like this,” and I probably could understand it better from another person my age then how they make it more complex like a professor would.

Along with specialized peer tutors, participants also cited how they benefitted from the attendance of their professors. Isaiah, a sophomore football player, explained how he benefitted from the AST:

Sometimes you have professors there and they have like a small white board and they write the problem out on the white board and ask you to solve it. They basically help you out.

The active participation by professors increased positive faculty-student interactions for the participants and reflected EAU’s commitment to providing quality instruction to all its students. This well-coordinated and intentionally designed program provided comprehensive academic support to EAU student athletes and reinforced to them that their academic success was valued and important. Collectively, the educationally based institutional policies (e.g., student athlete code of conduct), the critical mass of caring Black faculty, and purposefully designed academic support services (e.g., the AST program) cultivated a “student first” mentality among the participants in this study and enhanced their educational experiences.

An Expectation for Student Athletes' Holistic Development. The second basic assumption of the EAU athletic culture was “an expectation for student athletes’ holistic development.” The EAU athletic department mission statement articulates its “focus on the overall educational, physical, mental, social welfare and total development of our student athletes, and recognize our athletic program as a major contributor in accomplishing the University’s objectives in education, research, and service.” Aside from time spent on academics and athletics, student athletes were encouraged to be involved in educationally purposeful activities on campus. The most popular campus organization among the participants was the Institute for African American Males (IAAM). Nearly half of the participants in this study (7 out of the 17) were members of the IAAM. The IAAM was established to promote academic excellence, positive self-identities, leadership skills, and mentorship opportunities among the African American male students at EAU.

Examples of IAAM sponsored programs included their annual African American Male Scholarship Banquet (an academic scholarship fundraiser for 40 deserving pre-college students within the IAAM service area), the national African American Male Mentoring Conference (a conference focused on disseminating best mentoring practices and promoting higher academic, social, and community consciousness among African American males), the African American Athletes’ Experiences Learning Community (a series of academic courses during a students’ first year including two sections of English composition, a Team Sports course, and a Recreational Skills course designed to develop students’ writing and critical thinking skills through the documentation of their experiences in and reflections on athletics/sports), and the Annual Youth Summit (a conference designed to bring faculty, students across different ages and academic classifications, and community leaders together to discuss strategies for facilitating successful outcomes for African American youth). Malcolm explained the benefits of being involved in the IAAM:

IAAM shows you how to be a man... how to handle your responsibilities and how to be a role model for young people who not only look up to athletes, but just look up to people in college in general.

Culturally relevant programs such as the IAAM reflect EAU’s commitment to providing its students with educationally purposeful activities that facilitate their holistic development.

A unique feature associated with these educationally purposeful activities was the preponderance of Black students who were involved in them. Participants emphasized how being an educational environment with a large number of Black students who share similar sociocultural backgrounds created a synergy on campus, which enhanced their interest and engagement in these activities. Jerald, a freshman basketball player, described the uniqueness of a HBCU culture when he said:

It’s different you know...going to a HBCU, you’re surrounded more by people of your own race, you know, people of your same background. So, you feel more connected to everybody.

This sense of connection motivated the participants to be involved on campus. As opposed to a PWI, where there may be a lack of culturally relevant campus organizations and an underrepresentation of Black students in the general study body, EAU sponsored several

culturally relevant and educationally purposeful activities and enrolled a high number of Black students.

Another way the EAU athletic culture promoted “student athletes’ holistic development” was through the community service requirement for athletic eligibility. Each semester student athletes were required to participate in community service activities such as mentoring, tutoring, and school visits. These hours could be completed on an individual or team-sponsored basis. Terrence, a sophomore football player, described how he completed his community service hours by working with the local elementary and middle schools, which also assisted him with his professional development in the field of education:

So, I have to get volunteer hours at schools. I get to meet a lot of high school and middle school students. Because of my field and professional life ...being there talking to them, telling them what you have to do to go to college...and it may open eyes up a little bit more that people are looking up to you [as college student athlete]...you are a mentor.

Given the fact that EAU was located in a predominantly Black community, Terrence was involved in community service at the local high school and middle school, which allowed him to strengthen his relationship with the members of the surrounding community. This unique connection between HBCUs and the predominantly Black communities where they are located reflects the special role these institutions fulfill in providing a service to the local community and cultivating holistic development among its students. Terrence’s comments reflected how the participants internalized the basic assumption within the EAU athletic culture, which viewed community service as an institutional obligation and an opportunity for student athletes to build character through a lifelong commitment to serving others.

EAU is an Extension of the African American Community. The third basic assumption identified within the EAU athletic culture was the idea that “EAU is an extension of the African American Community.” A primary example of this connection was identified in the annual homecoming events. A cornerstone of HBCU cultures is annual homecoming events, which serve as sites of cultural empowerment whereby African American cultural traditions are upheld and institutional pride is on display (Archer & Watson, 2005). Although, these events are organized around athletic contests, they consist of a week full of activities including the historic battle of the bands competitions, step shows, professional development workshops, health fairs, parades, music concerts, fashion shows, and tailgating (Moore, 2012). Kelvin described the fervor around EAU homecoming events:

There is nothing like a homecoming at an HBCU. Because all the alumni come out. People from neighboring cities come out. Like the whole town shutdown...It’s like this long strip will be full of vendors selling things. You have fraternities and sororities coming back out. And, it’s like former players and alumni, they’ll come out and want to meet you and talk to you about your experience.

Donnie, a senior basketball player, described the special feeling he experienced being a part of the EAU homecoming when he simply said: “Knowing that you’re a part of that, it feels real good.” The success of these events as well as other athletic events on campus enhanced the prestige of both the university and the predominantly African American community in which it resides.

In addition, to the annual homecoming events, the basic assumption of “EAU is as an extension of the African American community” was also identified in the participants’ descriptions about the culture of collective identity at EAU. Kelvin described the supportive culture at EAU:

When I say “pride,” I mean as in the community coming out and supporting the athletic teams. Usually when there’s an athletic event everybody comes out, supports the school, and cheers them on to victory. And when I say “campus organization,” and “campus involvement,” I feel like not just a group of people come out, but everybody will come out and lend a hand to help out...if a hand is needed.

Several of the participants also described their social relationships at EAU with words of endearment and affection. For example, Shamar, a freshman football player, described how his relationship with his coach prior to enrollment convinced him that EAU was a positive familial environment for him:

[T]he reason I came to this HBCU was because the coach. I felt like they wanted me to be here. I felt like it was going to be a family if I came out here. Like they’re going to take care of me. They’re going to look out for me. Overall, I just like being here...At an HBCU, it’s like everything seems like a big old family. Because everybody try to work together to get the job done no matter what it is.

Several participants when describing the culture at EAU used the term “family” to describe the close-knit relationships at the school. Along the same lines, Lawrence, a sophomore basketball player, described how everyone at EAU expressed a genuine concern for one another when he said: “Like everybody loves on this campus. I feel like that...they care about you.” The sentiment of the collective identity at EAU was salient among all participants. The combination of culturally relevant campus events such as the annual homecomings and the presence of a nurturing education environment with a large number of Black students, faculty, administrators, and staff reinforced EAU’s basic assumption that it served as “an extension of the African American community.”

Discussion

Given the increased public scrutiny over the educational value of intercollegiate athletics, the current study highlighted how a Division II HBCU successfully created an organizational culture that prioritized student athletes’ holistic development over their athletic success and revenue generation. Contrary to many Division I PWIs, the Division II HBCU in this study promoted a culturally relevant mission statement designed to address the unique challenges facing the African American community and cultivated an educational environment where Black male student athletes felt supported and nurtured. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the organizational culture at a HBCU on Black male student athletes’ experiences. Findings revealed congruence between the stated values of the HBCU and Black male student athletes’ experiences.

The first research question focused on understanding the organizational culture at a HBCU as documented in its core institutional documents and demonstrated through observable

artifacts. Findings indicated the organizational culture of the EAU athletic program was rooted in three basic assumptions: 1) “EAU student athletes are students first,” 2) “an expectation of student athletes’ holistic development,” and 3) “EAU is an extension of the African American community.” These basic assumptions reflected the espoused beliefs and values of the culture at EAU and more specifically the subculture of athletics. According the EAU athletic department philosophy statement in the student athlete handbook, the core beliefs of the EAU athletic program include athletics are an integral part of the EAU’s overall educational program, student athletes’ total development is paramount, and athletics serves as a tool to enhance institutional pride through shared entertainment and social activity. Each of these beliefs was manifested in the following key artifacts: 1) EAU athletic complex, 2) athletic study hall, 3) Academic Study Tables (AST), 4) annual sports banquet, and 5) annual homecoming events.

The EAU athletic complex reflected the belief that athletics is an integral part of university’s overall mission statement. Within the EAU mission statement, the institution declared its commitment to “promoting and preserving the historical and culturally distinctive traditions which define African American culture.” In concert with this mission, the EAU athletic complex preserves African American culture by promoting the accomplishments of former EAU student athletes, coaches, and administrators along with famous African Americans in U.S. history. The portraits and accompanying commentary of these individuals are a form of Black cultural symbolism, which is a distinctive feature of HBCUs (Davis, 2006). Similarly, the annual homecoming events are another artifact that reflected EAU’s belief that athletics are an integral part of EAU’s overall educational program and provided shared entertainment and social activity for the campus community. At each of these homecoming events, African American culture is on display in various forms including athletic contests, battle of the band competitions, step shows, fashion shows, parades, and community service activities (Moore, 2012). Similar to previous research on HBCUs, these findings reveal how these institutions serve as sites of cultural empowerment whereby collective racial identity is cultivated (Cokley, 2000; Steinfeldt, Reed, & Steinfeldt, 2010).

Moreover, the EAU athletic study hall, the AST program, and annual sports banquet reflected the belief that student athletes’ educational development was valued and supported. The EAU athletic study hall was conveniently located in the main athletic complex on the floor with the athletic department offices, which provided direct oversight for athletic administrators. Furthermore, the athletic department’s endorsement of the AST program not only signaled to the participants that their academic success was a university-wide effort, but also enhanced their integration into the campus culture. Key features such as the involvement of professors and specialized peer tutors were designed to ensure student athletes’ academic needs were met. In addition, the annual sports banquet served as a public recognition of student athletes’ academic and athletic accomplishments. The athletic department’s inclusion of academic awards in this ceremony reflected the institution’s core value of academic achievement. Collectively, the presence of these educationally based artifacts is consistent with the Division II philosophy, which focuses on maintaining a healthy balance between academics and athletics through comprehensive programs of learning and development (NCAA, 2011b).

The second research question focused on understanding how the organizational culture at a HBCU influenced Black male student athletes’ experiences. Findings revealed the influence of the EAU culture cultivated positive educational experiences for the student athletes. Regarding the basic assumption of “EAU student athletes are students first,” participants embraced this role and took pride in being an EAU student athlete. The participants expressed how they understood

as student athletes that they carried additional responsibilities academically, athletically, and behaviorally. Related to their academics, participants cited how the eligibility standards, mandatory study hall requirements, and the presence of the year-around AST program enhanced their academic engagement and performance. Participants specifically cited one-on-one interactions with professors and specialized peer tutors as beneficial. These findings support previous studies, which found student athletes benefitted from being involved in educationally purposeful activities such as out-of-class interactions with professors and engagement in academic-related programs (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Gaston Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Related to the basic assumption that student athletes' holistic development is a cultural expectation, participants affirmed this value by citing their involvement in various educationally purposeful activities. Among the most popular of these programs was the IAAM program. Participants described how this program provided them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills, serve as roles model in the local community, and fellowship with other Black males who they may not otherwise have met. The presence of culturally relevant programs such as the IAAM reiterate the notion that intentionally designed and well implemented institutional programs contribute to positive developmental outcomes for African American student athletes (Person & LeNoir, 1997). In addition, participants also mentioned their participation in the mandatory community services hours as an important part of their experiences as EAU student athletes. The fact that the EAU athletic culture promoted student athletes' engagement in non-athletic related activities supports previous studies, which found athletic participation to be linked to increased levels of social involvement on campus (Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006).

Additional findings revealed that participants internalized the basic assumption that "EAU is an extension of the African American community." Culturally empowering events such as the annual homecoming events served as sites of cultural empowerment where Black male student athletes at EAU experienced a sense of collective identity with EAU and the local African American community (Archer & Watson, 2005). The feeling of being a part of a rich legacy encouraged the participants to do their best to exhibit high levels of character both on and off the courts/fields. Terrence poignantly described the benefits of being an EAU student athlete: "So, us, being [athletes] it teaches us how to grow as young Black men and grow as young independent responsible men."

The positive interactions with institutional staff and the balanced emphasis on student athletes' academic development and overall well-being are vastly different from previous studies on Black male student athletes' experiences at Division I PWIs (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Singer, 2005, 2009). For example, Singer (2009) found that African American football athletes at a Division I PWI referred to their role at these institutions as "glorified slaves and high-class slaves," which reflected their feeling that they were being exploited for their athletic talents with little support for academic and/or personal development (p. 108). In contrast, Black male student athletes at the Division II HBCU in this study referred to themselves as "students first" and described the culture at their school "a big family." These differences in college experiences and campus perceptions suggest the educational and cultural environments at HBCUs may be better suited to produce positive developmental outcomes for Black students than PWIs (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2000; Fleming, 1984). In addition, one of the themes identified from Singer's (2009) study highlighted how African American football student athletes at a Division I PWI felt there was a lack of role models in leadership positions within the athletic department. However, within the athletic department at EAU, an African American filled every leadership role and

upper level administrative position at the university. Thus, providing another example of how HBCUs create positive learning environments where Black students can be exposed to quality role models with whom they can connect with racially and socio-culturally (Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2010).

There are two possible explanations for these contrasting findings between the current study and previous studies on Black male student athletes' experiences at Division I PWIs. The first explanation lies in the fact that HBCUs operate under unique missions, which focus on the cultural uplift of Black students through education and view athletics as an extension of this educational experience (Allen et al., 2007; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Gallien & Peterson, 2005). The mere presence of a critical mass of Black faculty, administrators, and staff as well as culturally empowering artifacts signal to Black students that these environments value Black culture and intellectualism (Davis, 2006). Another explanation could be the divisional classification. At Division I level, the multi-million dollar television contracts and increased commercialization of football and men's basketball have been cited as the primary reasons the educational missions at these institutions are being undermined (Byers, 1995; Sack & Stauroskey, 1998; Sperber, 2000; Zimbalist, 2001). In addition, at many Division I PWIs where there is a conspicuous overrepresentation of Black males on athletic teams and underrepresentation in the overall student body, the culture reflects an athletic industrial complex where Black males are viewed as athletic commodities (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Hawkins, 2010).

Collectively, the artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions at EAU created a *culture of collective uplift* in that the EAU athletic department and various academic departments coalesced to accomplish the institution's mission of "educating students to become outstanding citizens of society." The EAU athletic department's promotion of the "student athletes are students first" mantra and the university-wide "expectation for student athlete' holistic development" reflected the belief that "EAU is an extension of the African American community" that is invested in the success of its student athletes. The standards of academic excellence, sportsmanship, integrity, self-discipline, and character reflected in the core institutional documents were internalized by Black male student athletes through their exposure to culturally empowering artifacts, involvement in educationally purposeful activities, and positive relationships with institutional staff.

Limitations

The limitations associated with the current study include the sample size, the data collection methods and analyses, and the scope of the study. The current study examined a single institution and a group of 17 Black male student athletes. Therefore, the sample size limited the researcher's confidence in inferences regarding the transferability of the findings. Regarding data collection and analyses, the study was limited to a thematic analysis of institution's core documents, participant and site observations, and three semi-structured focus group interviews with Black male student athletes at the institution. Thus, these methods limited the researchers' ability to investigate the organizational culture of the institution beyond the aforementioned sources. Another limitation of the current study was the scope of the study, which focused on understanding the influence of the organizational culture at a Division II HBCU on Black male student athletes' experiences. Hence, findings cannot be generalized to all

student athletes at the institution or student athletes at every institution of higher education in the U.S.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Findings from the current study provide recommendations that should be considered for improving the educational experiences and outcomes of Black male student athletes at institutions of higher education. In the current study, findings revealed participants benefitted from their exposure to culturally relevant and empowering artifacts such as the EAU athletic complex and the annual homecoming events. Therefore, one recommendation for institutions of higher education is to create campus climates that value, celebrate, and reflect African American culture and history. Although, many institutions (e.g., PWIs) cannot duplicate the environments at HBCUs, there are ways to include culturally empowering artifacts throughout the campus. For example, Strayhorn, Terrell, Redmond, and Walton (2010) described the important role Black cultural centers at PWIs serve in terms of enhancing Black students' sense of belonging at these institutions. At EAU, African American culture and history were celebrated across the institution as well as at different campus events such as the annual homecomings. These forms of cultural acknowledgment and reverence should be present across an institution (e.g., images, events, etc.) and should recognize African American excellence in all areas not just athletics.

Another recommendation for improving Black males student athletes' educational outcomes is to implement intentionally designed services based on the institution's culture and the student athletes' needs. For example, Person and LeNoir (1997) recommended devising programs with the input and commitment from various departments across the institution (e.g., academic, athletic, and student affairs departments). These partnerships would allow each department to contribute their expertise in the creation of comprehensive retention programs. In addition, Person and LeNoir (1997) also suggested the location of these programs and services should be intentional as well. At EAU, the intentional location of the athletic study hall in the main athletic complex on the same floor as the athletic department offices was not only convenient for student athletes to access, but also allowed for direct oversight by the athletic administrators. In another example, the location of the AST on the main part of campus facilitated student athletes' integration into the campus culture.

Moreover, participants in the current study benefitted from involvement in educationally purposeful activities such as out-of-class meetings with professors, peer study groups, and campus organizations. Gaston Gayles and Hu (2009) suggested institutions and their athletic departments should be intentional about increasing student athletes' involvement in educationally purposeful activities. The authors opined that increased involvement in these types of activities would enhance student athletes' personal self-concept, as well as their learning and communication skills. At EAU, participants were encouraged to participate in these activities by the athletic department through the teams' adherence to the 20-hour per week in-season and 8-hour per week out-of-season rules and explicit recommendations by athletic administrators and coaches. In addition, participants felt the programs available to them were culturally relevant. For example, the IAAM program provided them with an opportunity to engage with faculty, peers, and members of the community whom they felt they could relate to culturally and socially. Along the same lines, the mandatory community service hours from the athletic department provided participants with a structure to engage in outreach within their local community and build relationships with individuals outside of the university community. As a result, these types

of programs facilitated student athletes' engagement on and off campus and increased their persistence in college.

Conclusion

The current study builds on the growing body of literature on Black student athletes' experiences at HBCUs (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Hodge, Collins, & Bennett, 2013). Despite widespread criticism about the low graduation rates at HBCUs (Riley, 2010), the current study revealed how a HBCU athletic program fostered an organizational culture that contributed to positive academic behaviors, increased involvement in educationally purposeful activities, and cultural empowerment among Black male student athletes. The current study incorporated an organizational culture theoretical framework (Schein, 2010) to examine the influence of a HBCU environment on Black male student athletes' experiences. The current study contributes to the knowledge of organizational culture theory by highlighting the interplay between artifacts, espoused beliefs, and basic assumptions within the unique educational and sociocultural environment of a Division II HBCU and its subsequent impact on the positive educational experiences among Black male student athletes. More specifically, the organizational culture lens allowed the researcher to examine how racial identity, sociocultural norms, educational values, and athletic participation intertwined to create a supportive environment for Black male student athletes. Thus, the current study demonstrates the malleability of the organizational culture theory as it pertains to the examination of intercollegiate athletic programs and structures (Charlton, 2011; Schroeder, 2010; Schroeder & Scribner, 2006; Scott, 2012; Southall & Nagel, 2003).

In summary, findings revealed a congruency between culturally empowering artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions at a Division II HBCU and Black male student athletes' socialization processes. Findings support previous research, which found the organizational cultures of HBCUs and their educationally based intercollegiate athletic programs contribute to positive developmental outcomes for Black student athletes (Charlton, 2011; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012). Similar to previous findings on HBCUs, the organizational culture at EAU served as a welcoming and nurturing environment where Black students felt understood and supported (Allen et al., 2007; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2010). Specifically, Black male student athletes benefitted from culturally relevant philosophies, a campus climate with a critical mass of individuals who could relate to their sociocultural backgrounds, the presence of educationally purposeful activities, and the establishment of enriching rituals. In addressing the problem of Black male student athletes' academic underachievement at institutions of higher education, it is imperative to investigate how the organizational cultures at these institutions facilitate and/or inhibit their college experiences. Hence, the findings from the current study provide insight into various ways institutions of higher education can create campus cultures that enhance Black male student athletes' overall experiences in college.

Building on the current study, future research should consider examining the organizational cultures at different institutional types (e.g., HBCUs and PWIs, private and public, limited-resource and FBS) and across classifications and associations (e.g., NCAA Division I, II, III, NAIA, JUCO, etc.) to identify which environments foster positive outcomes for student athletes. Along the same lines, Future studies should investigate the impact of organizational cultures on the student athletes with different demographic backgrounds (e.g.,

race, ethnicity, gender, sport, etc.) and contrast their experiences. In addition, future studies should include the perspectives of different individuals affiliated with an institution including the chancellor/president, administrators, faculty, athletic department staff, coaches, and academic support staff to gain a multi-level analysis of the organizational culture at different institutions.

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Notes

1. A directional institutional pseudonym was assigned to the institution to preserve anonymity.
2. Data for Black male football student athletes from the Division II HBU in the current study was collected and aggregated from the NCAA Division II ASR Database (NCAA, 2013) and compared with the data for Black male football and men's basketball student athletes from Division II institutions (NCAA, 2012b) for the same corresponding reporting years.
3. A pseudonym was assigned to the institution's nickname to preserve anonymity.
4. In an effort to persevere institutional anonymity, a different name and pseudonym were used to describe the campus organization.
5. A pseudonym was used to preserve the anonymity of the institution referenced.