

TIME TO TALK ABOUT SPORTS: CREATING A SPACE FOR SPORT WITHIN

#LIFTINGANDSHIFTINGHBCUS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Since their inception, HBCUs have made notable contributions across national and international domains. Their athletic spaces, much like the connected educational institution, have also impacted multiple areas of sport, culture, and society.

Understanding this point, coupled with the positioning that sport and higher education serve as social institutions, I argue that HBCU sporting spaces should be understood as such. To achieve this, I conducted three studies – two being theoretical and the final being an empirical study. Article 1 is a critical reconceptualization of HBCU sporting spaces through a Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) framework. The result of this study shifted discourse and aided in repositioning HBCUs within the broader college sport landscape. The application of this theoretical perspective or lens resulted in key arguments that guided the development of Articles 2 and 3. Article 2 explored the argument that the social stratification and institutional distancing of HBCUs from HPWI programs is a result of the college sport landscape operating as a racialized organization. Implementing a Theory of Racialized Organizations lens, Article 2 explored the role of race and racialization within college sport media, economics, governance, and social discourse – resulting in the marginalization of HBCU athletic spaces. Building upon the argument that HBCU sporting spaces create liberatory experiences for community members, Article 3 consisted of a Critical Discourse Analysis of tweets about the HBCU sporting experience through a Black Liberatory Fantasy framework. This framework resulted in five (5) emergent themes that speak to the unique contributions of the HBCU sporting space from athletic, academic, professional, and social perspectives. The

cumulative findings result in shifting from anti-deficit narratives towards critical and liberatory framing. Aligning with this shift in perspective, the empirical findings amplify the role of sport at HBCUs in creating positive and enriching experiences. Broadly, each study extends the understanding of sport as a social institution, along with the role of society on the framing and operation of these spaces. Practically, implications of these studies impact media, governance, and resource allocation by highlighting culturally-responsive and equitable practices. Detailed theoretical and practical implications are explained further within each study.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my HBCU family. Following in the footsteps of those before us, I use this dissertation and the remainder of my career to create positive change within my field, my institution, and the broader scope of society. Reflecting the mission of my HBCU, Winston-Salem State University, this dissertation is a shining example of my departure to continue serving to the best of my abilities.

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Contributors

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NOMENCLATURE

BlackCrit	Black Critical Theory
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSL	College Sport Landscape
HBCU	Historically Black College(s) and University/Universities
HPWI	Historically Predominantly White Institution(s)

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INTRODUCTION

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are integral components within the United States higher education landscape. HBCUs have contributed to economic, social, political, and cultural developments – both nationally and internationally (Albritton, 2012; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Williams et al., 2019). Although the contributions of HBCUs are noteworthy, HBCUs and their constituents have experienced longstanding marginalization and exclusion across academic, economic, social, professional, and spatial contexts (Dancy et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019). From academic and economic perspectives, HBCUs are subjected to state and federal funding structures that limit the economic strength and development of these institutions (Boland & Gasman, 2014). Due to limits in funding, the growth and development of HBCU academic programs have been stunted in comparison to their Historically Predominantly White Institution (HPWI) peers (Boland & Gasman, 2014; Sav, 1997). The lack of funding and subsequent development of academic programs contribute to challenges with maintaining accreditation, which results in a negative trickle-down effect that limits the hiring and retention of qualified faculty/staff, the closure of academic units, and negative social perceptions of institutional success (Crawford, 2017). The culminating effect of these structural challenges results in a negative shift towards understanding and communication of HBCUs by framing them as inferior as opposed to systemically stifled.

As noted, a result of this long-standing marginalization of HBCUs is the widespread devaluation of these institutions through language and discourse – leading to

an overt deficit orientation towards HBCUs (Williams et al, 2019). Williams and colleagues note that although empirical findings illuminate the positive contributions of HBCUs, much of the social and mainstream discourse is grounded within a deficit perspective. This deficit perspective is manifested across multiple areas within the higher education landscape. HBCUs are primarily presented within the media during periods of discord and disarray – effectively creating an association between HBCUs and institutional ineffectiveness (Nocera, 2016; Williams et. al, 2019). As a response to the deficit perspectives surrounding HBCUs, in conjunction with further advancing HBCUs, a collection of scholars and practitioners established the social media movement - #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs.

1.1. Overview of #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs

When exploring the use of #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs on social media, this hashtag has grown into a scholar-practitioner movement that reflects the titular message – lifting and shifting the perception and placement of HBCUs. While there has not been a traditional exploration into the hashtag, Njoku (2019) signals the expansive application of this hashtag – through research, practice, dialogue, and community involvement. When reviewing the use of the hashtag on social media, many contributors used the hashtag to highlight moments of institutional development, illuminating narratives, and celebrating noteworthy accomplishments of the HBCU community. Going further, the hashtag is also used in moments of resistance and diversion from mainstream negative discourse surrounding HBCUs, e.g. outranking HPWIs, receiving awards, student accomplishments, etc. Although the hashtag, and subsequent discourse, has been used

with sport – the coverage has been minimal. Due to the minimal application within the sporting context, the HBCU sporting space is excluded from the larger mission of the movement.

1.1.1. The Inclusion of Sport in #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs

While #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs has made notable strides in illuminating and contributing to the growth of HBCUs, there has been minimal inclusion of sport in the discourse. Undoubtedly, the athletic space at HBCUs is integral to the legacies and current culture of these institutions. White (2019) explains the role of HBCU athletic spaces of being sites for community uplift, engagement, and resistance to the prevalent and persistent acts of racism against these community members. Going further, White (2019) presents the *Black Sporting Congregation* – a collection of athletes, fans, sport leadership, and community members as the driving force in blending culture, society, and sport. In doing so, this sporting congregation set the foundation for the HBCU athletic space to hold unique and significant meaning.

While the field of sport management has made contributions to the overarching scope of HBCU sport literature (Armstrong, 2002a; Armstrong, 2002b; Cooper, Caviil, & Cheeks, 2016; Jones & Bell, 2016; McGreggor, 2020) , there is still much to be considered. In this contemporary era of sport being further explored and understood as a social institution, scholars should continue to explore how society impacts HBCU athletic spaces in addition to exploring the impact of HBCU athletic spaces on society. Furthermore, as more nuanced and critical theoretical frameworks are developed, it is imperative that sport scholars inject these frameworks into existing areas of sport –

effectively working to establish sport as valuable and responsible social institutions (Gammelsæter, 2021; Zeigler, 2007). Focusing on HBCU sporting spaces, further theoretical development highlights the intersecting roles of sport, race, culture, and history on placement and operation of this sporting space.

1.2. Purpose of Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to address broad gaps in the theoretical and empirical understanding of the HBCU sporting space. The overarching research question for this manuscript is: how does the institutional context of HBCU athletic spaces impact their positioning within the college sport landscape? This broad question takes on the stance that HBCU sporting spaces are foundationally unique, which also calls for the study, communication, and operation of these spaces to reflect their historic and contemporary uniqueness. Each article answers a specific research question to build upon the overarching research question. Below are the research questions for articles 1, 2, and 3 – respectively.

- How does the theorization of race, through Black Critical (BlackCrit) theory, reshape the understanding of HBCU sporting spaces?
- How has the college sport landscape (CSL) operated as a racialized organization to the detriment of HBCU sporting spaces?
- How is the Black Liberatory Fantasy manifested in the HBCU sporting experience?

Article 1 serves as the catalyst for the remaining studies by presenting a novel, and needed, theoretical framework to reconceptualize HBCU sporting spaces. As a result, I

use a reconceptualization point from Article 1 as the basis for Article 2- which argues that the status of HBCU athletic programs is due to longstanding racist and anti-Black practices - to review the operation of the college sport landscape (CSL) as a racialized organization. Article 3, an empirical study, explores how the Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF), a component of Black Critical Theory, is manifested in the HBCU sport experience – which reiterated the argument that HBCUs serve as a space for the BLF. In doing so, the articles create a foundation for more detailed explorations of the HBCU sporting space through theoretical and empirical approaches.

1.3. Positionality Statement

Milner (2007) notes the importance of researchers in understanding and interrogating the racial and cultural knowledge of themselves and the communities they engage with. Through exploring and understanding the roles of my personal and scholarly lenses, I can work to enhance awareness in how this study is designed, enacted, and communicated further. Beginning with personal lenses, my identity as a Black HBCU graduate is paramount in the motivation behind this dissertation, along with how I chose to collect and analyze the information. As a Black graduate of an HBCU, my racial identity is central to my motivation in attending and persisting at my HBCU. Going further, the longstanding anti-deficit framing of HBCUs drives my desire to create a scaffolded study that reframes and repositions HBCUs as bastions of culture, uplift, and athletic success. Understanding this point, I am aware of the protective nature and desire to uplift these institutions in the framing of my dissertation.

From a scholarly perspective, I operate from a critical constructivist lens. This lens, which bridges the critical and constructivist frameworks, highlights the connection between social structures and information creation. Through this lens, I operate under the assertion that knowledge is created and maintained through varying social structures and degrees of power (Kincheloe, 2005). As a result, it is integral to understand how pieces of information are connected, communicated, and validated within society – resulting in transforming data from isolated findings into an interconnected network of information. This epistemological stance is reflected in the intentionality of creating a scaffolded approach towards the dissertation. This scaffolded approach creates a robust understanding of HBCU sports, while also highlighting the connection between multiple perspectives – primarily race, culture, sport, and education.

1.4. Article 1 Overview

In Article 1, I develop a reconceptualization of HBCU athletic spaces through a Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) framework. Through utilizing Pinar's (1978) reconceptualization framework in conjunction with BlackCrit, I explain the current conception of intercollegiate sport and the residual effects on HBCU athletic spaces. The central argument guiding Article 1 is that as the social understanding of sport continues to grow and develop, scholarship and practice should be grounded in more socially and culturally representative approaches (Birrell, 1989; Frisby, 2005; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Hoerber & Shaw, 2017; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Morgan, 1983; Singer, 2005a; Skinner & Edwards, 2005). In doing so, HBCU athletic spaces are explored, communicated, and

understood through the appropriate theoretical lens – which highlights social, cultural, political, and economic nuances of sport and identity.

Using Dumas and Ross (2016) as the central BlackCrit framework, the key components of BlackCrit within the study are: anti-Blackness is endemic, Blackness exists in tension with neoliberal multiculturalism, the rejection and resistance of revisionist accounts of White violence, and the creation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF). To reconceptualize HBCU athletics through the framework, Article 1 uses BlackCrit to explain the current conception of the College Sport Landscape (CSL) and HBCUs within this landscape. The overarching themes within the current conception of college sports are the endemic nature of anti-Blackness within sport fandom, media, and structural placements of Black athletes (Dancy et al, 2018; Love & Hughey, 2015; McDonald, 2010; Oshiro et al, 2020); the persistent tension towards elements of Blackness via team-only ideologies, scholarship positioning big-time HPWIs as the default, the erasure of Black athlete experiences/voices (Bimper, 2014; Harper, 2009; McCormick & McCormick, 2009; Leonard, 2004); the prevalence of revisionist accounts of White violence through silencing Black athletes, the reduction of athlete exploitation to a myth, and overt racism within components of the sporting space (Agyemang et al, 2010; Leonard & King, 2009; Oshiro et al, 2020). Highlighting these components are necessary to understand how the HBCU athletics provide different and culturally significant experiences for those within the space.

Upon understanding the current conception of the college sport landscape, the reconceptualization of HBCU athletics introduced five (5) key components of

differentiation. The first is that the foundation of HBCUs and their adjoining athletic spaces directly counter the hegemonic and racist foundation of American higher education (Williams et al., 2021). Secondly, through mirroring the foundation of HBCUs, Blackness is central in all elements of the HBCU sporting experience – as seen in the music, food, traditions, and social norms (McGreggor, 2020; Meriwether, 2020). Going further, the third differentiation highlights the centrality and importance of Blackness throughout the HBCU sporting space – which calls for epistemological considerations within HBCU athletics research (Singer, 2005b). Given the prevalence of exclusionary and anti-Black policy within higher education, sport, media, and other components of the CSL – the fourth differentiation point works to shift the narrative that the placement of HBCUs within the landscape is self-inflicted. Finally, with HBCUs existing as special mission institutions, the voices and experiences of their athletes are further amplified and understood – as seen in the works of Cooper and Hawkins (2014), along with Agyemang and colleagues (2020). Each of these components are integral in shaping the understanding and communication of HBCU athletic spaces in scholarly and practical settings.

Echoing the central goal of the study, this reconceptualization of HBCU athletic spaces brings forth two contributions to the study and practice of sport management. The first, and central contribution of the study, is a reconceptualization of HBCU athletic spaces – which offers cultural, social, and practical implications towards the field. In doing so, there is a theoretically enriching study and communication of HBCU athletic spaces with the intended practical outcomes of creating more culturally and socially-

reflective practices within athlete services, media, and sport governance. The second is broadening and critically reviewing the history, operation, and study of intercollegiate athletics, which creates opportunities for scholars to extend beyond HBCU athletic spaces to engage in similar critical theoretical reconceptualizations of sport spaces aligned with historically excluded and marginalized communities, i.e. women in sport, sport within Indigenous communities, adaptive sport, and others. In doing so, both scholarship and practice reflect the ever-present and expanding social role of sport.

1.5. Article II Overview

Building upon the BlackCrit reconceptualization of HBCU athletic spaces, Article II is positioned to expand upon the fourth differentiation point of HBCUs being on the fringes, and some cases the outside, of the college sport landscape (CSL) through Ray's (2019) *Theory of Racialized Organizations* framework. This framework, which operates through the Perrowian perspective of organizational studies (Perrow, 1986), posits that organizations share a two-way relationship with society where both contribute to the norms of operations of each other. Understanding this point, Ray's (2019) theoretical framework argues that the effects of race and racialization within society and present within the operation of organizations – often to the detriment of racialized communities. Because of this presence, it is imperative that organizations are critically assessed and interrogated to understand and dismantle these processes. Ray presents the following four components of a theory of racialized organizations: the enhancing/diminishing of racialized groups, the legitimization of unequal resource

distribution, Whiteness serving as a credential, and the decoupling of rules from practice being racialized.

When operationalized through a college sport context, this study explores how elements of the college sport landscape (CSL) operate to the detriment of HBCU athletic spaces due to the long-standing racialization of HBCUs. The following components are used within this study to conceptualize the CSL: institutional resources, college sport policy and governance, college sport media and communications, and social perception/discourse. Although not exhaustive, this presentation of the CSL provides a comprehensive overview of the primary components of the intercollegiate athletics space. The inclusion of these components highlights the intersecting processes of each component of the CSL.

Each component of the CSL highlights long standing social and organizational processes that have left HBCUs on the fringes and outside of the realm of college sport. Although recent developments within college sport have led to some changes within the landscape (see former professional athletes coaching HBCU programs and highly touted prospects considering/committing to HBCUs), there are noteworthy and deep-rooted challenges that scholarship and practice must work together to address. To note, the severe underrepresentation of HBCUs within the CSL presents notable challenges in creating policies and procedures that reflect the purpose and culture of these institutions (Cheeks, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Roberts, 2020) – resulting in limited agency. Going further, due to the pillaging of athletic talent, systemic marginalization through interest convergence-fueled integration depleted the athletic resources of

HBCUs (Cooper et al., 2014). By exploring how race and racialization are manifested within the operation of sport organizations and sectors, scholar-practitioners can work to develop anti-racist policies within sport governance sectors. With an emphasis on HBCU sporting spaces, sport media practitioners can contribute towards dismantling and shifting anti-HBCU narratives that have subsequent effects on athlete recruitment, retention, and assessment. Finally, the acknowledgement of the CSL operating as a racialized organization provides ample opportunities for HBCUs and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to be reflected in the personnel, policy, and practices of college sport administration from conference and NCAA levels.

1.6. Article III Overview

Article III, a qualitative study, explores the manifestation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF) within the HBCU sporting experience. Following the collective deliberation approach of BlackCrit, the BLF is operationalized as a combination of chaos, dissonance, and resistance from Black experiences and imagination (Coles, 2020; Gilmore, 2021); reveling in Blackness contrasting with the multicultural imagination (Adams, 1996; Dumas & ross, 2016); and the refusal to follow the mainstream desire to participate in non-Black spaces (Bryan, 2021; Martin et al., 2019; Vakil & Ayers, 2019). Although these elements are not exhaustive, each component aligns with HBCUs and their sporting spaces being unique, pro-Black, and grounded in a culture of resistance (Cavil et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2019). Additionally, these overarching broad themes give room to uncover HBCU sport specific themes. In doing so, the concept of the BLF

extends from an abstract concept to being an empirically and theoretically grounded phenomenon.

This study consists of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of tweets from HBCU students, alumni, and media members from 2013 to 2020. The purpose of using Twitter as the data source is the presence of Twitter as a counterspace for members (Florini, 2016). Focusing on the Black community, the development of the Black Twitter community has led to the creation of spaces for cultural expression, contemporary discourse, and uplift (Florini, 2014; Graham & Smith, 2016; Hill, 2018). The selected timeline correlates with the start of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the athlete empowerment era, and current social activism via sport (Evans et al., 2020; Langford & Speight, 2015). By conducting a CDA of the tweets, themes and messages are aligned with the BLF. In addition to correlating tweets with aforementioned themes, emergent themes are developed through the CDA approach. The combination of established and emergent themes within the collection of tweets provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the HBCU sporting experience through the fan, participant, and practitioner perspectives.

Through the exploration of HBCU sporting narratives through social media, this study illuminates the uniqueness of this sporting space. Along with exploring and understanding the uniqueness of HBCU sporting spaces, this study explains the connection between HBCUs, sport, and the Black Liberatory Fantasy. In doing so, the findings amplify the relationship between higher education institutions, sport, and the broader community desires for liberation. When applying to the field of sport

management scholarship and practice, the exploration of HBCU sport narratives bring attention to fan experiences, framing by media members, and the impact on overall athlete experiences. Marketing and fan engagement professionals can use the findings to create tailored and culturally-focused campaigns, while athlete services professionals can leverage the HBCU sport experience in creating more holistic approaches to athlete development and experience.

1.7. Expected Outcomes

The broad outcomes of the study seek to expand the understanding, assessment, and communication of athletics at HBCUs. Through the initial reconceptualization through the BlackCrit framework, HBCU athletic spaces are presented through an appropriate and culturally-grounded theoretical lens. Building upon the points developed within Article 1, both Articles 2 and 3 expand upon the points of HBCU differentiation. Through reframing HBCUs, in conjunction with reframing the positioning of HBCUs in comparison to their HPWI counterparts, scholarship and practice can operate through anti-deficit and socially just lenses. To note, the reconceptualization of Article 1 holds considerable potential in reshaping how HBCU athletic spaces are understood and communicated through scholarship and practice. Building upon the centering of HBCU athletic spaces, understanding the context of college sport in relation to the historic and contemporary of organizational racialization further highlights the current college sport landscape – resulting in a call for more equitable practices within media, governance, and assessment. The final component is uncovering the differentiation of HBCUs athletic spaces – with particular attention to these spaces serving as locations for uplift

and liberation. The culmination of these outcomes center and celebrate the uniqueness of HBCUs. In addition to explaining what makes these institutions significant, exploring components that led to a differing positioning of these institutions further illuminate the intrinsic traits of the college sport environment.

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2. A DIFFERENT WORLD: A BLACKCRIT RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF HBCU ATHLETICS

2.1. Introduction

Sport is a social institution and should be understood and assessed as such. Frey and Eitzen (1991) argued that sport holds a societal role that creates and maintains social interaction patterns and complex value systems that impact the operation of society. Going further, their argument explains that sport not only replicates elements of other social institutions (e.g., law, politics, and economics), but also creates nuanced conceptions of social relationships and realities – this can be seen in sport being used a socialization tool, addressing broader societal issues (racism, sexism, etc.), and creating connections between international communities. Focusing on the realm of intercollegiate sport, researchers have investigated how this space serves as a site that replicates broader social inequalities particularly as it relates to racism and classism (Albritton, 2012; Redd, 1988; Singer, 2019). Although college sport grounded and operationalized through an Historically White Institution (HWI) context, Historically Black College and University athletic spaces are also social institutions that require further investigation in their own right. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have consistently provided safe and equitable collegial spaces for Black students since their inception (Williams & Palmer, 2019). Along with creating educational spaces centered on the African Diaspora and health of Black racial identities, HBCUs also foster athletic spaces that uplift and champion the Black community in a similar fashion (Cavil et al., 2017). While this perspective regarding HBCU athletics can be framed as common knowledge,

the broader conception of HBCU athletics within sport studies scholarship is still grounded in a view that deems HWIs as superior institutions and athletic programs.

To diverge from this perspective and approach, the purpose of this study is to present HBCU athletics spaces through a conceptual framework grounded within the Black identity, perspective, and experience via Black Critical Theory. To achieve this reconceptualization, Black Critical Theory is used to explain the current conception of college sport and HBCU sporting spaces. Implementing Pinar's (1974) framework for reconceptualization in conjunction with BlackCrit, the purpose of this study is twofold. The primary purpose of this article is to challenge the current conception of HBCU athletics as inferior programs through presenting a reconceptualization that centers Black identity, the multiplicity of Blackness, and Black experiences and foundationally reframes HBCU athletics. This reconceptualization is necessary current conception of the HBCU athletic space is largely impacted by the athletic and social dominance of big-time college athletics. In particular, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2016) highlight the 'haves versus have-nots' dynamic between big-time athletic programs and HBCU athletic programs. Going further, scholars have noted the economic, social, and spatial differences between HBCU and HWPI athletic spaces (Cooper et. al, 2014; Gill & Hart, 2015; Johnson, 2013; Lillig, 2009; O'Neill, 2008). These differences highlight the long-standing exclusion and marginalization imposed upon HBCU athletic spaces, as well as signaling to the big-time and HWI-orientation of college sport discourse and understanding. The secondary, and broadly intended, purpose of this manuscript calls for additional critical reconceptualizations of sporting spaces that have been used as sites of

resistance and uplift of historically underrepresented communities. In doing so, historically excluded and forcefully underrepresented voices and experiences are illuminated and centered in the study, understanding, and communication of these sporting spaces.

To justify this endeavor, Vadeboncoeur, Bopp, and Singer (2021) and Singer (2005a) note the prevalence of Whiteness within sport management scholarship. Singer (2005a) challenged scholars to not “devalue, omit, or misinterpret and misrepresent the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of people of color in sport when studying the impact that the cultures and structures of sport organizations have on their experiences” (p. 475). This call directly addresses the overwhelming White and non-HBCU orientation of college sport in social contexts and college sport research more specifically. Coupled with Vadeboncoeur and colleagues’ (2021) exploration into reflexivity and Whiteness, scholar-practitioners can be subject to inherent biases that privilege socially dominant groups (i.e. White communities and HWIs). A key contributor to this cognitive orientation is the prevalence of ethnocentric monoculturalism within the US sporting space. Ethnocentric monoculturalism, as defined by Taylor (2006), uses social power, dominance, and prevalence to establish social norms in both action and thought. Given the longstanding prevalence of racism and racialization within the United States, notably education and sports (see Singer, 2019), the nexus of both areas leads to an overwhelmingly White orientation to sport discourse and scholarship (King, 2005; McDonald, 2005). McDonald (2005) highlights how research that decenters Whiteness is an epistemological form of resistance against

White supremacy and its embeddedness in the academy. In short, longstanding social structures have allowed HWIs and their athletic spaces to be understood and conceptualized as the default for intercollegiate athletics. For example, it should be noted that modern day economic gains and championship success among HWI athletic programs is primarily due to the talent extraction from HBCU athletic programs that occurred during the post-1960s when exploitation was disguised in the form of interest convergence (Cooper, Cavil, & Cheeks, 2014; Lillig, 2009). Through a critical reconceptualization via BlackCrit, HBCUs are illuminated and further positioned away from the mainstream and scholarly conception of college sport. In doing so, HBCU-centric narratives and contributions are brought to the forefront while also challenging dominant narratives surrounding college sport.

2.2. Literature Review

There have been notable contributions that have employed critical approaches towards the examination of college sport and HBCU athletics more specifically. Sammons (1994) posited that the Black narrative and experience can offer critical reconceptualizations of sporting spaces by challenging and rewriting commonly held understandings of sport. By challenging the mainstream notion of sport and sport history, a more complete and socially-grounded understanding can be communicated to the masses. Building upon Sammons' (1994) sentiments, scholars have made the connection between HBCU athletics and critical theory and extended the understanding of HBCU sport history (Cavil, 2015; Collins & Norris, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2015), organization and structure (Cooper et al., 2014), dynamics between HBCUs and HWIs

(Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Elliot & Kellison, 2019; McGregor, 2020; Steinfeldt et al, 2010), and HBCU athlete experience and development (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2015; Cooper & Hawkins, 2014, 2016).

The critical exploration and explanation of HBCU sporting spaces is a scholarly tradition that has been embraced by multiple scholars. In particular, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) provided an in-depth explanation of the college sport landscape and illuminated the divide between social placement and resources between HWIs and HBCU athletic programs. Using institutional distancing as a guide, their work highlights how HWIs have been able to maximize on the social devaluation of HBCUs by garnering a larger proportion of resources. In doing so, HBCUs are subjected to smaller media contracts, marginal sponsorship opportunities, and media misrepresentation. Going further, the institutional distancing between HWIs and HBCU athletic programs (and subsequent resources needed for success) create a constant battle between the 'haves' and 'have-nots.'

Building upon the role of institutional distancing between HBCUs and HWIs, Cooper and colleagues (2014) used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytic tool to explain the historic and current status of HBCU sporting spaces. Using each component of CRT, Cooper and colleagues explain the role of each in shaping the placement of HBCUs within the college sport landscape. For example, the *permanence of racism* and *Whiteness as property norm* expose the role of racism in creation of higher education policy, funding allocations, and representation (313-314). Similar sentiments regarding the structural challenges faced by HBCUs are further found by Cheeks (2016). This

study amplified the narratives of HBCU athletic directors and brought attention to the lack of resources and support from governing bodies and negative social perception attached to their athletic programs.

In addition to exploring the challenges faced by HBCUs, scholarship has also highlighted the positive elements and contributions of HBCU sporting spaces on their athlete and fan communities. At their core, White (2019) explains that the HBCU sporting space as a sporting congregation. This congregation is the culmination of athletes, leadership, fans, coaches, and media coming together and creating a unifying space during a time where HWI athletic programs (and adjoining universities) were racially segregated and hostile. Although the development of these congregations is connected to the pre-integration college sport landscape, this congregation continues to be replicated in the current HBCU sporting space. To support, Cooper and Dougherty (2015) found that the HBCU space fostered positive academic and social experiences for athletes, often resulting in higher rates of satisfaction and goal-setting. Additionally, the positive culture of HBCUs diminished the negative experiences of racism that Black athletes faced at their former HWIs (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014).

2.3. Conceptual Framework

Broadly, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been the primary theoretical framework applied to highlight more critical approaches to HBCUs. While CRT provides notable contributions in furthering the understanding and discourse of HBCU athletics, there are limitations of CRT in relation to BlackCrit. As presented by Dumas and ross (2016), while the conception of CRT has historic connections to the Black community (see bell,

1987; 1992), BlackCrit specifically highlights elements of Blackness that better serve the needs of this study. Being that Blackness is central to HBCUs, including their sporting spaces, the inclusion of a BlackCrit-fueled reconceptualization provides a targeted approach that considers the social, cultural, and spatial elements.

BlackCrit is a member of the family of critical theories that emerged from CRT (e.g. LatCrit, AsianCrit, and TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005; Chang, 1993; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997). As explained by Dumas and ross (2016), BlackCrit considers and offers a theorization of the nuanced, in-depth, and historic conditions of racialized experiences under race-specific oppression via antiBlackness and antiBlack racism (p. 417).

Although used interchangeably colloquially, it is important to note the differences and applications of these frameworks throughout the text. Antiblackness, centered on Wilderson's (2010) presentation of the concept, reflects the dehumanization and further separation of Blackness in relation to whiteness and the broader scope of normalcy. AntiBlack racism – which builds upon the dehumanization of the Black community – is a systemic and violent collection of actions and policies that continue to amplify the dehumanization of the Black community (Sexton, 2010; Wun, 2016).

To organize, the following primary components of BlackCrit are implemented within the reconceptualization articulated in this article: a) antiBlackness is endemic to the creation and understanding of our social, cultural, political, and economic world (bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995); b) Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination (Dumas & ross, 2016); c) resisting revisionists histories that support White supremacy/dominance (Bell, 1987; Dumas & ross, 2016; Leonardo,

2004); and d) the creation of the Black liberatory fantasy (Bassey, 2007; Dumas & ross, 2016; Gates, 1987; Hunt, 2020).

2.3.1. AntiBlackness is Endemic

Like Bell's (1992, 1995) and Delgado's (1995) explanation of the endemic nature of racism within the US context, BlackCrit specifically highlights the role of antiBlackness within economic, political, social, and cultural elements of life. In particular, the intellectual concept of Afro-pessimism presents the idea that the Black identity is still connected to imagery of the Slave, often exhibited through the limited control of property, communication, and self (Gordon, Wolpe, 1998; Harris, 1993; Olaloku-Teriba, 2018; Sexton, 2008; Wilderson, 2010). Coles and Powell (2020) explained the endemic nature of antiBlackness contributed to organizational and structural unfairness – which should be understood and analyzed within the experiences of the Black community.

To further support the claims of Afro-pessimism in alignment with endemic antiBlackness, Patterson (2018) presented the idea of the 'social death' of Black people, which is a phenomenon where the civil Black life is unattainable due to the constantly shifting definition and cause for violence against the Black community in conjunction with shifting views for justification (see social commentary similarities between Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and Tamir Rice). Additional examples of the embedded nature of antiBlackness in the U.S. supra- and social structure include the overrepresentation of Black males in the prison industrial complex (Alexander, 2010), the persistent racial wealth gap between Blacks and Whites (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Shapiro, 2005), the

perpetual underemployment of Blacks (Slack, Thiede, & Jensen, 2020), and prevailing health disparities within Black communities (particularly lack of access to quality preventive and responsive healthcare resources; e.g., Gillespie-Bell, 2021).

2.3.2. Blackness in Tension with Multicultural Imagination

Following the close of World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. presented itself as an anti-racist nation (Melamed, 2011). This orientation was justified through the establishment of social and structural programs aimed at providing equal opportunity for all communities, which led to a collective shift in stepping away from directly addressing racism and inequality (Dumas & ross, 2016, see also, Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Kersten, 2000; Zaroni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). Through the neoliberal multicultural context, Sexton (2008) and Dumas (2016) highlighted the longstanding difficulties for the Black community to assimilate into the conception of the (white) nation in a “integrated” (or rather racially assimilated) context. Going further, Sexton (2008) noted the role of antiBlackness in the creation of linkages between the Black community and joblessness, low-socioeconomic status (SES), and disparities in educational attainment – resulting in widespread beliefs and attitudes that the Black community is inherently flawed and a barrier to multicultural progress (Cardinal & Denault, 2007; Kymlicka, 2015).

2.3.3. Resisting the Revisionist History

Leonardo (2004) explained the dangers of a revisionist history that absolves socially dominant groups from the dangerous and inflammatory actions they have committed. Bell (1987) specifically speaks to the role of socially dominant White

communities committing heinous crimes such as race-based fear mongering, lynching, slavery, and segregation. Through an antiBlack and neoliberal multicultural imagination, the revisionist history is encouraged and supported with the intention to absolve socially dominant Whites from creating a society built in their design (Dumas & ross, 2016). Going further, an ethnocentric monoculturalist history is often created through a revisionist approach that reduces the negative impacts of socially dominant groups, while simultaneously crediting the same group for societal progress (Taylor, 2006).

2.3.4. Creation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy

Often presented in conjunction with resisting a revisionist history, the creation of a Black Liberatory Fantasy is an integral component of BlackCrit. Serving as a response to antiBlackness and the tensions that arise because of Blackness, the liberatory fantasy serves as a celebration and catalyst for change (Dumas and ross, 2016). With linkages between the “necessary chaos” presented by Dumas and ross (2016), and the improvisational nature of jazz music, the Black Liberatory Fantasy does not fit a specific mold or formula (Gilmore, 2021). Specifically, Coles (2021) detailed how despite the societal disdain of Blackness, the liberatory fantasy remains in the minds of those confronting oppression through space, context, and experience. The excerpt, and namesake, for Coles’ (2021) exploration into the Black Liberatory Fantasy challenged the notion high intellect that is inherently connected to affluent and overtly White suburbs. Through positioning geniuses as members of the hood, educational endeavors and intellect are presented through a lens that aligns with a historically underserved community while also celebrating a culturally-grounded presentation of intellect.

2.4. (Re)Conceptualization

Using Pinar's (1974) presentation for reconceptualization requires adherence to four criteria: a) the reconceptualization is foundational to the examination of any topic; b) the reconceptualization must be grounded in critical theory; c) the reconceptualization must be transformative in nature; and d) the reconceptualization cannot treat critiqued elements as immovable or unchanging. Pinar's (1974) approach, although grounded in curriculum and education, provides the ideal structure for addressing longstanding elements of college sport, along with leveraging the idea that HBCU athletics should be understood and seen as a separate entity. Going further, given the explicit connection between intercollegiate sport and higher education, Pinar's (1974) reconceptualization illuminates the necessity to include the role of higher education institutions in understanding and making sense of the athletic space as an extension (rather than separation) of the educational ecosystem (Vanover & DeBowes, 2013).

2.5. Current Conception of College Sports

To achieve a proper reconceptualization of HBCU athletic spaces, contextualizing their space within the broader college sport landscape is necessary. The implementation of a BlackCrit lens to critically analyze the college sport landscape brings attention to the presence and persistence of Blackness, antiBlackness, and antiBlack racism that impacts the placement and development of HBCU athletic spaces. Going further, contextualizing the broader scope of college sport further amplifies the uniqueness of HBCU athletic spaces – resulting in shifting narratives, countering anti-

deficit perspectives, and providing much-needed context for future scholarly investigations.

2.5.1. AntiBlackness is Endemic

Within the broader scope of American higher education, race and racism are central to the creation and operation of this space (Harper, 2012). Building upon the roles of race and racism, antiBlack rhetoric and ideology are deeply entrenched within the culture and operation of these institutions (Dancy, Edwards, & Davis, 2018). Much like the broader HBCU higher education institution, the adjoining HBCU athletic departments and conferences are impacted by antiBlackness. Cooper, Cavil and Cheeks (2014) outlined the macro (i.e., unjust impoverishment), meso (i.e., peripheral political power and limited financial capital), and micro (i.e., high staff turnover) level challenges facing HBCU athletic programs and conferences due to systemic racism (or as described in this current text – antiBlackness). The ecological nature of antiBlackness underscores its deeply embedded nature and highlights why changing persistent inequalities remains an challenging task. Cooper (2019) explained how the racist ideological hegemony in the U.S. has a particularly distinct influence on and harm against Blacks in and through sporting spaces. Since the antiBlackness is understood as a taken-for-granted norm (and in many cases, as outlined by Afro-pessimists, treated as unchangeable), Black oppression is not only expected, but necessary for the functioning of the racist social order.

Furthermore, regarding HWIs, scholars have interrogated the plantation politics that Black athletes are subjected to at these institutions (Dancy et al, 2018; Hawkins,

2010; Leonard, 1986; Squire, Williams, & Tuitt, 2018; Van Rheenen, 2019). The antiBlack operation of campus plantation politics limits autonomy, emphasizes a colonial labor arrangement where positions of power are unwavering and often dominated by White men, and institutionalizes the suffering of Black bodies particularly among athletic departments in the two highest revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball (Dancy et. al, 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Singer, 2019). Hawkins (2010) used the internal colonization model to explain how Black athletes serve as oscillating migrant laborers who are colonized and Division I HWI athletic departments and the NCAA serve as a colonizers who extract resources from Black communities and HBCUs through the inducement, recruitment, and exploitation of the former. Within this analysis, Hawkins (2010) also explained how the plantation analogy is not limited to Division I football and men's basketball, but rather this context is a microcosm of the broader economic, political, and cultural domination of Black culture at the hands of White colonizers who have controlled the means of production in the U.S. since its founding.

Extending past the operation of the athletic department, antiBlackness is manifested through sport culture, tradition, and fandom. Oshiro, Weems, and Singer (2021) highlighted the use of institutionalized language in ostracizing Black athletes who do not fit the ideal representation of the institution. In addition to fan dialogue, antiBlack discourse in media further supports the entrenched nature of antiBlackness within college sport (Love & Hughey, 2015; McDonald, 2010). Sport scholars have also documented how Black athletes (and non-athlete Black students) are often labeled as

academically underprepared, at-risk, high risk, deviant, troublemakers, hypersexual/promiscuous, and affirmative action/quota beneficiaries (as opposed to merit-based beneficiaries) (Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010). Black athletes are also commonly referred to in dehumanizing terms such as being described as ‘projects’, ‘cases’, and ‘assets’, all of which reduce their existence to what they can produce for the HWIs and their White stakeholders. Overall, antiBlackness permeates the operation, structure, and experiences of mainstream intercollegiate athletics by privileging the norms and ideologies of socially-dominant Whites.

2.5.2. Tension with Blackness and the Neoliberal Multicultural Imagination

As a result of the increasing racial diversity in the U.S., higher education institutions have experienced changes within their campus communities (Chun & Feagin, 2020; Williams, 2013). Concomitantly, the neoliberal multicultural imagination also gained a foothold within this sector (Saunders, 2010; Shahjahan, 2014). The emphases on collective identity and assimilation into traditionally White spaces creates a culture that promotes acceptance and upward mobility through identity erasure (Saunders, 2010). Regarding intercollegiate athletics, Harper (2018) signaled the overwhelming disparities between the overrepresentation of Black students who are athletes and underrepresentation of Black students who are non-athletes across Power Five institutions. While the incremental developments of increasing diversity at higher education institutions are often celebrated within the neoliberal multicultural imagination of intercollegiate sports, the role in maintaining athletic superiority (read: high profit generating commercial entertainment and winning) must be addressed (Gasman, 2009;

Martin, 2010). As noted earlier, the poaching of Black athletic talent was a primary catalyst in many athletic programs choosing to integrate (Cooper et al., 2014; Lillig, 2009; Martin, 2010).

Although assimilation impacts the compositional or surface-level diversity of athletic programs, the collective identity and projected colorblind racism pervasive within cultures of higher education are also reflected within athletic spaces at these institutions. For example, Bimper (2014) described how the role of creating and maintaining a sport first/only identity among Black athletes negatively impacts positive racial identity development and contributes to cognitive cultural dissonance (see also, Brown et al., 2003). Although many Black athletes are ingratiated into campus through a team/sport-only approach, their experiences of racism and exclusion are not only prevalent, but largely ignored because the perception is that their “privileged” athletic status protects them from any form of racial mistreatment (Bimper, 2014). Although Black athletes and a compositionally diverse athletic department is celebrated, antiBlack racism runs rampant through the fabric of the institution via abstract liberal and colorblind racist policies and practices (e.g., academic clustering, initial eligibility standards, lack of culturally inclusive and responsive holistic supports) (Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Dancy et. al, 2018; Dancy & Edwards, 2020; Harper, 2009; McCormick & McCormick, 2009).

2.5.3. Embedded Revisionist History

To challenge and diminish the role of Blackness in the experiences of Black college athletes, institutional leaders often seek to (un)wittingly challenge and diminish

“Blackness” by silencing Black athletes who are too outspoken against the status quo (Gill, 2016; Loggins, 2018; . While silencing outspoken Black athletes, institutional members also laud those who remain neutral or aligned with the institution (Agyemang et. al, 2020; Leonard & King, 2009). Conformity and uncritical acceptance of the great sport ethic is deeply entrenched in modern day U.S. sport (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Coakley, 2015). Additionally, the plantation politics and antiBlack culture of college sport has been reduced by some social commentators to a myth – often undergirded by the significant financial and social ‘benefits’ of participating in intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Osborne, 2014). In direct response to the promotion of the multicultural university and athletic department, the historic and contemporary violence (often psychological and cultural and at times physical) committed against Black athletes within the intercollegiate athletics space must be acknowledged. The neglect (e.g., academic, psychological, emotional, physical, etc.) of Black athletes such as at the University of Georgia (i.e., Malcolm Mitchell) and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to the physical (including sexual) and psychological traumas experienced by Black athletes at Rutgers University and University of Michigan to the tragic death of Jordan McNair at the University of Maryland, the unjust and harsh treatment of Black athletes’ holistic well-being at HWIs has never been more paramount (Cooper, 2019).

Following the anti-racism erasure of the country post-Civil Rights era – also portrayed as the race-neutral development of the country - intercollegiate athletic programs began to integrate or what some refer to as racially assimilate (Cooper et al., 2014; Martin, 2010). Through this tumultuous process of increasing racial equity within

sports, critical scholars have exposed and highlighted the ulterior motivation for athletic prowess to support the institutions economic and prestige aims (Cooper et al, 2014; Donnor, 2005; Martin, 2010). More contemporary accounts of hegemonic Whiteness and antiBlack attitudes in college sports have been present in the responses of University of Texas donors and alumni to athletes protesting the playing of the Eyes of Texas song at football games (McGee, 2021), the Good/Bad Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University (TAMU) Aggie dichotomous mischaracterization of Black athlete alumni who participate in the National Football League (NFL) protests (Oshiro et. al, 2021), and the lived experiences of racism communicated by athletes via social media and other outlets (Beamon, 2014; Comeaux, 2010; Harper et. al, 2013; Rubin, 2016; Singer, 2005b). The culmination of these components outlines the problematic conception of HBCU athletic spaces. To reject this problematic conception, the following reconceptualization outlines how BlackCrit is manifested within the HBCU athletic space.

2.6. Reconceptualizing HBCU Athletics

Through contextualizing the college sport landscape and the impact of the landscape on the placement and experiences of those within HBCU athletic space, the following reconceptualization is best presented through the Black Liberatory Fantasy. This component of BlackCrit signals to the unique positing the embedded resistance found within this sporting space – drawing connections to Coles’ (2021) presentation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy. This resistance, as seen through the reconceptualization, highlights how HBCU athletic spaces have responded to their shifting context within

college sport, along with how the experiences within these spaces offer foundational differences than their HWI counterparts. Echoing the sentiments presented in Pinar's (1974) critical reconceptualization framework, the reconceptualization shows that the college sport landscape is not static – as seen in the shifted narrative and positioning of HBCUs.

2.6.1. The Black Liberatory Fantasy

While the conception of intercollegiate athletics holds strong roots in antiBlack racism and oppression, HBCU athletics have served as a site of *Black Liberatory Fantasy*. This notion of fantasy is centered on the ability to “eradicate a prison and begin a necessary chaos” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 431). This prison, for the purpose of this article, is the historic and contemporary concept of intercollegiate athletics – a sporting institution that has reveled in antiBlack racism and neoliberal politics for decades. The reconceptualization of HBCU athletics through the BlackCrit framework is the necessary chaos, largely stemming from the disruptive and transformative nature of reconceptualization-based scholarship. The Black Liberatory Fantasy centers and celebrates Blackness, amplifies and basks in the tensions against neoliberalism, and actively rejects the revisionists' presentations of the broader intercollegiate athletics narrative.

In direct response to the *endemic nature of antiBlackness*, HBCU athletics is immersed within Blackness and the African Diaspora – historically and contemporarily. Harris (2012) positioned HBCUs as bastions of Black culture and tradition undergirded by the desire to support students. Stemming from their genesis as educational spaces

designed to educate the Black community, Blackness being centered is integral in the operation and conceptualization of HBCUs (Williams et. al, 2021). As Williams and colleagues (2019) explained, the mainstream conception of higher education has led to widespread deficit-based perspectives of HBCUs. Although their position focuses on the scope of HBCUs within the U.S. higher education system more broadly, similar sentiments apply to the intercollegiate athletics space. For example, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2017) documented the consistent devaluation of HBCU athletics across organizational and social levels (i.e., exclusion from lucrative Power 5 conferences and limited access to participation in the multi-billion dollar generating March Madness postseason basketball tournament).

Although there is a widespread devaluation of HBCUs within the intercollegiate athletics space, the Black athlete is met with a pro-Black culture – both organizationally and socially at HBCUs (Cooper & Hawkins, 2015, 2016; Harris, 2012; Williams et. al, 2019; Williams et. al, 2021). To support, Cooper and Hawkins (2016) highlighted the roles of support, encouragement, and a familial culture within the HBCU sporting space. In addition, the reaffirming cultural artifacts at these institutions reflect the value placed on Black history, existence, and excellence (Cooper & Hawkins, 2016). This culture is often in sharp contrast to the experiences of Black athletes within sporting spaces at HWIs (Beamon, 2014; Oshiro et al, 2020 Singer, 2019). HBCU athletic programs, much like their adjoining higher education institutions, centers and operates through a pro-Black orientation. This operation through Blackness is key in conceptualizing HBCUs as unique institutions that require specialized analysis and commentary.

Building upon the response to the endemic nature of antiBlackness, the inherent Blackness of HBCU athletics *exists (and thrives) in tension with the multicultural neoliberal imagination*. To start, Cabrera (2018) exposed the disdain held for HBCUs and their collective purpose. Within their exploration, the authors surmised that HBCUs were viewed as reverse racist institutions, which ignores and further diminishes the purpose of these institutions. This fallacious assertion ignores the reality of antiBlack racism and intentional isolation from the resource allocations and perceived legitimacy that is afforded to HWIs. Acknowledging the role of ‘race neutrality’ within the current neoliberal conception of college sport, the inherent Blackness of HBCU athletic spaces holds a stark contrast to mainstream college sports. For example, the establishment of HBCU football classics, homecoming events, and postseason competitions among peer institutions with similar educational and sociocultural foundations exemplify the uniqueness and power of collective resistance against antiBlack racism in society in general and within intercollegiate sport more specifically (Cooper et al., 2014). Moreover, Saunders (2010) emphasized the role of racial assimilation associated with the experiences of Black athletes in predominantly White athletic spaces. To contrast, athletes at HBCUs celebrate their ability to learn and develop a sense of self, while also having their individuality championed within their athletic and academic spaces (Bailey, 2017; Cooper & Hawkins, 2015, 2016; Martin, 2009). Perhaps more inflammatory than the collective identity orientation of HWI athletics is the sport first/only expectation placed on athletes – primarily Black athletes (Bimper, 2014). This approach reduces and

silences the experiences of Black athletes, while also forcefully integrating them into a campus and athletic culture that has historically excluded this community.

HBCUs, however, continue to expand the role of the HBCU athlete to include global citizenship, community leadership, and healthy family life. This expansion, as explained by Hall (2018), shows the support for involvement and expansion beyond the traditional domains of the college athlete seen at HWIs. The case example of Alfy Hill—who was a five-star recruit who initially committed to play football for Nick Saban at the University of Alabama but eventually ended up at an HBCU (i.e., Winston Salem State University)—is a powerful illustration of how the culture and community of an HBCU contributed to this Black man’s holistic development and transformation in a way that an HWI perhaps could not have (see Oshiro, Weems, Foster, & Singer, 2020).

Contemporarily, there has been a shift in college sport culture where high profile athletes and coaches have made the transition to HBCUs and highlighted culture, tradition, and/or the desire to shift narratives surrounding HBCU athletics (see Deion Sanders and sons, Mikey Williams, Chris Paul, and others).

The juxtaposition between HBCU and HWI athletic spaces further highlight the tensions that exist and persist between these sporting institutions. Essentially, the tensions lie between the neoliberal and Eurocentric foundations and identity of HWIs in direct contrast with the communal and African Diasporic foundations and identity of HBCUs (Cavil et al., 2017). As the conception of a multicultural neoliberal imagination creates a racially neutral and collective identity that serves the interests of HWIs, HBCU athletics have continuously emphasized the multiplicity of Blackness as well as been

inclusive towards diverse populations including students of Asian, Latinx, Native American/Indigenous American, and European descent. These differences in culture and operation, along with subsequent differences in athlete experience and development outcomes, further amplifies the tensions that come from HBCUs centering Blackness (read: resistance against antiBlack racism at HWIs and in U.S. society) while the college sport landscape assumes a neoliberal and race neutral (default racial stratification) orientation. To explain further, from a fan experience perspective, HBCUs have skillfully incorporated music into the fanfare and tradition to emphasize the communal bonds seen within the Black community (McGreggor, 2020). Affectionately referred to as the ‘Fifth Quarter,’ the HBCU band counters the traditional corporal style of HWI bands, while also centering spiritual and secular elements of Black culture (Armstrong, 2002; Essoka, 2014).

With HBCU athletic spaces centering and celebrating Blackness, along with accepting the tensions between them and their HWI counterparts, the final component of the HBCU athletics reconceptualization is the *rejection of a revisionist history*. While the broader scope of this component seeks to reject visions of murder, lynching, and pillaging – the HBCU context seeks to acknowledge the actions that led to the visible divide between HWI and HBCU athletics. Foundationally, Rhoden (2006) argued that the role of sport in the U.S. is largely fueled by racialized power dynamics. Specifically, Rhoden (2006) noted the differences in the purposes of sport between groups – where White communities typically use sport as a means of domination and control, and Black communities often use sport as a means of community and relationship building. For a

more contemporary understanding of these dynamics, Rhoden (2006) also highlighted the dichotomous relationship between Black athletes serving as labor and entertainment to primarily White leadership and fans. This racialized dynamic, undoubtedly fueled by antiBlack sentiments, is embedded within college athletics both historically and in contemporary times since a cultural revolution in college sport has not yet been fully manifested. While the racist histories of athletics programs at HWIs have been glossed over by their respective institutions, scholars have continued to illuminate the transformation of antiBlack sentiments and violence within these spaces (Hextrum, 2019; Martin, 2010; Rhoden, 2006). And while the desegregation of college athletics is broadly described with positive narratives (i.e., the integration of HWIs and their athletic programs as being beneficial to Black athletes and the broader Black community), La Noue and Bennett (2014) countered these dominant narratives by discussing the adverse outcomes experienced by HBCU athletic programs in the post 1960s to the modern day early 21st century era.

In addition to the antiBlack and exclusionary foundations of HWI athletics, sport fandom and tradition are used as methods to perpetuate racism. Although presented as race neutral and enjoyed by all, HWI sport traditions still serve their initial purpose as artifacts of their origins. Yearwood (2018) explained that the racist foundations of college sport tradition stemmed from the overly racist origins of the institutions with chants, symbols, mottos, and traditions reflecting the overtly racist origins of the institution, i.e., University of Florida and the use of ‘Gator Bait’ and/or the University of Texas and the use of *The Eyes of Texas*. In contrast, Armstrong (2002) explained how

Black consumers of HBCU athletics seek a culturally affirming experience where their social identities and personal preferences are acknowledged and uplifted. At HBCU athletic events, songs such as the Negro National Anthem (Lift Every Voice and Sing composed by James Weldon Johnson), classic gospel, rhythm and blues (R&B), jazz, neo-soul, and hip-hop music, and programming centered on Black empowerment are commonplace (Armstrong, 2002; Cooper et al., 2014; Rhoden, 2006).

While contemporary interpretations of college sport may reflect the neoliberal multicultural orientation of higher education, roots of these traditions hold longstanding exclusionary and discriminatory views, policies, and practices towards Black communities. HBCU sporting tradition, however, represent the antithesis or counternarrative to the mainstream conception of college sport tradition. In comparison to their HWI counterparts that have aimed to transform their racist origins into more palatable traditions, HBCUs continued to build sporting traditions that are undergirded by self-expression, community, and the celebration of Blackness (Armstrong, 2002; Rodgers, 2015). The juxtaposition between HWI and HBCU athletics, both historic and contemporary, amplifies the rejection of a revisionist approach to college sport. While HBCU traditions were undoubtedly formed during periods of racial turmoil and overt oppression, the continuation of these traditions shows their rejection of the contemporary race neutral and oppressive conception of college athletics.

2.7. The HBCU Difference

Collectively, this BlackCrit reconceptualization stands on four pillars. These pillars highlight the key components of HBCUs, in alignment with BlackCrit, that shape

the understanding and assessment of HBCU athletics. Following the example set by Dumas and ross (2016), the current analysis positions HBCUs as unique educational, social, and political institutions deserving of their own merit despite facing intergenerational systemic racism. The first pillar reflects how HBCUs counteract the racist foundations of the U.S. higher education system and amplifies their culturally empowering mission through concerted structures, curriculum, policies, practices, and programming (Williams & Palmer, 2019). When conceptualizing HBCUs, accounting for the institutional idiosyncrasies is key to ensuring these institutions are not viewed as the same as their HWI counterparts given their contrasting foundations, funding sources, and intergenerational compositions.

The second pillar, the centrality of Blackness, calls for Blackness to be included across all levels of inquiry, assessment, and communication. Mobley (2018) posited that the complexities of Blackness need to be centered within methodologies to ensure the lived experiences of individuals are properly illuminated and accounted for. Although focused on lived experiences, the same consideration can be applied towards methodological approaches across all areas of HBCU research to ensure the foundation of Blackness is integrated into all facets of the sporting space. Cavil and colleagues (2017) proposed an HBCU Diasporic framework along with Ten Pillars for Active Engagement for Sport Leadership & Administration in Creating Athletic Organizational Success and Sustainability, which examines and optimizes the functioning of internal pillars (academic alignment, athletic compliance, corporate fundraising/capital campaigns, media solutions/event management, and alumni activation/community

engagement) and external pillars (critical evaluation/continuous improvement, strategic planning/tactical analysis, shared vision/shared governance, system thinking/operational practices, and personal mastery/team building) grounded in African Diasporic principles and pro-Blackness.

Pillar three, which rejects deficit-based language regarding HBCU athletics, highlights the role of systemic antiBlack policy and practice within U.S. higher education and intercollegiate athletics. Grounded in the converging interests of White athletic institutions, the racial integration of college sports led to a mass Black talent drain from HBCUs (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Cooper et al., 2014; Singer et. al, 2017). In addition to shifting tides in athletic talent, systemically antiBlack policies such as disproportionate land and financial resource allocations associated with The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 and current anti-HBCU legislation continue to place HBCUs at economic disadvantages (Albritton, 2012; Gasman, 2009). The manipulation of “equitable” funding allows states to offer lesser resources to HBCUs as opposed to leveling the playing field between them and their HWI counterparts (Albritton, 2012; Gasman & Bowman III, 2012; Jenkins, 1991; Redd, 1998). Going further, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) explained the structural differences between National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) divisions and subdivisions such as differences in scholarship limits, media coverage, and ability to obtain and maintain high-level resources (i.e., capital projects including state-of-the-art facilities). Acknowledging this pillar requires scholars and practitioners to include these structural elements in their analyses. Through adopting an anti-deficit framework, scholar-practitioners can actively

engage in addressing systemic and structural barriers that historically and contemporarily hindered HBCUs and their athletic spaces through shifting dialogue and perspective (Cooper & Hawkins, 2016; Williams et. al, 2019).

The final pillar, which centers on the ability of HBCUs to amplify the narratives of Black athletes, is the key element of the HBCU difference. Counter-stories at the individual and collective levels are essential to revealing the visceral impacts of antiBlack racism while also illuminating the immeasurable benefits of nurturing Blackness. While scholars have noted the difference in athlete experiences at HBCUs (Cooper & Dougherty, 2016; Cooper & Hawkins, 2015), these findings have not been connected to BlackCrit. With an explicit connection to the Black Liberatory Fantasy component of BlackCrit, amplifying and centering the Black voice and narrative flips the current conception of college sport *and* the HBCU athletic space. To note, the Black Liberatory Fantasy embodies a spirit of innovation and resistance to the majoritarian perspective (Dumas & ross, 2016). Through the creation of these liberatory spaces through centering narratives, deeper meaning and nuance is understood and amplified further within scholarship and practice. Through using BlackCrit as an additional theoretical foundation to explore HBCU athletic programs and athletes' narrative underscores the value added of this epistemological, ontological, and axiological intervention.

2.8. Concluding Call to Action

The use of BlackCrit within this reconceptualization of HBCU athletics provides an alternative understanding of a sporting space grounded in Blackness. As noted by

Mobley (2018), centering Blackness within methodological approaches aids in fully uncovering and illuminating the Black narrative and results in culturally-embedded findings. While applications of CRT (notably counter storytelling) have provided multiple advancements in the understanding, assessment, and communication of HBCU athletics - the purpose of BlackCrit is the centering of Blackness and the Black experience, which further enrich our collective understandings of the rich legacy of this diverse racial group. Aligning with the primary purpose of this article, the BlackCrit lens calls for notable shifts in perspective and dialogue, which presents notable implications regarding practical and scholarly discourse surrounding HBCU athletic spaces. In doing so, the researchers call for scholar-practitioners to consider the pillars in their approaches towards research and practice within HBCU athletic spaces.

The inclusion of the first pillar signals for scholars to consider the role of an antiracist approach in the foundation of HBCUs – which provides much-needed context on the organizational culture, social norms, and experiences of those within the HBCU athletic space. In alignment with the first pillar, the emphasis on Blackness within the second pillar further amplifies future research through the inclusion of Blackness and subsequent considerations through researcher positionality and reflexivity. The exploration into the relationship between Blackness from organizational and interpersonal perspectives further explains differences in the HBCU context, as opposed to HWI contexts. The third and fourth pillars focus on shifting from deficit-based language and athlete narrative amplification, respectively. The power of language is vital towards shaping broader perception and understanding of spaces, which places a social

responsibility on scholars-practitioners to accurately and communicate messages about spaces – with particular attention to spaces that have been structurally placed on the margins of their fields. In addition to shifting language, amplifying athlete narratives is vital when explaining the positioning and impact of HBCU sporting spaces. Being that this sporting context is still creating a space within the broader realm of college sport scholarship, understanding the intricacies of the athlete experience is paramount.

Following the secondary purpose of this manuscript, the researchers suggest for scholar-practitioners to provide expansive critical reconceptualizations of sporting spaces created in alignment with historically excluded communities. For example, LatCrit and TribalCrit hold explicit connections to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Native American Tribal Colleges/Universities (NATCUs), respectively. Additionally, these frameworks can also be applied to sporting spaces held within the broader community (i.e., community and recreational sport). Going further, Black Feminist Thought (see Collins, 1990) can be used to further explore and understand athletic programs and experiences at women’s colleges and universities as well as within youth, interscholastic, club, semi-professional, and professional sport leagues. Finally, as adaptive sport increases in prominence, the inclusion of Crip Theory or Critical Disability Theory (see Bone, 2017; McRuer, 2007) could further illuminate the purpose and impact of these sporting spaces. With sport growing as a social institution, it is imperative for sport scholar-practitioners to view these sporting spaces through culturally relevant theoretical and conceptual lenses. Not only will this shift and shape understanding in current practices and scholarship, but the realm of sport becomes more

nanced and reflective of our society, and ultimately creates the conditions necessary for manifesting a true multicultural affirming, inclusive, and empowering society through sport.

2.9. References

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3. (BLACK)LISTED: THE COLLEGE SPORT LANDSCAPE, HBCUS, AND A THEORY OF RACIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS

3.1. Introduction

As reported by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), the college sport landscape (CSL) is currently comprised of 1,108 schools across three divisional levels. Within this population, 51 are classified as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (NCAA Membership Directory, 2021). Outside of the 51 HBCUs within the NCAA, the remaining hold membership within other college athletics governing bodies (e.g. NAIA and NJCAA). Collectively, the 101 operating HBCUs currently account for 3% percent of all colleges and universities within the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Given the sheer underrepresentation of HBCUs coupled with the deeply embedded role of racism and anti-Blackness within American higher education and sport (see Dancy et al., 2018), an in-depth analysis of this sporting space is needed in the journey for institutional integrity and equity. Specifically, the CSL warrants an investigation that outlines the role of racialization in the operation of the CSL as it relates to HBCUs.

The placement of HBCUs within the CSL is not a novel topic within sport management. Scholars have highlighted the disparities between HBCUs and Historically Predominantly White Institutions (HPWIs) – from institutional, social, and sport settings (Richards et al, 2018; Sav, 2010; Smith & Kant, 2021). Focusing on HBCU athletics, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) signaled the role of institutional distancing between HBCUs and HPWIs – resulting in a schism supported by organizational and social

structures. Building from their work, we argue that the overrepresentation of HWPIs within the CSL led to an overtly HPWI-oriented conception and operation of college athletics.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate how multiple components of the college athletics realm has operated through a racialized lens – often to the detriment of HBCU athletics. This is achieved by synthesizing literature across various methodological approaches, theoretical underpinnings, and practical contexts to align with Ray’s (2019) theory of racialized organizations. While the contributions of existing scholarship have aided in enriching the understanding and dialogue regarding HBCU athletics within the CSL, the lack of a fully-aligning theoretical foundation is missing. Given the novelty of Ray’s (2019) Theory of Racialized Organizations, there have been limited opportunities to fully encapsulate the roles of race and racialization within this sporting context. As a result, a diversely investigated topic – HBCUs within the CSL – is strengthened by connecting to a novel but impactful theoretical framework. To support the purpose of this study, Frisby (2005) highlighted the importance of critical approaches within sport management – particularly organizational research. As noted by Frisby (see, also, Amis & Silk, 2005), critical approaches towards sport organization studies have been underrepresented and underutilized. Gammelsaeter (2021), along with Newman (2014), highlight the importance of including more sociocultural and critical perspectives into all facets of sport management research and practice.

The contributions to the field of sport management are two-fold. From a scholarly perspective, a novel theory is introduced into the field of sport management, answering

the call to include more critical and socially-grounded theoretical frameworks – resulting in more nuanced and socially-reflective practices within research. Within practice, this study illuminates how seemingly race-neutral organizations and agents operate through racialized lenses. In doing so, professionals and organizations can actively interrogate their policies, processes, and practices and work to create a more equitable CSL. Given the approach of the manuscript, future scholarship could explore similar processes across different sport contexts or include similar theoretical frameworks, e.g. theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990). Critical organizational explorations of the college sport landscape works towards creating equitable spaces that operate to the best interests of all involved. The remaining components of the manuscript contextualizes the racialized foundation of the college sport landscape, illuminates the presence of each tenet within college sport, and discusses steps forward in counteracting the racialized operation of this sporting space.

3.2. Contextualizing the College Sport Landscape

Within organizational research, the primary perspectives and approaches draw from Perrowian and Weberian models (Perrow, 1991). While Weber holds the perspective that organizations are inherently bureaucratic and separate from human and societal interference, Perrow argues that organizations are socially embedded and not only contribute to society, but society contributes to the operation of the organization. Going further, with college athletics consisting of multiple components (media, policy, athletic output, etc.), each element should be considered when investigating the operation of college sport as an organization. By viewing the CSL, specifically NCAA

Division I, II, and III institutions as a collective unit, Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations illuminates the role of racialization within the operation and culture of intercollegiate athletics.

To better assess the college sporting landscape as a racialized organization, both the higher education and sport realms must be discussed. Within the existent literature, the primary disparities between HBCUs and HPWIs are: funding and resource allocation, social perception and media discourse, and the role of governing bodies in the operation of these units (Cheeks, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Roberts, 2020). Although not exhaustive, each of these areas contribute to the broader operation and understanding of higher education, athletics, and the intersection of both.

3.2.1. Funding and Resources

Racialized funding structures serve as the foundation for differences between HBCUs and HPWI. As noted by Boland and Gasman (2014), HBCUs have been historically underfunded and structurally underserved by local, state, and federal governments. From a sporting perspective, scholars have noted the role of converging interests as HWPI have amassed generational wealth following the integration of their athletics programs while simultaneously limiting the same opportunities for growth within HBCUs (Cheeks, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Cooper et al., 2014; Cooper et al., 2017). Although some view the integration of college sport through an altruistic lens, Cooper and colleagues (2017) argued that the embedded racialization of higher education and sport fueled the decision to integrate to reclaim athletic superiority. Due to the mass exodus of talent from HBCUs to HWPIs, growing opportunities for

media representation, revenue generation, and facility development were diminished (Cooper; 2012; Cooper et al., 2014; Hodge et al, 2008).

3.2.2. Governance and Policy

Historically, the NCAA has been the central governing body for intercollegiate sport. The NCAA serves as the athletic and academic measure for athletic programs by setting academic, experiential, and athletic requirements under the guise of amateurism and corporate social responsibility (Polite et al, 2011; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). This is seen through the NCAA providing financial rewards for programs that maintain athletic and academic success (Roberts, 2020). Along with policy design, the NCAA established a prominent role in the financial success of college athletics, which has spread into increased control for conferences and schools – as seen in the development of television contracts, multimillion-dollar licensing deals, and increased visibility (Berr, 2015; Donne & Hunder, 2021; Scully, 1984). Given the growth of NCAA sanctioned sports into an economic behemoth, Donne and Hunter (2020) argued that the NCAA has transitioned from their foundational purpose of athlete well-being and into self-preservation. Considering this point, coupled with the racialized and gendered foundation of the NCAA, we argue that the governance structure and policy-making reflect the corporate self-interests of the organization – as opposed to the betterment of college sport and protection of amateurism.

3.2.3. Media Representation

A key component of the CSL is media representation and discourse. Given the rise of mainstream sport networks, conference television deals, and multiple media

outlets that track the peaks and valleys of the season, strong media representation is integral in brand development, recruitment, and subsequent athletic success (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Wallace et al, 2011). Additionally, sport media representation and discourse aids in creating connections between existing and emergent fan groups (Clavio & Walsh, 2014). Beyond building and maintaining fanbases, sport media is key in creating and directing discourse surrounding college sport and athletic programs. Higher level connections within media result in positive perceptions of sport, athletes, and programs. Scholarship has shown that the lack of media representation for HBCUs and women in sport leads to diminished views of sport within both areas when compared to HPWIs and men in sport (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; McDonald, 2010).

3.2.4. Social Perception and Discourse

Social perception and discourse, or sport fandom, is an interesting phenomenon that shows the intersection between institutional pride and identity alignment with athletic programs (Ervin & Rosser, 2017). Although not unique to college sport, multiple components impact fan alignment and overall allegiance to an athletic program. To note, Lee and Pedersen (2011) found that high-level sponsorships have a positive relationship with fandom and team identification – partly due to the prestige of the brand being attached to the program. Along with brand alignment, media discourse impacts how fans view and understand respective programs across the landscape. With college sport media prominently displaying Power Five programs, many programs scramble to gain media spotlights through alternative means. This presents challenges for athletic programs

outside of this population to gain noteworthy fan bases and more enriched social perception – program history, positive brand perception, and overarching discourse. Although on the fringes of the college sport social spectrum, Armstrong (2002a, 2002b) found that the social significance of HBCUs (and other race-centric sporting spaces) hold considerable value in the Black community. In addition to their institutional context aiding in establishing fan bases, the noteworthy program history also contributes to longevity within the fan base. Understanding these points, it can be hypothesized that equity within media representation and sponsorship opportunities can lead to increased social perception and discourse surrounding HBCU athletic programs.

3.3. Literature Review

3.3.1. Brief History of HBCUs

To understand the current placement of HBCU athletics within the CSL, the historical components of American higher education must be explored further. Being that the core of American higher education was built upon a foundation of racism and exclusion, the educational opportunities for emerging Black scholars were limited due to segregation and other systemic barriers (Minor, 2008; Mustaffa, 2017). Considering this, HBCUs were established on a foundation to provide safe and equitable educational opportunities for Black students. While private HBCUs existed, the scarcity of these institutions reflected the dearth of structural support from local, state, and federal government. Through the implementation of the second Morrill Act, the first public HBCUs were developed and offered the promise of equitable funding by fulfilling state missions to serve as land-grant institutions (Gasman & Bowman III, 2012; Minor, 2008).

Unfortunately, many states did not provide equitable funding and launched the broader scope of HBCUs into a perpetual game of ‘catch-up’ across university fronts (Albritton, 2012; Kujovich, 1993; Singh, 2021).

Despite the racially-fueled barriers, HBCUs expanded their philosophical approach to include the same educational and social spaces for first-generation, low-income, and historically excluded communities (Bettez & Suggs, 2012). This approach has created a unique landscape for HBCUs in comparison to their HPWI counterparts. This landscape is largely impacted by funding and policy structures that inherently benefit historically-championed institutions. For example, Minor (2008) found that both University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University receive more state higher education funds than the five public HBCUs in the state of North Carolina combined. Nevertheless, HBCUs have continued to provide ideal opportunities, educational experiences, and social enrichment with far less resources than their HPWI counterparts (Startz, 2021).

A key component of HBCUs persisting beyond structural and societal barriers is the dynamic culture fostered at HBCUs. At the foundation, Albritton (2012) highlights the culture of HBCUs contributing to upward social, political, and economic mobility. This foundational culture extends into a campus community Harris (2012) calls the ‘village pedagogy.’ This pedagogy, which extends beyond the classroom, offers educators (and students) the ideal space that emphasizes communal bonds, collective uplift, and cultural enrichment (Harris, 2012; Tafari, 2016). As a result, HBCUs are positioned as liberatory spaces, which inject a spirit of resistance and determination

within the community (Douglas, 2012; Graham et al, 2009; Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Being that all members of the HBCU community are liberated and empowered, the HBCU influence is reflected through all components of the institution (Graham et al, 2009; Tingle, 2021).

3.3.2. The Role of Sport at HBCUs

Aligning with the mission and purpose of HBCUs, the athletic space in these institutions are also driven by the desire to create safe and equitable spaces for Black athletes. Historically, HBCU athletic spaces provided sites for uplift, community, and resistance against the persistent presence of racism within American higher education and sport (White, 2019). White (2019) highlights the role of the complete HBCU athletic community as the Black Sporting Congregation – a community that consisted of fans, athletes, university members, media, and the broad sport network. Being likened to a congregation notes the communal nature and spiritual connection that many Black athletes could not experience within the White mainstream sport network. As a result, the HBCU athletic space produced sport figures who contributed to shifting the landscape of (inter)national sport through their embodiment of resistance (Cooper et al, 2014; Hawkins et al, 2015; Cooper et al, 2019).

Contemporarily, HBCU athletics have continued to follow the mission and purpose of HBCUs. As college sport has grown into a social and economic juggernaut, the voice and platform of the college athlete has mirrored this growth (Garner & Singer, 2017). This resulted in the HBCU experience being communicated to wider audiences and subsequently enriched the overall public perception of HBCU athletics. To note,

scholars have found the positive impact of HBCUs and their sporting spaces on the holistic experiences of athletes (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Cooper et al, 2017; Horton, 2012). In particular, athletes at HBCUs celebrate their experiences of empowerment and ability to participate in social justice movements (Cooper, 2012; Cooper et al, 2014). The continuation of this tradition and culture illuminates the strength and uniqueness of HBCUs within the broader CSL.

3.3.3. The Placement of HBCUs within the College Sport Landscape

While HBCUs have carved an invaluable space within the CSL, the existence of this sport space has not been utopic. Just as HBCUs have struggled against policy that has stunted their growth, their athletic spaces have been subject to the same constraints. Cooper and colleagues (2014) attributed the interest convergence of sport integration where HPWI athletic programs integrated athletic programs in order to maintain athletic superiority. In doing so, formidable HBCU programs lost recruitment battles to institutions that could leverage broader social networks and amassed intergenerational wealth against historically excluded HBCU programs. The pillaging of talent from HBCUs also led to subsequent challenges in securing high-level sponsorships, prime television deals, and resources to expand athletic facilities (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015). Reflective of the schism between HBCUs and HPWIs is also present within the athletics realm. Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) explain that this schism is the result of institutional distancing. As noted by Cheeks and Carter-Francique, the differences in external economic support, media portrayal, and institutional consideration in governance/policy highlights how HBCU athletic programs have been placed on the

fringes of the CSL. As a result, HPWI athletic programs have benefitted from the stratification of the resources needed to be successful.

3.4. Theoretical Framework

Ray (2019) presented a theoretical framework that illuminates the role and processes of racialization within organizations. It is important to note that the overarching perspective implemented within this framework aligns with the Perrowian view that asserts that organizations are inherently reflective of society – resulting in amplifying social systems while also contributing to social systems (Perrow, 1991). The inclusion of this point illuminates the constantly shifting operation of organizations based on social norms and rejects the notion that organizations are inherently bureaucratic. This theoretical framework pulls from existent literature and outlines for foundational tenets that can be used to explain how racialized social systems are manifested within organizations. Ray outlines the following tenets for a theory of racialized organizations: a) racialized organizations enhance/diminish the agency of racial groups, b) racialized organizations legitimize the unequal distribution of resources, c) Whiteness serves as a credential within the organization, and d) the decoupling of rules from practice is racialized (Ray, 2019, p. 27).

3.4.1. Enhancing/Diminishing the Agency of Racialized Groups

Ray (2019) argues that racialized organizations enhance the agency of White groups while diminishing the agency of historically excluded groups through macro, meso, and micro levels. The most prominent method of diminishing agency within historically excluded communities is their overrepresentation and consistent placement

within lower organizational tiers. Because agency is directly connected to organizational power differentials, overrepresentation of communities of color within lower organizational tiers establish an incessant culture of subordination towards others within the organization (Sewell, 1992). A primary example of this phenomenon is the organizational power differentials between lawyers, doctors, and facility operation staff members within the same organization (Ray, 2019). As explained by Ray, organizational hierarchies and subsequent power differentials are predicated on expected social norms and symbolism. These social norms and symbolic meanings, when accounting for the overrepresentation of racialized communities in lower organizational tiers, result in attitudes and organizational practices grounded in racialized deference, expendability, and limited upward mobility.

In addition to the creation of racialized organizational structures, diminished agency is also manifested through limited control of time and space. Ray (2019) explained that due to the direct relationship between organizational placement and agency, those within lower tiers are subjected to minimal control of time and space. Sewell (1992) likens this process to the agency seen within the concept of the king (or higher-level organizational members) in comparison to those within positions beneath the position of the king. As the organizational placement increases, not only does agency over time and space increase, but control over subordinates' time and space increases. Conversely, lack of agency is also manifested to the dynamic nature of resources across organizational levels. Roy and colleagues (2004) highlight this process as the persistent crisis of time and space due to insufficient resources – manifested through the

geographic placement of organizations, occupational safety and security, and differential wages (Edin & Schaefer, 2015; Mahadeo, 2018; Wilson, 1996). As emphasized by Mahadeo, each of these components continue the replication of racialized hierarchies within organizations.

The final component of diminishing the agency of racialized groups is the creation of racial deference rituals (Ray, 2019). As explained by Hitlin and Elder (2007), these deference rituals are manifested through socially-prescribed roles that influence employee-to-consumer and employee-to-employee interactions. Along racial lines, there is an expectation of persistent deference and limited displays of emotion – often to the comfort of White organizational members (Wingfield, 2009; Wingfield & Alston, 2013). The culmination of these components highlights how the replication of racialized social orders, specifically those that limit agency, are manifested in the daily operation of organizations.

3.4.2. Legitimizing the Unequal Distribution of Resources

Being that race-based segregation served as the foundation of multiple institutions, the residual effects of this practice are present – albeit transformed – in present day organizational operations. Ray (2019) argues that since racial segregation is the foundation of institutional histories, much like other forms of identity-based segregation practices, the structures are maintained through law, policy, and practice. This maintenance of inequality is visible through supraorganizational levels and into micro-level interactions between members within organizations.

The primary tool used to legitimate the unequal distribution of resources is the racialized othering of organizations operated by and for historically marginalized communities. To support, Stinchcombe (1965) argued that the overt racialization of institutions set a foundation for White dominance and self-interest – resulting in the adjoining support systems to be designed through these interests. Additionally, racial schemas are established and maintained through an intricate social order that spans across institutions and industries, e.g. perceived institutional dominance of HPWIs and racialized othering of Minority Serving Institutions being replicated in the media representation discourse centering on racialized attitudes (Jones, 2016). By establishing racialized organizations as deviants and inferior, the broader landscape needed for success and survival is considerably imbalanced (Wooten, 2015; Wooten & Couloute, 2017). This imbalance, which has persisted across generations, is manifested through processes and programs. These processes and programs have been socially constructed and presented as wholly valid due to their connection with dominant White institution, i.e. school tracking (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Tyson, 2011), vocational education (Oakes, 1983; Ozer & Perc, 2020), college rankings/assessments (Hardy et al., 2019; Jaschik, 2018), and reliance on White institutional benefactors (Ray, 2019).

Building upon the racialization and othering of organizations operated by historically marginalized communities, inequality of resources is also justified through the naturalization of race. Sewell (2016) explained this process as institutional actors reifying racial schema by transforming racialized myths into assumed social facts. Sewell compares this process to discriminatory banking professionals engaging in

disparate lending practices against Black and other historically excluded applicants. In doing so, racialized myths regarding the financial stability and trustworthiness of these communities are reinforced. With these myths transitioning to assumed facts, the broader institutional field accepts and continues practices that perpetuate the unequal distribution of resources.

The final component is the practice of occupational segregation within micro and meso-level settings. Ray (2019) explained this practice as the intentional and unintentional placement of historically excluded individuals within the lower tiers of the organizational hierarchy. While this historic intentional placement has transformed into seemingly unintentional biases and racial schemas, the long-term implications of this practice has led to longstanding disparities in resource allocation (Edin & Schaefer, 2015; Mahadeo, 2018; Wilson, 2011). Similar to lack of agency and time scarcity associated with lower organizational levels, these sectors are also subjected to larger disparities within economic and practical resources. This is manifested in multiple blue and brown-collar positions experiencing limited legal protections, minimal health and safety precautions, and limited opportunities for upward mobility (Catanzarite, 2002; Reskin, 2012). The intersecting components of the resource inequality leads to widespread outcomes that negatively impact historically underserved communities (Reskin, 2012).

3.4.3. Credentialing Whiteness

Whiteness serving as a credential, albeit abstract in nature, highlights the processes in which Whiteness creates and solidifies the institutionalization of racialized

disparities. Ray (2019) presents this component as a tool used to legitimize organizational structures, amplify White agency, and inject bias into a seemingly unbiased assessment structure. This is centered on Collins (1979) argument that the meritocratic nature of credentialing is inherently objective and a legitimate means of assessment and validation (Pager, 2008). Understanding the processes of racialization, one must consider the insidious presence of race-based exclusion despite matching or exceeding credentials (Sen & Wasow, 2016). Pager and colleagues (2009) explain this phenomenon as negative credentialing. This process negatively impacts historically excluded agents by weaponizing their racialized identity against acceptable credentials. A key example of this process is that although former convictions are treated as negative credentials, Black and Latinx applicants without criminal records have lower rates of interview inquiries than White applicants with criminal records. Unfortunately, the most successful approach towards credentialing Whiteness is communities of color aligning with Whiteness through action and presentation – essentially passing for White (Harris, 1995). The culmination of this tenet highlights the connection between Whiteness, property, and how both establish institutions and industries as inherently White.

3.4.4. Racialized Decoupling of Rules and Practice

Ray (2019) presented the final component through both a diversity/equity/inclusion (DEI) lens and a broader operational lens. The DEI lens specifically illuminates the inconsistencies between rules and practices regarding the creation and maintenance of DEI efforts. Ray (2019) notes the DEI efforts within the majority-White higher-level organizational ranks are not used within the majority-

historically excluded lower organizational tiers. This is likened to Whiteness being centered and prioritized – therefore White-dominant spaces are protected through strategic integration and minority-centric lower tiers are not subjected to diversify by increasing White representation. With Whiteness being centered, those entering into these spaces through DEI efforts are often tasked and expected to conform to the unspoken cultural norms of White-dominant spaces (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Expanding beyond inconsistencies between DEI policy and practice, organizations exhibit similar approaches between protection and persecution processes. Roscigno (2007) explained that while organizations have protection processes for employees against harassment/discrimination, the organizational practices often leave initiators as victims of hazing, ostracization, or termination. Going further, Roscigno argued that organizational responses to complaints about policy violations are worse than the initial violation. Given the racialized (gendered, religious, and ability-based) dynamics between organizational tiers, historically excluded communities are often subjected to harsher working environments, limited protection by the organization, and inability to obtain resources needed for protection against this decoupling process (Ray, 2019; Roscigno, 2007).

3.5. The Racialization of HBCU Athletics

3.5.1. Diminished Agency

With race-based segregation serving as a foundation for both sport and higher education, the remnant of this abysmal foundation is rather noticeable in the contemporary spaces of integrated sport and higher education (Minor, 2008; Southall &

Weiler, 2014). The current manifestation of this foundation is seen in the placement of HBCU conferences within the broader scope of the CSL. Given the race-based exclusion of HBCU athletic programs from larger HPWCs (Historically Predominantly White Conferences), HBCUs were forced to create and sustain their own athletic conferences (Wiggins, 2000). In addition to HPWCs forcefully excluding HBCU athletic conferences, the NCAA also excluded HBCU athletic conferences – resulting in limited opportunity for growth and development in comparison to other conferences and programs embraced by the NCAA (Cooper et al, 2014).

Building upon the historic exclusion of HBCU athletic conferences, contemporary examples highlight the symbolism and social discourse regarding HBCU athletic within the mainstream media (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015). Cheeks and Carter-Francique brought attention to the limited media investment within HBCU athletics – which limits program and conference ability to obtain sponsorships and media contracts needed to expand and develop programs. Going further, given the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness within sport media outlets and/or personnel that choose to include or represent HBCU athletics are often clouded with problematic viewpoints and dialogue, e.g. Doug Gottlieb on Travis Hunter, Deion Sanders on lack of HBCU coverage by ESPN, and lack of coverage on HBCU athletic academic achievements (Jackson, 2021; McDonald, 2010). Aligning with the Ray's (2019) emphasis on the relationship between time and agency, lack of noteworthy television and sponsorship contracts lead to an overreliance on participating in guarantee games (Lillig, 2009; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015). These games, which are designed and presented as

surefire wins for the larger and more prominent football and basketball programs at HPWIs, present HBCUs (and other smaller athletic programs) with additional funds needed for athletic program and department development. The necessity of these games highlights the limited agency of these programs and signal to a larger issue of racialized deference. Essentially, HBCUs are held at the whim of HPWI athletic programs for immediate their economic stability.

3.5.2. Legitimized Resource Inequality

An expected consequence of diminishing the agency of HBCU athletic programs is the legitimization of unequal athletic resources between HBCUs and HPWIs. With big-time athletics programs (specifically Power Five and Group of Five) being HPWIs, multiple components of the CSL are designed to maintain social and economic dominance for HPWIs due to their primacy within the college sport dialogue. Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) expand on this disparity between resources through the practice of institutional distancing. Institutional distancing is the practice of dominant groups allocating resources and positive capital towards dominant groups while also assigning minimal resources and negative capital to subordinated groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Cheeks and Carter-Francique further assert that the institutional distancing processes is seen through persistently negative media portrayals resulting in limited opportunities for sponsorship and mainstream television representation. As noted by Wiggins (2000) HBCU athletic programs and conferences have been continuously othered through forceful exclusion and current practices that limit representation with

college sport leadership, policy design, and institutional funding from governmental agencies (Boland & Gasman, 2014; Cheeks, 2015; Sav, 2010).

Boland and Gasman (2014) note the longstanding othering of HBCUs in comparison to their HPWI counterparts through governmental funding and policy design. Within the realm of higher education, HBCUs are primarily subjected to institutional funding parameters that limit the development of institutions. In particular, Boland and Gasman (2014) noted the differences in funding measures without consideration for the purpose and mission of HBCUs. This lack of funding negatively impacts student (athlete) academic and social experiences by limiting the development of academic programs, institutional development, and opportunities to expand university facilities. Going further, McClelland (2011) highlighted the longstanding lack of equitable funding of HBCUs from external sources in comparison to the HWPI counterparts. In addition to highlighting differences within funding, McClelland found that athletic administrators noticed clear disconnects with HBCU culture/purpose/mission and the policies set by the NCAA. This could be credited to the noteworthy lack of HBCU representation within NCAA Division I and II leadership councils – where HBCU representatives accounts for five or the fifty-six total top divisional leadership positions (NCAA Governance, 2022). As a result, athletic administrators believed that considerations for size, student population, and institutional resources would result in an increase of program effectiveness (McClelland, 2011). The lack of institutional nuance and inclusion under the guise of total equality signals to a broader system of inequity between HPWIs and HBCUs (and other MSIs).

The final component, which centers on the results of athletic resource disparities, exposes the connections between sport integration, interest convergence, and rewards for athletic output. Cooper and colleagues (2014) liken the selective integration of HPWI athletic programs to the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet of interest convergence. Their explanation is that the integration of HWPI athletic programs were not implemented for the betterment of society or for altruistic reasons, but instead, to pillage athletic talent from HBCU programs. Going further, the primary college athletic governing bodies did not accept and reflect HBCUs within their ranks until 1953 (NAIA) and 1965 (NCAA) (Hodge et al., 2013). Following integration, the athletic output of Black athletes has resulted in championships, (inter)national recognition, and subsequent increases in financial resources across all fronts for HPWIs (Cooper et al., 2014; Lillig, 2009; Wiggins, 2000).

To heighten the disparity in funds, Jones and Black (2021) found that HBCUs are provided less money per athlete and lower amounts overall in comparison to HPWIs participating in guarantee games. This trend is also reflected in the diminished value and subsequent marginalization of their programs within championships and high-profile tournaments. Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) highlight the consistently low funds provided to the two Division I HBCU conferences for their participation in the NCAA Men's March Madness tournament. The scarce funds provided to these two conferences reflect their performance within the tournament, but due to the consistent devaluation of HBCU athletic programs, the strength of schedule and win-loss quality rankings by the seeding committee continually places high-performing HBCU athletic programs at a

disadvantage. The disparities across multiple fronts places HBCU athletic programs in perpetual battles against limitations in resources.

3.5.3. Credentialing and Centering Whiteness within the CSL

Focusing on athletic resources, the sheer overrepresentation of White males within coaching and leadership positions signal to a longstanding credentialing process that has excluded those who fall outside of this demographic (Hextrum, 2020). To support, the 2020 TIDES (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport) Report reiterates the overwhelming White-maleness of NCAA leadership (TIDES, 2020). In the findings, the report also acknowledges the propensity for HBCUs to higher more leaders from historically excluded communities in comparison to the broader non-HBCU sporting landscape. In addition to numerical domination within the highest and most-visible positions within college sport, White men are also the primary beneficiaries of economic domination when considering the positions of these roles. Dancy and colleagues (2018) further explained that the historic and contemporary economic and visual dominance of White men within the CSL solidifies racialized practices and policies within their institutions and the broader CSL. Going further, Day and McDonald (2010) highlighted the benefit – and necessity – for Black coaches to develop and maintain social-professional networks with their White colleagues but did not find the same necessity for White coaches to develop networks with their historically excluded colleagues. The social and practical implications of this embedded credentialing signal the primacy of White maleness within college sport coaching and leadership – which presents notable challenges for people of color and women.

Extending beyond coaching and leadership, Whiteness is rampant within sport media – with particular emphasis on college sport media (McDonald, 2010). Both historically and contemporarily, sport media has operated to the benefit of HPWI athletic programs given the primacy of Whiteness in college sports and media (Hextrum, 2020; McDonald, 2010). Being that a bulk of college sport media centers on the men’s basketball and football at HPWIs, the broader social discourse surrounding these sports exclude HBCU and women’s athletic programs (Hextrum, 2020). Hextrum explained that within this overemphasis on HPWI sport, in conjunction with the embeddedness of race, creates an ideological frame that positions programs at these institutions as the norm – leaving the outside institutions as deviants. Considering the systemically-driven disparity between HBCUs and these institutions – the existing higher education discourse is amplified when the sport context becomes a part of the broader conversation.

Contemporarily, sport media figures have limited views and understanding of the HBCU sporting experience and the systemic challenges faced by these institutions. As a result, much of the narratives surrounding HBCU sports are misinformed, racially charged, and supportive of the big-time HPWI narrative. For example, Doug Gottlieb took to Twitter and emphatically argued that Travis Hunter’s commitment to Jackson State University could not translate to opportunities within the National Football League due to their lack of resources and placement outside of the Power Five. In addition to his comments regarding the Jackson State-to-NFL pipeline, Gottlieb further asserted that HBCUs lacked the academic and professional networks to produce successful alumni.

Given the scope of his audience, coupled with his cache as a media member, these messages can further diminish the reputation and image of HBCUs and steer athletes away from these institutions. Alongside sport media figures, the media buy-in for Power Five programs and conferences signal to the mainstream overemphasis towards these programs. Media giants like the SEC Network, Longhorn Network, and Notre Dame football have established media presences that cycle mass amounts of revenue back into conferences – further asserting themselves as the socially and athletically dominant programs (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015).

The combination of athletic resources, leadership, and media leads to a longstanding struggle for HBCUs and the fight for legitimacy. Each of these components contribute to a broader social cognition of HBCUs and their athletic spaces as inferior, or in some cases, serving as a unique niche within the sporting complex – e.g. bands, homecoming events, or components of sport history. If this process continues, the practical and scholarly implications point towards further ostracizing HBCU athletic spaces – along with other sporting spaces aligned with historically excluded and marginalized communities.

3.5.4. Racialized Decoupling of Rules and Practice

This final component shares a specific focus on college sport governance and policy – with a particular emphasis on the differences in design and response between HBCUs and the broader CSL. With the NCAA requiring and rewarding academic success (Hosick, 2016), it is important to acknowledge how these seemingly equal practices disadvantage differing institutional types. At their foundation, the purpose of

HBCUs was to create safe and equitable educational opportunities for all Black students (Johnson, 2017). In alignment with this purpose, HBCUs have continually admitted students from historically underserved communities – both academically and economically – to bridge the higher education attainment gaps created by historical exclusion of HPWIs (Albritton, 2012). This integral component positions the HBCU student population in stark contrast with the increasingly exclusive student populations in big-time college sport programs at HPWIs. Understanding this point, the academic benchmark requirements set by the NCAA are likely received and attained differently due to institutional type and approach.

Roberts (2020) found that the special mission foundation of HBCUs have created notable challenges in meeting the Academic Progress Rate (APR) Graduation Success Rate (GSR) set by the NCAA. Both measures and the subsequent responses for HBCUs often leave these institutions negatively impacted although their athletes speak to more enriching and positive academic and social experiences (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015). Conversely, while HPWI athletic programs meet NCAA academic guidelines, the approaches are problematic and counterintuitive. Foster and Huml (2017) found that academic clustering, or the strategic placement of athletes in certain majors, results in higher scores in both areas due to tailored academic paths. Through doing this, HPWI athletic programs are able to participate in bowl games – resulting in increased opportunities to increase funding and resources. Going further, as outlined by the newly implemented NCAA academic rewards, programs receive additional monies for athletic success and academic success (Hosick, 2016). These monies could be used to address

the resource gap between institutional types. In particular, the athlete resource spending gaps seen between HPWIs (upwards of \$190,000 for notable programs) and HBCUS (below \$55,000) suggests the latter are not worthy (Harrell, 2020). In addition to HBCUs and their missions not being considered for a more holistic approach towards academic success, they have a higher likelihood of being reprimanded by the NCAA (Otto, 2005). By not including institutional purpose, student profiles, or athlete experiences – governing bodies are amplifying the longstanding disparities between these institutions.

3.6. Discussion

Following Frey and Eitzen's (1991) assertion that sport is reflective of society, it is integral to understand how the social construction of race is manifested within the operation of sporting spaces. In doing so, sport scholars and practitioners can work to ensure that sport is more equitable and socially-just for all involved (Cunningham, 2019). Through unpacking and reviewing components of the CSL through the Theory of Racialized Organizations lens, each area is understood from a perspective that outlines the manifestation of historical and contemporary conceptions of race in sport. This manuscript exposes the pivotal role of Whiteness within sport media that impacts social perception (resulting in broad-stroke othering of HBCU athletic spaces), limiting time and space within mainstream sport dialogue, and subsequent opportunities to establish strong relationships with sponsors.

Building upon media, the dynamic disparities in funding and resource allocation within the CSL reflect the longstanding structures that have stifled the full potential of HBCUs. Although the role of institutional and governmental funds are not the primary sources for

athletic development, noting the differences highlight the longstanding marginalization of HBCUs (Harrell, 2020). By not acknowledging and including the role of HBCUs as special mission institutions within funding and resource allocation structures, these institutions are placed in a perpetual battle against meeting and maintaining athletic and academic structures built against them. A notable example of this struggle is the NCAA requirement for athletic academic support staff, opportunities for financial reward through athlete academic success, and the lack of equitable funding to create and build these units within HBCU athletic departments (Harrell, 2020). In turn, HBCU athletic departments are faced with the challenge to provide the necessary resources to maintain NCAA academic standards, align with institutional mission, and maintain athletic competitiveness with considerably lower budgets and resources – which have been severely impacted by both overt and covert racialized structures.

Focusing on the role of the NCAA and other governing bodies, while often presented as race-neutral entities, the exclusionary origins of these entities are manifested through policies and practices that continue to disadvantage HBCUs (and other MSIs). As previously explained, the APR and GSR requirements set by the NCAA do not consider the purposes, student profiles, or resources within special mission institutions (Parker, 2017; Roberts, 2020). In doing so, these institutions are faced with notable challenges with staffing and meeting the goals to maintain eligibility for postseason competition. Because of this, HBCU athletic programs have residual challenges in competing for and securing funds from bowl game participation, e.g. sponsorships, competition awards,

NCAA disbursements for athletic success. In return, agency and resources continue to dwindle in comparison to their HPWI counterparts.

3.7. Conclusion

The culmination of these components highlights the role of society in shaping the operation of sporting space. By acknowledging and interrogating the rampant nature of racialization within the CSL, scholars and practitioners can work to understand, communicate, and implement socially reflective practices. As college sport scholarship continues to expand, we encourage scholars to consider the arguments made within this piece to consider how HBCU athletic spaces are investigated, understood, and communicated on their own and in relation to the broader scope of college athletics. Additionally, we implore that as scholar-practitioners work in and with HBCUs, the differences between HBCUs and HPWIs are interrogated. Through shifting discourse via scholarship, coupled with active engagement within practice, we believe that noteworthy strides can be made in the search for true parity within college sports. Following the suggestions made by Ray (2019) we believe the recent external social movement of athlete empowerment will lead to longstanding internal and external change in how HBCUs are understood and positioned in the CSL. In particular, the swift rise of the Jackson State University and Florida A&M University football programs (along with the consistent upsets of HPWI basketball programs by the Texas Southern University men's basketball teams), sheds a much-needed contemporary light on HBCU athletic spaces as viable sites for competition. In addition to growing in athletic prominence, the current wave of athlete empowerment aligns with existing scholarship

that notes the positive academic and social experiences of athletes at HBCUs. If the trend continues, we could expect shifts in media representation, funding/sponsorship opportunities, and subsequent increases in institutionally and externally-driven resources.

To build upon this piece, we encourage scholar-practitioners to continue engaging with this theoretical framework across contexts and methodological approaches. For example, Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations aligns closely with the historic and contemporary movements of women in sport. To continue the integration of critical organizational theory, we encourage future scholarship to critically investigate the reproduction of social norms into varying sporting contexts. Echoing Cunningham's (2019) sentiments, we believe this approach towards organizational studies works to create more equitable and inclusive sporting spaces – resulting in a better placement for HBCUs within the CSL. Once applied to other areas, the field can begin to see notable shifts for historically excluded groups.

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4. YOU GOTTA BE THERE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE HBCU SPORTING EXPERIENCE

4.1. Introduction

Four games into the 2021 football season and Winston-Salem State University made notable waves across social media. Interestingly, the waves came from a viral video regarding the appearance of their cheerleading squad, known as *The Powerhouse of Red and White*. This video drew an influx of attention due to the entire squad cheering with their natural hair (Gaither, 2021). Given the historic and contemporary dialogue regarding Black women and natural hair, and the broader scope of Eurocentric beauty standards, the conversations on social media centered on resistance, self-esteem, beauty, and authenticity – effectively reflecting the culture and purpose of HBCUs (Bankhead & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2019; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Since their inception, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have embodied the spirit of resistance by providing safe and equitable educational opportunities for Black students during periods of racism and exclusion, along with serving as sites for social justice and community development (Cavil et al, 2017; Collins et al, 2021; Mobley, 2017). Centering on HBCU athletics, this spirit of resistance is a response to the prevalence of racism, segregation, and anti-Blackness within the broader scope of intercollegiate athletics (Cavil et al, 2017; Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; McGreggor, 2020; Wallsten et al., 2017). Much like the growth of intercollegiate sport, HBCU athletic programs have experienced great strides in the performance and development of their programs (Cheeks & Crowley, 2015; White, 2019). This growth and development led to HBCU athletes

and coaches gaining brighter spotlights across the nation and within the professional sport realm (White, 2019). White (2019) further explains that the HBCU sporting space, with particular focus during times of social unrest, aided in the creation of ‘sporting congregations’ (p.8). These congregations consisted of athletes, fans, administrators, the broader community, and media members – who were key in creating a culture of uplift, unity, resistance, and joy. As seen in the response to the WSSU cheerleading squad, the sporting congregation is still amplifying the HBCU athletic space.

BlackCrit aids in explaining how Blackness is engrained, both physically and symbolically, into spaces and contexts (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417). Going further, the Black Liberatory Fantasy is a component that highlights the creation and manifestation of physical, cognitive, and spiritual spaces centering on the Black identity and experiences (Dumas & ross, 2016; ross, 2019). To unpack, BlackCrit can be used to explain how the Black identity and experience shapes individual and collective experiences within a given context (Dumas & ross, 2016). Within this broad approach, the Black Liberatory Fantasy is the creation of a space centered on resistance, uplift, freedom of majoritarian concepts or approaches (Martin et al, 2019). While there are multiple data sources to support this study, Black Twitter takes on a contemporary approach to White’s (2019) sporting congregation. Through a collection of tweets, from a multitude of community members, a cohesive understanding of this sporting space is developed.

In alignment with Frey and Eitzen’s (1991) assertion that sport is a social institution, this study positions HBCU athletic spaces as social institutions that reflect

the historic and contemporary elements of society, while also contributing to their communities. Although scholarship has highlighted the nuanced and unique nature of intercollegiate athletics at HBCUs, there is still much to be considered both theoretically and empirically. To this point, there has been limited utilization of critical theory in exploring and explaining the HBCU athletic experience – notably through Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit). As noted by Doherty (2012) and Whetten (1989), a key role of theory and theoretical development is to explain the microprocesses of situations and contexts. Both theoretically and empirically, this study seeks to explain how the contemporary HBCU sporting space is a material and symbolic manifestation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy. Applying to a broader perspective, the outcomes of this study can be used to explain and understand how sporting spaces within Minority-Serving Institutions leverage components of culture and identity into creating positive experiences for participants and spectators. Building upon isolated examples of the experiences within the HBCU sporting space, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the *Black Liberatory Fantasy* component of Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) is present within this environment. The research question guiding this study is: how is the Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF) manifested within the HBCU athletic space?

4.2. Literature Review

4.2.1. The College Sport Experience

The full spectrum of the sporting space has become central to the college experience. Beyer and Hannah (2000) describe the college sporting experience as a cultural rite. Through this framing, the college sport experience has expanded into a

place where shared beliefs and norms are taken on as cultural components of members within the institution. Going further, the societal roles of sport and higher education are exacerbated further and result in the development of cultural ideologies. Trice and Beyer (1993) explain the role of cultural ideologies as a collection of values, beliefs, and norms strengthened by emotion – resulting in a deeper understanding of the meaning of space, time, and context.

The college sport experience contributes more than emotion and ideology. As seen through Gumprecht's (2003) exploration, the presence of big-time college sport shapes the culture and demographics of college towns. Along with temporarily increasing the population, the presence of college athletics leaves economic fingerprints throughout the hosting cities – guiding patrons and businesses to reflect their alliance to the prominent sporting institution in their towns. The amalgamation of college tradition, sports culture, and economic growth gives room for an experience and social shift that centers on the institution, amplifies pride, and has a rippling effect that extends beyond the campus community (Gumprecht, 2003).

While college sport culture contributes to the mixing and creation of cultural ideologies within the sporting context, much like the adjoining higher education institutions, college sport serves as a socialization tool for all participants. Clopton (2011) highlights the role of college sport in the creation of social capital and unity amongst community members. Focusing on the relationship between sporting experiences and social capital within higher education, Wintre and Bowers (2007) note the opportunities and ease for upward social mobility due to capital accumulation.

Overall, the college sport experience serves as a unique extension to the historic placement and understanding of higher education.

4.2.2. The HBCU Sporting Space

The HBCU sporting space, however, provides an exclusive experience outside of the traditional college sport approach given the history and culture of HBCUs. Following the integration of college athletics, HBCU athletics experienced a stark decline in their athletic output (Cooper et al, 2014; Cooper et al, 2017). Cooper and colleagues (2014) attribute this to the Critical Race Theory tenet of interest convergence. In detail, their argument is that Historically Predominantly White Institutions (HPWIs) chose to integrate programs to maintain athletic superiority over HBCUs. In addition to attempting to achieve athletic superiority, Cheeks and Carter-Francique (2015) explain the role of institutional distancing between HPWIs and HBCUs further amplifies the gaps between the institutional types. Specifically, HPWIs have benefited from social networks - in conjunction with systemic institutional barriers – resulting in widening institutional gaps between HBCUs in revenue generation and the broader college sport landscape (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Lott, 2002; Lott & Bullock, 2007). A primary example of institutional distancing between HPWIs and HBCUs is the consistent underpaying of HBCUs in ‘guarantee games’ (Jones & Black, 2021). In addition to underpaying HBCUs in guarantee games, sport media has been critiqued for being overwhelmingly white – resulting in limited exposure and misrepresentation of HBCUs, continuous underfunding of HBCUs across funding sources, and the subsequent

cognitive devaluing of HBCU athletic spaces (Cheeks, 2016; Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Gaither, 2013; McDonald, 2010).

Scholars have highlighted the uniqueness of the HBCU sport experience. To note, Rodgers (2015) illuminated the culture surrounding HBCU Classics, which highlighted the role of culture and the overarching connections to Blackness and Black identity (McGreggor, 2020). Existent literature has utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the primary framework to explain the experiences within the HBCU sporting space and advocate for secession from the traditional NCAA model (Cooper et al, 2014; Lillig, 2009). From a broader perspective into fan behavior and engagement, exploration into HBCU fandom has resulted in nuanced and representative understandings of social psychology and consumption motivation amongst the Black fan community (Armstrong 2002a, 2002b). Armstrong (2002a, 2002b) notes the role and salience of HBCU athletic spaces to the broader scope of one's identity. The outcome of this relationship illuminates the increased likelihood of consumption due to the increased significance between institution and consumer identity.

The *Black Sporting Congregation* is central to the HBCU athletics space and experience. To explain further, White (2020) recently defined the Black Sporting Congregation as the collection of athletes, fans, administrators, and media members within the HBCU athletics space (p. 8-9). Along with centering the interconnectedness of the HBCU sporting community, the complexity of Blackness is highlighted through the role representation and identities of all members – resulting in a more nuanced and representative understanding of this community (hooks, 2017; White, 2020). Connected

to past generations of HBCU athletics, the Black Sporting Congregation consisted of multiple communities while also creating and maintaining a culture of support, uplift, resistance, and pride (White, 2020).

Contemporarily, following the genesis of the Black Lives Matter movement, HBCUs have seen an increase in enrollment (Williams & Palmer, 2019). This increase in enrollment coupled with college athletes becoming more vocal about their experiences with racism at HPWIs creates the ideal setting to explore the HBCU athletic space further (Gayles et al, 2018; Oshiro et al, 2020; Yearwood, 2018). Much like the development of sport congregations during the earlier waves of social unrest, the current social and political landscape may have given way for a newer generation of sporting congregations to develop – with social media holding a noteworthy role.

4.3. Analytic Framework

Like the development of other race-centric critical frameworks, Black Critical Theory, stemmed from the broader Critical Race Theory (e.g., LatCrit, AsianCrit, and TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005; Chang, 1993; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997). Like the critical frameworks, BlackCrit differentiates itself from CRT by focusing specifically on Blackness and anti-Blackness – through material and ideological means (Dumas & ross, 2016). In detail, Dumas and ross (2016) explain that BlackCrit differentiates itself from CRT by separating Blackness from the broader exploration of race, which results in a more detailed, nuanced, and representative exploration of the Black identity and experience (p. 417). With CRT being a theorization of race, the understanding of race must extend beyond the Black/White binary (Brown, 2005). In doing so, BlackCrit

extends the theorization of race found within CRT and specifically highlights how Blackness is understood, communicated, and operationalized across contexts. For example, the theorization of race through CRT illuminates the role of race and racism within redlining, resource allocation, and the outcomes of environmental racism (Reich, 1992). However, when considering the same phenomenon, a BlackCrit lens centers on ongoing water crisis in Flint, anti-Black attitudes within the ongoing gentrification crisis, and anti-Black education within STEM education and practice – which illuminates the specificity of Blackness and anti-Blackness (Foran, 2019; Nxumalo & ross, 2019; Vakil & Ayers, 2019).

The following are the broad components of BlackCrit: anti-Blackness is endemic to the creation and understanding of our social, cultural, political, and economic world (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995); Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination (Dumas & ross, 2016); resisting revisionists histories that support White supremacy/dominance, while also avoiding the absolving of hateful and violent actions committed against the Black community (Bell, 1987; Dumas & ross, 2016; Leonardo, 2004); and the creation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy (Bassey, 2007; Dumas & ross, 2016; Gates, 1987). By focusing on Blackness, BlackCrit also aids in the theorization, and further explanation of the Black experience in a fashion like the other members of the race-critical paradigm (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417). Shifting from the traditional model of theoretical tenets, BlackCrit theorists use a collective deliberation model where multiple scholars and contributors can shape the understanding and application of the theory (Dumas & ross, 2016) The result is a diverse and expansive

understanding of each component, a collection of underpinnings that reflect unique experiences and elements, and a presentation of the framework that reflects the nuances of Blackness and the Black experience (Dumas & ross, 2016). Following the examples set by Bryan (2021) and Gilmore (2021), specific components can be utilized and extrapolated to understand spaces and experiences – notably the Black Liberatory Fantasy.

4.3.1. The Black Liberatory Fantasy

The Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF) is primarily presented in alignment with the resistance of a revisionists' history. In response to anti-Blackness and majoritarian approaches towards space, the BLF embodies change and resistance (Dumas and ross, 2016). Presented as a form of 'necessary chaos,' likened to the improvisational nature of jazz music, the Black Liberatory fantasy is free-flowing and reflective of the multiplicities of the Black identity – meaning there is not a singular or concrete form of the BLF (Gilmore, 2021). Coles (2021) explains that despite the broader societal inclination to oppose overt Blackness, the Black Liberatory Fantasy is a model and motivation for those fighting oppression and marginalization by actively combating white-dominant narratives and embracing all components that have been deemed unsavory, inappropriate, and/or unworthy. Going further, ross (2019) explains that the role of the Black Liberatory Fantasy is to aid as a “disruptive force that serves as a beacon for systemic change” by disavowing normative beliefs regarding personal behaviors, ideology, displays of performance and embracing the culturally-influenced performances, behaviors, and ideologies (p. 3). To explain further, the Black Liberatory

Fantasy actively rejects the domineering and pervasive nature of whiteness and illuminates the unique influence of Blackness in action, thought, and presentation. This disruptive force is best reflected through Coles' (2021) utilization of the Black Liberatory Fantasy by highlighting 'it's geniuses that live in the hood (p. 50).' This component challenges the mainstream conception of the visual presentation, geographic location, and demographic identities of a genius. In doing so, the idea of intelligence and status of being a genius is celebrated in an appropriate and uplifting fashion.

Following the collective deliberation model utilized within BlackCrit, multiple perspectives can inform one's definition and application of the Black Liberatory Fantasy. While BlackCrit rejects the rigid design and numerated processes expected of theory, to understand how the Black Liberatory Fantasy is operationalized within this study, the following elements define the Black Liberatory Fantasy: resistance, chaos, and dissonance through Black imagination and experience (Fanon, 2008; Gilmore, 2021); refusal to participate outside of Black spaces (Vakil & Ayers, 2019; Bryan, 2021); and reveling in Blackness contrasting with the neoliberal multicultural imagination (Dumas & ross, 2016; Johnson et al, 2019; Martin et al, 2019). Given the expansiveness of the collective deliberation approach within BlackCrit, it is important to note that these elements are not exhaustive of the Black Liberatory Fantasy but do serve as the foundation of the analytic framework and methodological approach for this study.

4.4. Methods

Social media can be used as a tool to challenge dominant narratives through community building and amplification. Twitter, specifically Black Twitter, offers a unique

experience and output presents an emotional/cultural contagion effect but also challenges dominant discourse and perspectives (Graham & Smith, 2016; Sharma, 2013). Black Twitter is a community of Black Twitter users that have contributed to popular culture, viral memes, community discourse, social justice movements, and culturally-centric approaches to day-to-day topics (Florini, 2014; Graham & Smith, 2016, p. 434; Sharma, 2013). While mainstream media has continuously covered the strength and intricacies of Black Twitter, academia has recently tapped into more investigative approaches to understand the role of Black Twitter within the broader scope of society (Abbey-Lambertz, 2014; Graham & Smith, 2016; McDonald, 2014). Considering the role of social media in amplifying experiences and building community within sport and higher education, Black Twitter is a viable resource when investigating the HBCU athletic space.

4.5. Research Context

4.5.1. Black Twitter

The Black Twitter community has become a central component in the contemporary Black experience. Thurston (2010) set the foundation into the virtual Black tradition by highlighting social experiences and their replication within Twitter. For example, Thurston notes the Black practice of “playing the dozens” or “joanin” within the social media practices of Black Twitter users. Florini (2014) likens this to the practice of “signifyin’” or displaying Blackness through social media. Being that a component of Blackness is the visual and verbal display of Blackness – speech, dress, interaction, etc. Florini further explains that the practice of signifyin’ creates community

by replicating oral tradition, discussing and gauging cultural traditions, extrapolating the multiplicities of Blackness within general topics/discussions, and communicating shared knowledge and experiences (p. 224). A central component of Black Twitter is the role of contagion – the spread and replication of emotion – within the community. Often highlighted through likes and retweets, the contagion can also spread through replies, hashtags, and quote tweets (Sharma, 2013, p. 57-58).

While Black Twitter is often positioned as a space for fun and social interaction, this space also serves as a site for counternarratives, resistance, and creating a counterpublic. Graham and Smith (2016) explore the role of Black Twitter in communicating the Black experience and perspective during a social era where misinformation and racialized hegemony is present within mainstream discourse. Counterpublics, as explained by Fraser (1990), are developed when marginalized communities create public discourses to challenge the dominant discourses that strategically exclude communities. The development of these spaces illuminates experiences, perspectives, and provides culturally significant to complex topics. Hill (2018) expands further by noting the role of the Black Twitter counterpublic in rejecting respectability politics, amplifying surveillance, and resisting erasure. In an era where social media is prevalent, the role of Black Twitter is integral to the culture and social positioning of the Black community.

4.6. Critical Discourse Analysis

The utilization of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is key in understanding how language creates, replicates, and challenges dominant discourse (Chouliaraki &

Fairclough, 1999). Van Dijk (1993) outlined key principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and being that each principle can operate in isolation or in conjunction with each other – the primary principle utilized within this CDA process is social cognition. This component within CDA can be used to explore how groups utilize language to make sense of and communicate their unique spaces within society – from macro and micro-level perspectives (van Dijk, 2003). Aligning with Hill’s (2018) expansion into the purposes of Black Twitter, the application of CDA offers the opportunity to illuminate resistance, experience, and perspectives of a counterpublic, e.g., the HBCU sport community in relation to the broader college sport community. Using the Black Liberatory Fantasy as the analytic framework, aligning and emergent themes are developed – further contributing to the scope of BlackCrit. Narratives are gathered through existing tweets, ranging from 2013 to 2020 – which coincide with the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement and the most recent completed athletic season. This time period also coincides with a social, cultural, economic, and political shift that has resulted in an increase in HBCU enrollment and athlete interest in HBCU athletic programs (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; Williams & Palmer, 2019).

4.7. Data Collection

The data collected are tweets from the HBCU+Black Twitter community (the HBCU subsection of the Black Twitter community). Through a general scraping of data via keywords through Octoparse – a Twitter data scraping service – multiple accounts are used within the study. This service uses key words and phrases coupled with date ranges to collect corresponding tweets (Kirschner, 2020). The keyword combinations

used consist of the following terms: HBCU, athletics, sport, experience, and culture. After pulling tweets, profile biographies (bios) details are reviewed to confirm that the tweets were made from HBCU alumni or students based on identifying language, emojis, and/or acronyms (i.e., Winston-Salem State University being represented by WSSU, Tre-4 State, the ram emoji, or a reference to an element of HBCU sport culture). To establish the trustworthiness of tweets and corresponding accounts, only established profiles with HBCU-related signifiers (university acronym, mascot names, and/or graduation dates) are utilized within the study. Inclusion of this criteria aligns with and extends the social reputation elements outlined by Khan and Michalas (2020). To highlight the nuances between region, athletic conference and year(s) attended, tweets are further categorized by university, graduation year (if available), athlete status, and geographic region. By considering these variables, variations in aligning and emergent themes highlight the multiplicities of Black culture and identity.

To maintain the authenticity of narratives, multiple tweets were excluded due to their content or origin. Regarding content, Twitter-related apps allows users to repost videos, pictures, and memes without crediting the original creator of the content. Understanding this point, tweets that contained visual content along with textual tweets were not considered since the originator could not be verified. In addition to excluding tweets with visual content, tweets posted by commercial/business accounts were not collected. This exclusion criterion ensured that the users from the accounts posted held authentic relationships towards HBCUs and the content within the tweets were focused on the HBCU sport experience, as opposed to marketing HBCU-themed products.

4.8. Data Analysis

Understanding that Black Twitter serves as a counterpublic is key to the Critical Discourse Analysis (Graham & Smith, 2016; Dyer & Hakkola, 2020). Given that CDA is centered on language that challenges and counters dominant discourse, language used within a counterspace is integral in proper capturing, displaying, and communicating the HBCU+Black Twitter community (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Hill, 2018). In addition to highlighting the role of Black Twitter being a counter space, the Black Liberatory Fantasy operates as a counter to dominant culture and revels in the ‘necessary chaos’ that comes from countering dominant cultures and ideologies (ross, 2019). To properly capture the manifestation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy within the tweets and narratives, a multi-level coding process is implemented. The first step within the coding process is a unit-by-unit coding scheme that centers on key language that shares explicit connections to the highlighted components of the Black Liberatory Fantasy (Connelly, 2013). This coding process highlights language that directly correlates with resistance, dissonance and chaos; necessity and desire for Black spaces; and celebrating the idiosyncrasies of Black spaces and identities. Following the unit-by-unit coding scheme, a line-by-line coding process progresses from individual words to phrases and sentences. This transition provides additional context to complete tweets and thoughts – resulting in a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Gibbs, 2007). Upon connecting narratives and tweets to existing components of the Black Liberatory Fantasy, the final coding process is an open thematic coding process that seeks to extend the understanding of this component (Gibbs, 2007; Williams & Moser,

2019). This open coding process is used to uncover specific language and themes that align with the overall concept of the Black Liberatory Fantasy but offer an extension to the component. To further the development of emergent themes, an axial coding process is used to categorize codes and create linkages across data points (Scott & Medaugh, 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019).

4.9. Findings & Discussion

Following the review of social media posts, the final data population consisted of 272 unique tweets across six (6) keyword combinations. Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of tweets across keyword combinations and years. The primary trend within the tweet distribution highlights the importance of sport to the HBCU experience, as seen in the ‘HBCU-Experience’ keyword combination holding a 65% share of the tweets. Going further, the trends in tweet content shows a notable increase in tweet frequency by yearly total. This trend illuminates the increasing discourse surrounding the HBCU sporting space – which further supports the impact of this space on the holistic HBCU experience.

Table 1
Distribution of tweets by keyword and year

Keyword Combinations	Years								Total
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
HBCU - Experience	3	7	15	32	32	36	38	15	178
HBCU - Culture	0	1	0	0	2	6	5	15	29
HBCU - Sport - Culture	2	1	0	0	5	2	7	11	28
HBCU - Sport - Experience	0	1	2	2	1	4	3	7	20
HBCU - Athletic - Culture	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	4	9
HBCU - Athletic - Experience	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	2	8
Total	5	10	18	34	42	49	60	54	272

While each keyword combination provides some insight into the placement of sport within the HBCU experience and culture, conducting a CDA offers a deeper explanation into the messages communicated within the tweets. In doing so, messages communicated by the target population exposes the deeper significance of HBCU sport. In particular, the established themes within the Black Liberatory Fantasy (BLF) were supported by five (5) additional emergent themes that explain the unique, nuanced, and impactful role of the HBCU sporting space. The established themes are a) shifting HBCU sport narratives, b) communal culture of HBCU sport, c) the sporting sanctuary, d) enrichment with sport, and e) the Black Oppressive Nightmare (BON). Each of these emergent themes, in conjunction with the guiding themes within the operationalized definition of the BLF, explain the complex nature and contributions of the HBCU sporting space. The following explanations highlight the role of the guiding themes and

each emergent theme within the manifestation of the BLF within the HBCU sporting space.

4.9.1. Guiding Theoretical Components

As expected, the guiding themes within operationalized definition of the BLF were present within the collected tweets. These themes present connections between the BLF and the HBCU sporting space – which speaks to the significance of this space outside the traditionally commercialized conception of intercollegiate sport. The utilization of Critical Discourse Analysis within a social media counterspace served as the ideal approach to unpack messages communicated by members of the community (Pinckney et al, 2019). As noted by Correa and Jeong (2011) Black social media usage has continually been a space for users to produce insights into navigating spaces, highlight shared and differing culture, and serve as a hub for unity and collaboration.

Following the definition of ‘the refusal to participate in non-Black spaces,’ the tweets presented an overt desire to only be within the HBCU athletic space. Some tweets specifically noted the disdain for and lack of motivation to attend non-HBCU athletic spaces – which echoes similar sentiments found within Armstrong (2002a) and Stone et al. (2012). For example, a contributor quipped, ‘even in the mighty #SEC student athletes know where home is,’ which speaks to the longstanding placement of HBCUs within the Black community and the propensity of former HWPI athletes to transfer to HBCUs (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). This desire to be within Black spaces speak to the historic and contemporary role of HBCUs as bastions of refuge and uplift (Mobley, 2017). From a different perspective, Johnson (2019) found that deep-rooted pride drove

motivation for selecting, attending, and matriculating through HBCUs. The similar attitudes found within their study are also replicated within multiple tweets that express pride in supporting and participating in HBCU athletic programs. Overall, the desire to only participate in Black sporting spaces speaks to the HBCU foundation built upon racial pride, uplift, and excellence – which is undeniably present within the HBCU sporting space.

Much like the first guiding theme, the element of ‘reveling in Blackness’ is a key component of the HBCU sporting experience. These components go together due to racialized saliency of HBCUs and their constituents. In particular, the bulk of the tweets communicated the significant relationship between the institutional type and sport, e.g., HBCU football/basketball, CIAA basketball, etc. While similar connections between Historically Predominantly White Athletic Conferences (HPWACs) and their dominance in sport, the connection between HBCUs and their sports acknowledges the sociocultural elements that makes this sporting space unique. The celebration of Black culture and identity within these spaces further illuminate the presence of the Black Sporting Congregation (White, 2019; 2020). The replication of this sporting congregation from a contemporary perspective extends the scope and application of this space to include the increased connectivity between institutions, the prevalence of social media, and a transformed sense of pride.

The final component, ‘the presence of resistance, chaos, and dissonance,’ reflects Dumas and ross’ (2016) explanation of the BLF as a rejection of majoritarian narratives and perspectives. Going further, Dumas and ross’ (2016) centering the role of ‘necessary

chaos' in the BLF, the creation and maintenance of a sporting space that directly contrasts the mainstream conception of college sport is central to the HBCUs. When reviewing the aligning tweets, multiple contributors highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of the HBCU sporting space and experience with emphases on in-game culture, interactions within the HBCU network, and the contrast between HBCUs and HWPI sports. These elements are presented through the increased importance of the band in creating a strong game experience, the accepted and celebrated chaos within the fan environments (e.g., Tuskegee University student section shed, prevalence of uncensored trap music, and culture that relies on more components than athletic output).

At the core, being a problem or divergent from the norm is celebrated within this space – reflecting similar themes found within Coles' (2021) study into education with Black urban youth. HBCU athletic spaces create, maintain, and enjoy their propensity to directly contrast HPWI athletic programs. In fact, many contributors reject potential athletic participation in HWPACs due to the lack of aligning institutional cultures. This approach, much like geniuses being in the hood, reflects the longstanding placement of opposition that HBCUs have dwelled within. Going further, members within this space have no desire for their spaces to be understood – resulting in a rebellious culture that is preserved for the in-group members.

The culmination of these components provides a solid foundation to explore further the presence of the BLF within the HBCU sporting space. At their core, HBCU sporting spaces are built upon a foundation of refuge and fortified with an unapologetic culture that uplifts and celebrates the multiplicitous nature of Blackness. In doing so,

HBCU sporting spaces offer emotionally and culturally-charged social experiences that extend beyond the traditionally commercialized nature of college athletics.

Understanding the unique nature and context of sport, the guiding themes offer a broad understanding of HBCU sports. To further specify the relationship between the BLF and the HBCU sporting space, an exploration into the nuanced emergent themes is needed.

4.10. Emergent Themes

In addition to uncovering connections between tweets in the guiding theoretical components, the thematic coding process implemented within the study aided in uncovering five (5) emergent themes. These emergent themes expand the understanding of the HBCU sporting space by offering new perspectives into how the BLF is present within the utilized narratives (Gavin, 2008; Joffe, 2012). In addition to expanding the connection between the BLF and HBCU sporting spaces, the development of emergent themes also broadens the understanding of the BLF by further contributing to the collective deliberation approach (Dumas & ross, 2016). The operationalized definitions developed for these emergent themes are present within Table 2, while representative tweets are present within Table 3. The representative tweets within Table 3 signal to the unit-by-unit and line-by-line codes that served as the foundation in establishing the themes. Collectively, the selected tweet excerpts for each theme come together to provide a brief – but comprehensive – insight into how the themes are presented across contexts and perspectives.

Table 2
Definition of Emergent Themes within Tweets

Themes	Definition
Shifting HBCU Sport Narratives	the desire and/or responsibility to highlight the successes and contributions of HBCU athletics; demystifying misinformed and deficit-centered perspectives about HBCU sport
Communal Culture of HBCU Sport	the community-centric culture of the HBCU sporting spaces for in-group and out-group members; sharing the HBCU sporting space with others as a rite of passage
The HBCU Sporting Sanctuary	the ability for multiple subgroups to be reflected and accepted within the HBCU sporting space
Enrichment with HBCU Sporting Spaces	the intrinsic and extrinsic contributions of the HBCU sporting space on the academic, professional, social, and personal development of participants
The Black Oppressive Nightmare	the existence of a hostile and oppressive existence for HBCU community members; the presence of anti-Blackness within the intersections of sport, higher education, and society

4.10.1. Shifting HBCU Sport Narratives

Like the CRT tenet, counter-storytelling, the presence of shifting narratives about HBCU sports is prevalent within the tweets. This component is key in exposing how within the BLF, members can engage in an alternative dialogue that reframes their athletic spaces outside the scope of HPWI (primarily Power Five) athletics. Among the multiple tweets positing that the HBCU sporting experience is worthwhile and impactful, the most compelling were those that speak to the athletic output and quality of the athletic experience. While mainstream conversations have often highlighted the shortcomings of HBCU sporting spaces, these tweets acknowledge HBCUs longstanding

ability to exist, persist, and succeed with far less (Startz, 2021). Championing this trait about HBCUs, with emphasis on their athletic spaces, speaks to a foundation of resiliency and ability to develop a culture of excellence (Cantey et al., 2013). This component also draws comparisons to Coles' (2021) findings that illuminated the presence and celebration of intellect within the hood. Both show that an integral component of shifting narratives is possessing and celebrating positive elements without regard to setting or circumstance.

In addition to celebrating athletic spaces with limited resources, this narrative shift also highlights the quality of resources and experiences within the HBCU sporting space. As noted by (Williams et al., 2019), HBCUs are primarily presented through deficit perspectives – which limits mainstream perceptions that these institutions can provide formidable athletic spaces and resources. The most notable is a response to Tarik Cohen speaking about his athletic and academic experiences at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT) while also dispelling the myth that the contemporary HBCU athletic space could not contribute to a noteworthy career within professional sports. Going further, multiple contributors emphasized how the HBCU sporting experience exceeded their personal experiences in renowned HWPI athletic spaces, e.g., a Winston-Salem State game environment exceeding UNC, Duke, and NC State. This ability to leapfrog historically renowned athletic spaces speaks to the culture of HBCU, which contributors found difficulty in explaining but continued to emphasize the difference. This difference in institutional setting and culture, coupled with expanding facilities and resources, further asserts that the contemporary HBCU

sporting space has carved a unique niche that rivals multiple Power Five and Group of Five programs.

4.10.2. Communal Culture

Community is a key component of the academic and social experience of the HBCU (Bettez & Suggs, 2012). While the contributors within the study communicated their unabashed desire to only be within Black spaces, they also seek to share this experience with as many people as possible – including those from outside the HBCU community. Because the desire to only be in Black spaces is grounded in a spirit of pride and uplift, the communal culture signals the desire to create an uplifting space for as many people as possible. As seen in their tweets, many contributors communicate that the HBCU sporting experience offers deeper emotional and social experiences. This desire to positively impact their community through creating a communal culture can be likened to the existing relationship between HBCUs and othermothering/otherfathering. These processes are characterized as a form of community activism that is presented through mentoring, educational, and enrichment practices (Brooms, 2017; Flowers et al., 2015). Although the tweets are presented through a peer-to-peer framing, their desire to provide a unique and culturally significant experience for those outside the HBCU space highlights their assumed role as othermothers and otherfathers.

The communal culture is also reflected in the collective nature of the HBCU network. McGreggor (2020) notes the presence of collectivism within the HBCU community – which is primarily present during homecomings, classics, and marquee matchups. Homecoming, which is a core component of this emergent theme, reflects the

diverse student communities within the HBCU environment. The sporting component of the HBCU homecoming serves as the ideal space for anyone to come into the HBCU environment and have a culturally impactful experience. Going further, as seen in multiple tweets, many contributors focused on the growth and development of all HBCU athletic programs, the desire to dwell within other HBCU sporting spaces, and an overall fandom towards HBCU athletics. In doing so, this communal culture highlights the transcendent nature of HBCUs and further asserts the importance of institutional type and culture in the college sport experience.

4.10.3. Sporting Sanctuaries

Being that sport at the HBCU initially served as a site of resistance and refuge, the presentation of this space as a sanctuary is expected. Through establishing a space where multiple non-sport components of the university can exist, with consideration that big-time college sports have often pitted these components against each other, the HBCU sporting space serves as a sanctuary for multiple communities. Building upon the communal nature of the HBCU sporting space, multiple contributors alluded to this space serving as a form of sanctuary for all components of the HBCU sport experience, e.g. band, dance, food, academics, and student life. Although like the communal culture, the spirit of the sporting sanctuary focuses on the emotional impact of the sporting space through the inclusion of these areas. In essence, the HBCU sporting space offers something for all community members because the sporting space is an amalgamation of the HBCU through a sporting lens (McGreggor, 2020). To note, a contributor emphasized how ‘athletics, academics, the student center...it all connects.’

Going further, many tweets alluded to the presence of ‘the culture’ being evident within the HBCU sporting spaces. This culture speaks to the foundational presence of Blackness within the sporting environment. Being that Blackness permeates the music, food, social interactions, and fashion – resulting in an inclusive and targeted experience for those who have a high saliency towards their non-sport interests. For example, both McGreggor (2020) and Rodgers (2015) noted the presence and centrality of non-sport elements within the HBCU environments – notably homecoming and classics. Through the HBCU sporting space offering sanctuary for non-sport elements, that are largely impacted by Black culture and identity, the sporting space transforms from the traditional athletic domain and into a site for social and cultural celebration.

4.10.4. Enrichment with Sport

With the previous themes center on pride, communalism, and emotional inclusion, *enrichment with sport* notes the role of HBCU sporting spaces in serving as a tool and site for academic, professional, and social development. The concept of enrichment is consistently likened to the ‘HBCU experience’ and the contributions of HBCUs as an institution. Albritton (2012) emphasized the role of HBCUs in positively impacting educational outcomes for students. From a sport perspective, Cooper (2013) echoes similar sentiments regarding HBCUs and their athletic spaces in fostering positive development and outcomes. Reflecting the assertions by Albritton and Cooper, a multitude of tweets focused on the college athlete experience at HBCUs – with a majority focusing on a holistic experience. This holistic experience, as communicated through tweets, notes the authenticity and intentionality of the HBCU environment. The

connection between institutional purpose and sporting culture directly contrasts the longstanding division between higher education and college sport (Davis, 1993; Nite et al., 2013). The prevalent culture and practice of leveraging the HBCU sporting space as a tool for enrichment shows how the commercialized nature of college sport is positioned and utilized differently within the HBCU context.

4.10.5. Black Oppressive Nightmare (BONs)

Interestingly, the final emergent theme within the tweets did not present a positive outlook into the HBCU sporting space. Much like the full explanation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy, the adjoining component is the presence of an existence that is grounded in oppression, exclusion, and conflict with Whiteness. Given the stark contrast of this existence, this component is referred to as the *Black Oppressive Nightmares* (BONs). BONs reflect the current existence that led to the need and creation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy. Within this study, the existing circumstances are the prevalent deficit-fueled narratives surrounding HBCUs (Benson, 2000; Cooper et al., 2014; Hosick, 2014), HPWI sporting spaces riddled with racist ideologies and operations (Davis, 1994; Love et al., 2021; Singer, 2005; Singer, 2009), a disjointed and sport-centric environment (Bimper, 2015; Cooper et al., 2017; McCluskey, 2020), and a sport culture that limits the development and enrichment of athletes (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Hatteberg, 2018; Simiyu, 2012; Singer, 2005). The culmination of these components presents a nightmarish existence that creates a hostile sporting space for athletes, marginalizes Black students, and limits the holistic development of athletes.

Table 3*Examples of Emergent Themes within Tweets*

Themes	Representative Tweets
Shifting HBCU Sport Narratives	<p>been to UNC & NC State but my best experience was my first hbcu basketball game at WSSU!</p> <p>CollegeGameDay y'all need to go to an HBCU during one of their homecoming weekend</p> <p>don't think that ur football team beating our football team is gonna affect how we feel about our HBCU experience.;</p>
Communal Culture of HBCU Sport	<p>If you didn't go to an #HBCU, I encourage you to tune into ABC right now & watch the halftime</p> <p>the atmosphere at HBCU athletic events is truly an experience that everyone should attend</p>
The HBCU Sporting Sanctuary	<p>Its the band, the halftime show breakdown, cheerleaders, the fans, PA announcer, the wave!</p> <p>an experience like no other. The marching bands, the fraternities, the fans.</p> <p>There are certain check marks that ALL freshmen must experience at HBCU's;</p>
Enrichment with HBCU Sporting Spaces	<p>if you really want the FULL student-athlete experience... you should attend an #HBCU;</p> <p>HBCUs are all about work. They have great students, and they have great student-athletes as well</p> <p>the ability to be unapologetically black amongst your peers and staff</p>
The Black Oppressive Nightmare	<p>a lot of CFB history books I've dug into minimize the impact and experience of HBCU football;</p> <p>the discrimination that HBCU athletes/athletic programs experience...because its real</p> <p>we will look back on this exodus of HBCUs to FCS conferences as the final erosion of HBCU sports culture. It's a sad situation.</p>

4.11. Conclusion

In addition to bringing attention to the contributions of the HBCU sporting space, this study offers notable insights for sport scholar-practitioners. Within scholarship, the development of the Black Liberatory Fantasy extends the applications of the sporting context. In particular, the emergent themes found within the study explores the contributions of HBCU athletics along with acknowledging problematic structures within college sport – which contributes to the creation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy through HBCU sports. Additionally, the exploration of the Black Twitter counterspace shows the need to understand and amplify narratives found within social media communities – with major emphasis on communities whose voices have been minimized by majoritarian discourse. When applied to practice, amplifying and leveraging narratives through social media discourse is a viable approach for marketing and fan experience professionals. As HBCUs continue to gain prominence within the shifting landscape of college sport, communicating the unique contributions of this community aids in shifting narratives, increasing the likelihood for more spectator engagement, and champions the contributions of HBCUs. Alongside media and fan experience practice, student affairs professionals can use the findings within the study to bridge connections between the positive student development and the athletic experience. As found within the data, the HBCU sporting space transcends the traditional boundaries of college sport and produces a rippling effect that resonates within academic, professional, and other social spaces.

While college sport is rightfully positioned as a commercialized entity, it is imperative for scholars to consider the historic and contemporary positioning of college sport through sociocultural lenses. When considering the impact of HBCUs on their communities, the compounding effects of institutional type and sport signal to a unique positioning of these spaces. When the prevalence of racialization and racism are considered, sporting spaces embedded within institutions that prioritize uplift and social justice offer a different experience for those involved. Through using the HBCU+Black Twitter counterspace as a site to explore the HBCU sporting experience, this study illuminated the contributions and impact of this sporting space on the Black community. Although limited in scope, many contributors noted the social, emotional, cultural, and professional benefits that come from being within the HBCU sporting space. Future scholarship should continue to explore the similar experiences through differing sport contexts, e.g. Latinx experiences at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, experiences of women in sport, and the role of religion within religiously-affiliated sporting spaces. The investigation of the relationship between identity and sporting spaces further expands the understanding of sport being used as a tool for societal uplift and development.

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5. CONCLUSION

While existing scholarship has explored multiple components of the HBCU sporting space, the topic is not static in nature. With sport mirroring the dynamic structure of society, scholars must continue to investigate the field from new and alternative perspectives. Following Frey and Eitzen's (1991) assertion of sport being a social institution, unpacking the ever-changing societal positioning of sport is key. Reiterating the central purpose of the study, the culminating work provides key developments with the understanding of HBCU sports in relation to the broader college sport spectrum. In addition to exploring the relationship between HBCU athletics and the realm of college sports, the study also emphasized and explored HBCUs on their own. The combination of critical reconceptualization, critical contextual analysis, and narrative analysis achieves the goals of repositioning, understanding, and uplifting HBCU sporting spaces and those within them.

5.1. Reflexivity Statement

Understanding and interrogating identity and perspectives are key in establishing a rigorous qualitative study. As explained by Jootun and colleagues (2009) reflexivity is an integral component of qualitative research. The reflexive process explores the role of the researcher in guiding or influencing the results of the study – which holds considerable implications on trustworthiness, generalizability, and rigor. Mirroring Dowling's (2004) emphasis for reflexivity in nursing research due to the intimacy of the researcher and participant, the intimate relationship I have with HBCUs and the Black community held considerable impact in study design and data analysis. My anti-deficit

and liberation sociology-infused approach reflects my desire to explore how HBCU athletic spaces are positioned within the broader scope of college athletics and to further differentiate these athletic spaces as socioculturally unique. This emphasis on uplift and celebration shaped the theories used, methodological tools, and subsequent analyses. The theories used throughout the articles have critical foundations – resulting in an active interrogation of power, privilege, and social structures. Methodologically, the critical discourse analysis was used to challenge dominant discourse while also exploring how community members make sense of their spaces and existence (Choulairaki & Fairclough, 1999; Van Dijk, 1993). Each component reflects my connection to the HBCU space and desire to design a culminating output that works to uplift HBCUs and their sporting culture.

Considering the design of the dissertation, my close connection to these institutions served as the inspiration to create a scaffolded approach – which centers various components of the overarching topic. I chose to implement this format because I felt a singular study could not achieve my scholarly and broader societal goals of uplifting and shifting HBCU sport discourse. Going further, given saliency of my identity with HBCUs, I aimed to create a larger impact with my dissertation. My desire to first reconceptualize HBCUs and follow with an active interrogation of the college sport landscape reflects my critical epistemological stance while also signaling to my inherent belief that HBCU sporting spaces are unique and important to Black culture and the realm of college sport.

Article III is an extension of my social media network, which is primarily HBCU community members. Seeing the conversations we held over the years regarding our athletic programs and sport experiences, I wanted to illuminate a key component of our HBCU experiences. Due to my emphasis on uplift and celebration, my desire to amplify the voices of in-group members is readily visible with the selection method for Article III. While the parameters to only include tweets from profiles that display an explicit connection to HBCUs limited the breadth and depth of the data, ensuring that all contributors were in-group members offers an increased level of reliability and trustworthiness (Wagner & Zick, 1995). Going further, the high saliency between myself and the HBCU sporting space further ensured that high levels of care and intentionality were applied through the theoretical and empirical studies. Additionally, as a member of the community, my personal experiences and insights provided an important nuance to the context of the tweets. While my ingroup status could present challenges within the study, I see this membership as a needed component in understanding language and context.

5.2. Revisiting #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs

Historically and contemporarily, HBCUs have been subjected to deficit-based scholarship and social discourse. As a result, these institutions are primarily viewed through problem-first lenses, as opposed to an orientation that highlights the contributions of these institutions. To reiterate the purpose and design of this dissertation, #LiftingAndShiftingHBCUs (Njoku, 2019) is used to highlight shifts in discourse, institutional developments, and overall celebrations of HBCUs. While the

hashtag and movement has been applied to some sporting contexts, the overlap is minimum. By centering sport, this dissertation addresses the gap and provides a needed layer to positively impact the full spectrum of HBCU sporting spaces.

5.2.1. The Inclusion of Sport

The inclusion of sport within the hashtag continues the trend set by other scholar-practitioners. At the core, this scholarly output sought out ways to shift HBCU discourse and understanding of HBCU athletics with the goal of celebrating HBCU sporting spaces. The initial reconceptualization reframed how HBCU sporting spaces should be understood from scholarly, practical, and social perspectives. Through the reconceptualization, the subsequent studies explained the positioning of HBCU athletic programs within the broader college sport landscape and the unique contributions of these sporting spaces from sociocultural perspectives. Not only does the second study bring attention to the racialized nature of the college sport landscape, but it also challenges and dismantles the deficit-based perspectives surrounding HBCU athletics in relation to HPWI athletics. Concluding with the third study that centers the HBCU sporting experience from fan, athlete, and practitioner perspectives. Each study builds upon the other and results in a complex exploration into changing how HBCU sporting spaces are understood, studied, and experienced.

5.3. Contributions

When reviewing the broader contributions of the study on the field of sport management, theory development serves as the primary offering. Article I presented a novel theoretical development and responds to numerous calls for criticality within sport

management scholarship (Frisby, 2005; Newman, 2014; Skinner et al., 2005; Weems et al., 2017). The inclusion of critical theoretical perspectives, with emphasis on those within education and other social sciences, challenges the dominant perspectives within sport management scholarship and practice. The application of BlackCrit through a college sport context signals the dynamic relationship between higher education institutions, sport, and those affiliated with the institution. Going further, the critical reconceptualization of HBCU sporting spaces through the BlackCrit lens highlights how Blackness is present through symbolic and material means (Dumas & ross, 2016). The explicit inclusion of Blackness within the HBCU sporting space extends the conception of this space outside the traditional and assumed boundaries of college sport. This extension illuminates contributions of this space outside of sport performance.

Similarly, the application of a *Theory of Racialized Organizations* lens within the operation of the college sport landscape notes the racialized intersection of media, governance, social discourse, and resource attainment. Along with providing developments through the analysis of the college sport landscape, the inclusion of critical organizational theory presents the needed challenge for the field of sport management to assess how domineering power structures impact the operation of sporting contexts. Following the foundation of Acker's (1990) interrogation of gendered organizations, the overarching application of organizational studies through the Perrowian lens seeks to address the roles of race and racialization within college sport. The change in perspective offers a needed exploration into the role of sport in reflecting historic and contemporary societal norms.

The final study explores the manifestation of the Black Liberatory Fantasy within the HBCU sporting space. In addition to bridging the gap between an education-dominant theory with the sport management domain, the development of emergent themes contributes to the collective deliberation approach of BlackCrit while also presenting notable developments in understanding the HBCU sporting space. The overarching theoretical contributions present noteworthy developments into the study, communication, and operation of HBCU sporting spaces. Exploring the deeper emotional contributions of this space extends the understanding between social identity, fan identity, and sport consumption. Going further, the intersection of the Black Liberatory Fantasy and HBCU athletics also offers insights into exploring the concept of race-based escapism through sport.

Along with theoretical contributions, this study notes the tumultuous space that HBCUs (and other historically excluded) sporting spaces have operated within. In doing so, practice is further informed through establishing scholarship undergirded by theory. In particular, the bricolage approach implemented within Articles I and II bridges theoretical, methodological, and epistemological gaps between scholars who have contributed to the study of HBCUs. As noted by Warne and McAndrew (2009), the bricolage approach creates an enriched and thorough network of information that explains contexts and experiences. For example, both the BlackCrit reconceptualization and the racialized organization analyses provide noteworthy contributions with sport media framing and discourse regarding HBCU athletics. In addition to shaping discourse, both studies also aid in establishing more equitable sport governance policies,

funding structures, and assessment strategies. In addition to bridging gaps between research points, the empirical findings within Article III explore the intersection of institutional type and sport culture on communities. These findings can be leveraged by fan experience professionals seeking to create community-specific practices, media members working to accurately communicate the culture within these spaces, and student affairs professionals aiming to leverage the HBCU sport experience in working towards holistic student development. As a result, multiple areas of the HBCU sporting space are enriched through the scaffolded design of the dissertation.

5.4. Future Steps

Through exploring how HBCUs are positioned differently within the college sport landscape, future scholarship should continue emphasizing this dynamic. Through more intricate explorations of HBCUs within the college sport landscape, scholar-practitioners can begin to interrogate structures that inherently limit the vitality of these institutions. In addition to addressing systemic structures between HBCUs and HPWIs, scholars should pull from Articles I and III as inspiration to celebrate these institutions without comparison to their HPWI counterparts. Operating against a comparative approach actively interrogates the assumptions that HPWI athletics are the norm within college sport. As a result, scholarship and subsequent practices are institutionally-specific, resulting in more reflective outcomes.

Building upon the criticality of Articles I and II, future developments should continue this trend of critical reconceptualizations and analyses of sporting spaces that are historically and contemporarily connected to historically excluded communities. The

expected results point towards explanations of sporting spaces that hold economic, political, social, and cultural significance for these communities but are often silenced by dominant narratives, e.g. women's college sport being positioned against the domineering culture of men's college sport. Exploring the roles of power and discourse are key in creating more equitable practices and socially-reflective scholarship. Overall, future scholarship and practice should continue to challenge the status quo with the intention to magnify the uniqueness and significance of these spaces and the communities within them. Completing this task works to ensure that sport retains the altruistic traits attached to the domain while also creating more equitable practices.

5.5. References

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