Spring 4-21-2021

The Athletic Department's Role in Racial Justice and the Black Lives Matter Movement: Perceptions of NCAA Student-Athletes

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THE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN RACIAL JUSTICE AND THE BLACK LIVES

MATTER MOVEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

NATALIE BUNCH

Under the Direction of Beth A. Cianfrone, Ph.D.

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THE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN RACIAL JUSTICE AND THE BLACK

LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

NATALIE N. BUNCH

Under the Direction of Beth Cianfrone

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 2020, after a series of incidents of police brutality, deaths of Black Americans, and protests throughout the world, people flooded social media with their opinions. As people and organizations began to raise their voices on social media about the country's injustices, sport organizations and athletes also utilized social media to speak out, including college athletics departments.

Framed by critical race theory, researchers have examined how fans (e.g., Frederick et al., 2017) and athletes (e.g., Agyemang et al., 2010; Intosh et al., 2020) feel about athlete activism. However, research on sport organizations' activism is limited. At the collegiate level, athletic directors may be concerned with student-athletes' perceptions of athletic departments' efforts in the racial justice movement, as 18% of NCAA student-athletes are African American, and representation drastically increases in the highest revenue producing sports (Kluch & Wilson, 2020). Researchers have noted that Black student-athletes frequently perceive their institutions as unsupportive (Cooper, 2017). Meanwhile, activism efforts through social media can build community and promote civic engagement (Skoric et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions of student-athletes based on factors identified by Sappington et al.

(2019)—namely, student-athletes' emotional response to posts (affective response), the impact on the team (perceived conflict), and the role or perceived qualification of the athletics department to post about race relations.

To assess student-athlete perception of college athletics departments involvement in the BLM movement, an online survey was distributed to NCAA student-athletes. A modified version of the Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (7-point Likert scale; Sappington et al., 2019) measured the student-athlete's response to athletic department's social media activism. In addition, original open-ended questions were asked to gauge specific response and feedback for future practices.

The findings suggest that overall student-athletes welcome their athletics departments' activism efforts, especially in terms of low perceived conflict and affective reaction. Student-athletes were less likely to believe it was their athletics departments' role or that they had the proper qualification. The answers to the open-ended questions suggest that athletics departments should work on authenticity, education, and being proactive.

INDEX WORDS: Collegiate athletics, race relations, social media, activism, Black Lives Matter (BLM)

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A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

in

Sport Administration

in

Department of Kinesiology and Health

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2021

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1 THE PROBLEM
Introduction

Historically, athletes have used their social status and platform to demonstrate their beliefs, incite change, and spark conversations on topics outside of sports. In the summer of 2020, after a series of police brutality and deaths of Black Americans (e.g., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor), and protests throughout the world, there was a shift in not only professional athletes being involved in social activism, but also college student-athletes utilizing their voices on social media to help influence change. As people and organizations around the world began to speak out on the country's injustices, college coaches and athletic departments, also began speaking out on social media.

As people flooded social media with their voices and opinions, several social media campaigns to support social change emerged, such as #BlackoutTuesday and the use of #BlackLivesMatter. All of this action was a part of the larger Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, which had begun in response to police brutality against African Americans in 2013. In the collegiate space, student-athletes, with large followings on social media platforms, used this moment to demand that their universities change certain traditions, which were based in racist origins.

One example of student-athletes using their public image to influence change was Mississippi State University's running back, Kylin Hill, who tweeted in June 2020 that he would not play football in the upcoming season if the state of Mississippi did not change its flag due to the flag's symbolic tie to the Confederacy. The message was retweeted 4,700 times and garnered 20,000 likes (Hill, 2020). College coaches were also involved, such as MSU's women's basketball coach, Nikki McCray-Penson, who spoke out against the flag (McCray-Penson,

2020). Days later, the NCAA created a ban in which the State of Mississippi would not be allowed to hold collegiate championships until their flag was changed. Due to the pressure exerted, lawmakers decided to change the 126-year-old flag.

Student-athletes were making changes, through the use of social media, across the country. At Kansas State University, football players threatened to boycott the team after a fellow student posted an insensitive tweet about the murder of George Floyd, an African American man, at the hands of a White police officer in Minnesota in 2020 (Sallee, 2020). The football players' actions forced the University's President and administration to address racism on the Kansas State campus. Student-athletes at Clemson University, with the support of the athletics department's social media, organized a protest, which 3,000 people attended (Hughes, 2020). These are a few examples of how collegiate athletes used social media to increase awareness and bring about social change. In the of summer of 2020 ,college athletic departments began posting about social issues on their own social media pages, as organizations and businesses also began to use their social media platforms. It is apparent that social change is important to some student-athletes, but how this interacts with their athletic department and the crossover of sport and activism has yet to be determined.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is multi-faceted. Existing research has examined how fans and athletes feel about athlete activism (Frederick et al., 2017) but researchers have not yet examined athletes' attitudes of activism at the collegiate organizational level. Due to this gap in the literature, the study aims to discover student-athletes' perceptions about their athletics departments' involvement in race-related issues and the BLM movement through social media channels.

Additionally, the study will examine if student-athletes believe their athletics department did a sufficient job in posting about race-related issues during Summer 2020, and if there are differences based on a student-athlete's race, while providing insights into how athletics departments could improve in future postings. Because several athletics departments began to use social media to address race related concerns in 2020 without real guidance or experience, this study will guide athletics departments on how to create content around these issues in the future.
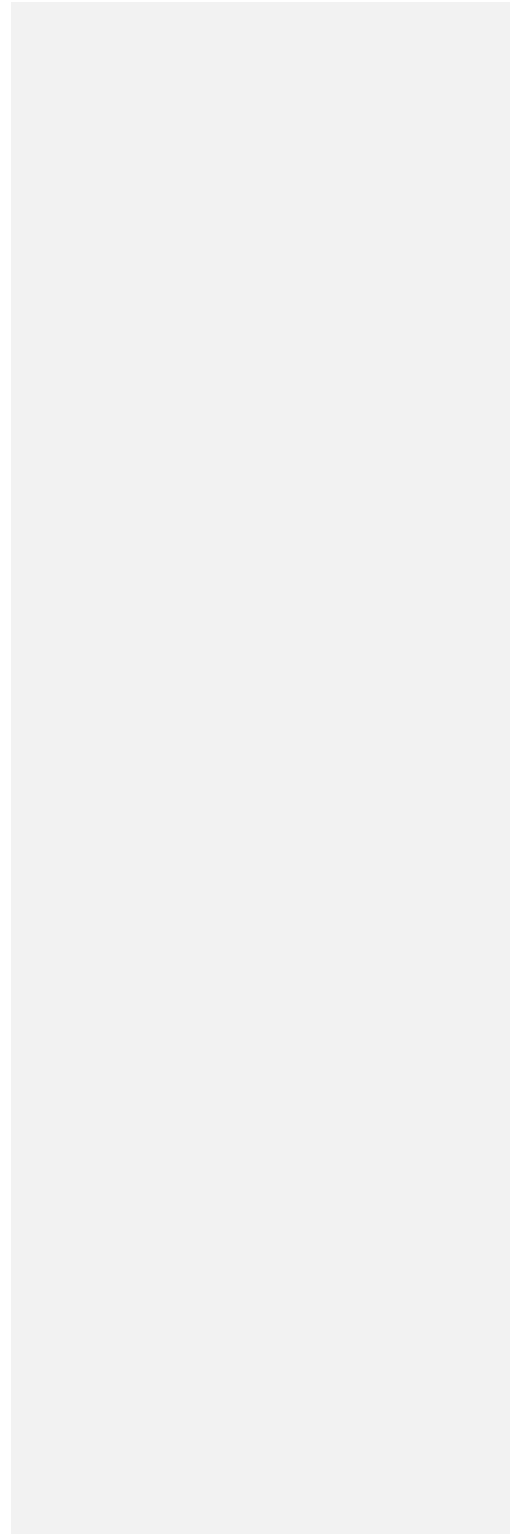
<div align="center">**Rationale**</div>

Overall, 18% of NCAA student-athletes are African American. In men's basketball and football, the highest revenue producing sports, the percentage of African American athletes is greater, as 44.8% of college football players and 53% of basketball players are African American (Kluch & Wilson, 2020). Additionally, 43% of women's basketball players identify as African American (Kluch & Wilson, 2020). Previous research indicates that Black student-athletes face numerous challenges, and they frequently perceive their institutions as unsupportive (Cooper, 2017). Universities need to understand how to make African American student-athletes feel welcomed and included in their campus communities.

As part of inclusivity, one step college athletics departments can take is to use their social media resources to recognize issues important to the student-athletes. Social media had been reported as a tool to build community and promote civic engagement (Skoric et al., 2015), which in turn can foster a more inclusive environment. As athletics departments begin to grapple with political issues through public forums such as social media, the marketing and communications staff have to be cognizant of the perceptions of student-athletes, as well as their fan base.

Additionally, perceived inclusion in the workplace can affect employee performance. Scholars of organizational behavior suggest that organizations should focus on ways to make

employees feel included to enhance employee commitment (Chen & Tang, 2018). Although

athletes do not have legal status as employees in their institutions, student-athletes dedicate

immense amounts of time to represent their universities. Thus, it is vital for athletics departments

to understand the role they play in increasing morale among their student-athletes.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Framework

As this study examines the intersection of activism, race, the identity of student-athletes, and university communications, it is appropriate for several theories to serve as the foundation for this study. The Critical Race Theory (CRT), Framing, and Social Identity Theory are the three frameworks utilized in this research.

Critical Race Theory

Several scholars have utilized CRT as a lens to look at racism's prevalent role in society. CRT is explained by Delgado et al. (2017), who outlined several primary tenets of CRT. In summary of their work, CRT proposes that a) the dominant group benefits from racism, which exists in everyday life b) racism continues because it benefits the dominant group without providing an incentive to end it c) race is not biological, yet it has been constructed through society d) as the dominant point of view on different groups changes, people experience racism differently e) people have overlapping identities f) people of color have experiences that give them additional insight. Because racism and sports both exist in American society, the two cannot be separated (Agyemang & DeLorme, 2010).

Not only is sport an area where racism exists, but additionally college campuses struggle with issues of race. Studies have shown how overall, African American students can face additional challenges as they transition to universities, including issues with stereotyping from the faculty and student-body, the legacy of racism, and cultural isolation, among others (Njororai, 2012). These issues can especially shape how minority student athletes identify in their racial group (Chavous et al., 2018). Furthermore, research suggests that Black student-athletes who transferred from predominantly White institutions (PWI) to Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) experienced a more holistic environment, which aided their

overall development as a student and athlete (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). By using CRT to examine Black student-athletes' experiences, the researchers provided further evidence that PWIs pose issues for Black student-athletes on campus.

At the collegiate level, it is crucial to know and understand the lack of diversity found in decision-making positions in athletic departments. In 2018, 84.3% of Division I, 90% of Division II, and 92.7% of Division III athletic directors were White (Kluch & Wilson, 2020). Although the NCAA is implementing initiatives to remedy this issue (Kluch & Wilson, 2020), White is the predominant cultural lens through which many decisions are being made. In terms of organizational leadership, researchers suggest that organizations would benefit from using a CRT approach for leadership because it would show a commitment to social justice (Cooper et al., 2017).

Fans overall represent the privilege of White culture over Black culture (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). Researchers have acknowledged that when athletes vocalize their opinions on social injustices, the fans must recognize that social inequities exist (Freedman, 2017). Therefore, when student-athletes protest or partake in social activism, they are challenging the dominant position of the predominantly White administration and university culture with which they are situated. Collegiate athletics social media departments represent the student-athletes and university as a whole. Therefore, social media coordinators have the opportunity to show their commitment and support of their student-athletes via social media, which can serve as a platform to build community. Communication via social media can increase social capital (Kim & Kim, 2019).

Framing

Framing further guides this investigation on how athletic departments are presenting communications concerning race and activism. Framing originates from the work of Goffman (1974) in which he suggests that framing provides people with ways to classify information. Framing demonstrates how the selection, emphasis, and exclusion of certain topics makes them more predominant (Entman, 1993). Endres (2004) argues that frames reflect the dominant norms and values.

Traditionally, framing has been used to investigate how traditional news outlets present information, but more research in social media has utilized this framework (Frederick et al, 2017). By using framing theory, scholars are able to discern how using certain frames can affect attitudes of sports media audiences (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). As one of the most visible segments of the university, athletic departments play an important role in developing image and culture of universities (Finch & Clopton, 2017). Due to the fact content creators have to choose the information which is disseminated to the public (Lewis & Weaver, 2015), it important for athletic departments' social media managers to understand the effects of their selected frames on their target audiences.

Framing theory has been used to examine the role of race, gender, and nationality in sports, especially the Olympics. For example, researchers studied how the press in China and the United States differed in their presentation of the 2008 Olympic torch relay (Ying & Shahira, 2013). At the collegiate level, scholars have studied how framing affects the perceptions of student-athletes on campus. Scholars suggest that framing and media affects how student-athletes are perceived by the other students on campus (Ash & Cranmer, 2020).

As the emphasis on social media platforms increases researchers are beginning to move their examination of framing, race, and sports to these platforms. Johnson and Romney (2018) examined the depiction of athletes on sport networks' Instagram pages. Similar to traditional media outlets, scholars discovered that Black athletes are more likely to be showcased for their athletic skill rather than their off the field accomplishments unlike their counterparts. Presently, a gap in research exists when considering how athletic departments frame their values and norms to their fan base.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory provides insight into how the public perceives disseminated messages. For this study specifically, it guides how student-athletes and potential recruits may perceive messages from a university's athletic department. According to social identity theory, individuals categorize themselves and others into groups (Hogg et al., 1995). Additionally, people's self-conception comes from being in certain social groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). When it comes to building a campus community, it is important to note that people are motivated to affiliate with organizations and systems that boost their self-esteem (Tajfel, 1982). Additionally, Geumchan (2019) supports the notion that individuals are more likely to associate with organizations that represent their own personal attributes (Fink et al., 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in this instance an athlete's involvement or association with an athletic team. In concurrence with social identity theory, it appears that fans may change their attitudes towards an athlete if the athlete's public political ideology differs from the fan. This makes the athlete a member of the "out-group" in the fan's mind (Mudrick et al, 2019).

Social identity theory addresses that in-group communication can affect group norms. Scholars note that communication can help create similar views among group members, which

could lower stereotyping and discrimination (Kim & Kim, 2019). As previously stated, social media can be used to build community. As a result, universities and content creators should be aware of how their work and messaging influences the self-esteem of their student-athletes and teams.

<div align="center">**Social Activism and Sport**</div>

Sports historically have been an important and visible platform for activism. Muhammad Ali, Arthur Ashe, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Billie Jean King are among athletes that used their platforms to address social issues in a visible way. More recently, former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, sparked controversy around the country when he began kneeling during the playing of the national anthem prior to football games in 2016 to bring attention to police brutality and racial injustices in the United States. Several athletes across sport leagues followed Kaepernick's lead. For example, a month after Kaepernick, the WNBA's entire Indiana Fever team knelt during the national anthem to demonstrate their feelings towards the ongoing racial injustices (Vasilogambros, 2016).

There are various ways people have showcased their activism. Smith and Carlos raised their fists on the podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics as a physical demonstration centered on racial inequality. Others have used their money to make a change. For example, in 2017 LeBron James, who has been vocal about race inequalities in America, opened the I Promise School, an elementary school for at-risk youth in Akron, Ohio. Athletes have used social media platforms to organize social protests (Sandoval-Alzmazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). When people are using social media to quickly share information or their opinions, users can quickly join together to form collective action (Earl et al., 2013). Additionally, social media allows protests and movements to be made without a central location or authority (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014).

Because social media has no border or boundaries, these campaigns are also able to internationally gain attention and traction (Boykoff, 2017). Seeing as colleges and universities aim to sign top talent from around the nation and globe, the transcontinental nature of social media is particularly vital for university athletics departments.

The Role of Social Media in Race-Related Sport Activism

Historically, people and organizations communicated via one-way communication sources. A website post, newspaper article, or magazine would be disseminated for people to read. Today, social media content is often user-generated, and the audience can easily interact with this content, allowing for two-way communication (Pegoraro, 2010). Additionally, social media platforms have allowed athletes to communicate with fans without a third-party acting as a barrier. This has allowed for a more open and honest form of communication (Pegoraro, 2010).

Although a majority of existing literature focuses on activist professional athletes, recently similar research has been done in the scope of student-athletes. In 2015, after severe racial tensions at the University of Missouri, several African American football players threatened not to play football for the university until the President stepped down. In subsequent days, the coaching staff and other athletes supported these actions and the President resigned. This situation drew national media attention. Researchers analyzed comments from the University of Missouri Athletics Facebook page to gauge the perception of the student-athletes' actions (Frederick et al., 2017). Trivializing racism, encouraging advocacy, systematic critiques, and incompatibility of advocacy were the primary themes found in the content analysis. In addition, fans believed the focus on advocacy deterred from focusing on the team's success.

These findings supported the narrative that sports and politics should be kept separate among fans, which could be a deterrent to athletic departments when they post about social

issues. Furthermore, with the existing gap in research, athletic departments do not know how posting about these issues affects student-athletes.

In the midst of this campus conflict, Mizzou football players took to Twitter to mobilize their concerns and voices. Twenty players began using #ConcernedStudent1950 and this social media movement eventually spanned the country and the globe (Yan et al., 2018). This research further supports how student-athletes have used their social media platforms to vocalize and protest.

Schmittel and Sanderson (2015) reasoned that although social media gives athletes another platform to vocalize activism, they often receive backlash from fans who do not believe sports and activism intersect. In 2014 after the death of Michael Brown, an African American teenager, five African American football players for the St. Louis Rams placed their arms in a "hands-up" position as they entered the stadium during pre-game introductions. The players' actions sparked discussion from people across the country. Sanderson et al. (2016) analyzed fans Facebook comments and Tweets surrounding the protest by the players. They discovered six primary themes throughout the social media discourse: renouncing fandom, punishment commentary, racial commentary, general criticism, attacking other group members, and presenting "facts."

Due to this aspect of social media, student-athletes can disseminate messages to fans without going through their athletics departments. In doing so, student-athletes have shed light on actions by coaching staffs at their institutions. TCU linebacker, Dylan Jordan, released a statement via Twitter in August 2020 regarding head coach Gary Patterson's use of a racial slur. After this statement, several TCU players skipped the subsequent practice to draw attention to this misconduct. Although this statement received various response by teammates, this tweet

garnered media attention and forced a conversation around race relations by the TCU coaching staff (West, 2020).

Another instance of a student-athlete exposing racism from their coaching staff occurred within the Oklahoma State University football program in 2020. Assistant Mike Gundy was seen in a t-shirt which promoted a news channel that was critical of the BLM movement. Chuba Hubbard, a running back, took to social media to voice his displeasure. He threatened to boycott the program until changes were implemented. This tweet drew support from former and current Oklahoma State players and forced the athletic director and coaching staff to also address racism and the BLM movement on social media (Boone, 2020).

College Athletic Department Actions and Student-Athlete Perceptions

Student-athletes understand the power they have to use their athletic abilities to bring change (McCoy et al., 2017). As athletics departments have used social media as part of their overall branding efforts, researchers have investigated how universities can use best practices in terms of overall strategy. Two of the main challenges that social media practitioners in college athletics face are keeping up with the evolving nature of social media and preserving the brand (Blaszka et al., 2018). Current literature is limited and does not include how athletics departments should evolve in regard to ongoing political and national changes.

Additionally, university athletics departments perform a tough balancing act when it comes to how their student-athletes utilize personal social media accounts. On one hand, there could be repercussions if student-athletes post behavior which does not abide to the NCAA guidelines (Epstein, 2012). Therefore, athletics departments have begun to make guidelines and monitor social media profiles (Sanderson, 2011). Additional research indicates that athletics

departments do not stay current with their policies and these restrictions can have negative
effects on student-athletes (Sanderson at al., 2015).

As social media activism and collegiate athletics department use of social media grows,
research must help guide collegiate athletic department social media managers on how to utilize
social media around race related issues. It has been noted that athletics have played a critical role
at large universities in creating and building brand image (Finch & Clopton, 2017). Therefore,
the communications staff must balance the need to represent the university's overall brand and
ensure they are representing the values of their student-athletes (and/or athletic department
mission and values). Without existing research, college athletic departments currently do not
know the best practices to support their student-athletes, but previous research has examined fan
response to race related activism.

As racial tension grew during the Summer of 2020, Nielson media reported that 69% of
sports fans indicated supporting BLM and 70% of respondents thought that teams should create
marketing initiatives that supported diversity (Nielsen, 2020). Despite these numbers, past
researchers show that fan response to activism can be mixed on social media. The negative fan
feedback demonstrates how activism can cause divisiveness and isolate fan bases. Despite these
reactions, while fans might change their attitudes toward an athlete after the athlete's display of
activism, fans do not typically change their attitudes of the player's associated team (Mudrick et
al., 2019). Yet, the prevalent fear of backlash explains why organizations may be weary of the
reaction from their fan bases. In addition, fans adverse reactions could cause sponsors to pull or
change their sponsorships (Sanderson et al., 2016). These concerns could alter how organizations
address race-related issues on their social media pages.

A majority of the previous research has focused on fans' responses to athlete activism through content analyses. More recently, Sappington et al. (2019) attempted to shift researchers to quantify the public's attitudes towards athlete activism. They developed the 18-item Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ), which included five subscales: affective reactions, perceived conflict with the team, athlete role, lacking qualification, and desired punishment and consequence. Four of these factors (affective reactions, perceived conflict with the team, athlete role, and lacking qualification) are pertinent to my examination of athlete's response to athletic departments' social media content.

Researchers can quantify emotional response to activism through testing affective reaction, which is the degree to which an athlete approves of activism (Sappington et al., 2019). This is important to this investigation due to the fact no research shows how student-athletes feel about activism at the organizational level. The university athletics department's social media pages should represent their student-athletes and identify the students as one of their target audiences. Without this knowledge practitioners working in college athletics do not know if their posts around race relations and the BLM movement are actually taken well by their student-athletes.

Despite previous research which demonstrates how social media can help facilitate community development and belonging (Skoric et al., 2015), it remains important to quantify perceived conflict among the student-athletes. Perceived conflict measures if people believe activism negatively impacts team culture and performance (Sappington et al., 2019). Due to the divisive nature of the topic and movement, it would not be prudent of practitioners to assume all teammates would react the same way to this messaging. Student-athletes' internalization of postings centered around race relations and the BLM movement could lead to conflict among

team members. Despite possibly having the opposite intention, it is currently unknown if sport markets are hurting team culture through posting about race relations and the BLM movement.

One of the primary arguments about athlete activism is the notion that sports and politics should be separated (Frederick et al., 2017). Often this sentiment is because some people believe the athletes role is on the field, and/or an athlete lacks political qualifications to speak out on such matters. Due to the gap in knowledge, it is unknown if college athletics departments are perceived in a similar vein by their student-athletes. This insight can be tested via two factors identified by Sappington et al. (2019): athlete role and lack of political qualifications. For this study, athlete role pertains to the organizational role of the athletics department. According to Sappington et al. (2019), this measure would indicate if student-athletes believe it is among the athletics department's duties to speak out on race relations and the BLM movement. Lack of qualification will measure the degree to which student-athletes believe their athletics department has enough knowledge to speak out on race relations and the BLM movement (Sappington, 2019). Both factors are pertinent to this investigation, as this examination would either show the need for organizational action or the desire for organizational silence on the matter. This understanding will help guide practitioners in future posting decisions around the topic of race relations.

The ATAAQ included a fifth subscale, desired consequence and punishment. This aimed to determine if an individual thought the athletes should face consequence for participating in activism (e.g., being benched on the team). Due to this investigation's focus on organizational behavior, it was determined that measuring punishment and consequence did not align with the purpose of this study.

While it is important to know how spectators or fans feel about athletes' activism, it is equally critical to understand what athletes feel about activism. Intosh et al. (2020) studied NCAA student-athlete perceptions of activism in a quantitative fashion. They used the Social Justice Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012) to measure student-athlete attitudes around social justice. Due to the similarity in population of participants, the findings provide key insights for my study. Most importantly, the researchers found that although the level of engagement in activism among student-athletes is low, student-athletes typically think of activism favorably. The researchers suggested that athletics administrators actively work to create team and campus cultures that empower student-athletes to vocalize their thoughts on social justice issues. As previously noted, social media could play a role in cultivating this culture. Lastly, minority student-athletes possessed stronger positive attitudes towards activism and more likely to participate in activism. In my investigation, I will examine if student-athletes' race affects their perception of how their athletic-departments should post about race-related issues. There is still a gap with understanding student-athlete's views of their athletic departments' role in social justice and activism.

As athletic departments begin to involve themselves in activism, it is very important they recognize the difference between social media activism and slacktivism. Slacktivism has been a term associated with activism that is low in effort and merely symbolic (Morozov, 2009). In 2020, Kluch and Wilson examined the #NCAAInclusion campaign for actual change throughout the NCAA. The purpose of the five-day social media campaign was "to create a dialogue on diversity and inclusion and to communicate the benefit of inclusive environments to the student-athlete experience" by addressing topics pertinent to student-athletes (Kluch & Wilson, 2020, p.S38). Through the NCAA's promotion of this campaign, student-athletes and university

athletic departments were able to highlight the many roles student-athletes juggle off the playing field. The campaign aimed to avoid slacktivism, and although the researchers could find some change after the week-long efforts, some universities believed the campaign did not do enough to bring about actual long-term change to their institution, which can happen if a campaign is deemed as slacktivism.

As another part of social issues awareness, organizations across industries are increasingly participating in corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. "CSR can be broadly understood as the responsibility of organizations to be ethical and accountable to the needs of their society as well as their stakeholders" (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 692). Because utilizing CSR tactics can pose risk to organizations when not fully executed (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006), one can see why organizations are quick not to make statements or become involved in CSR. Sport managers are looking across the industry to see how other professionals are implementing best practices (Armstrong et al., 2018). The NCAA and member institutions are no exception, as they have implemented CSR practices (Ko et al., 2014). With an increased presence of athlete activism, college athletic departments must continue to determine how they fit into this landscape.

Researchers have found that university students' perception of an athletic department's CSR initiatives affects their patronage, intention to support, and team identification (Geumchan, 2019). This research supports the notion that administrators and communications personnel with college athletics should develop and implement clear CSR strategies to engage their publics. Due to limited attention given to activism and CSR within college athletics, there is no existing research on the effects of activism and CSR initiatives on current student-athletes or potential

recruits. This could be vital for schools to know as colleges want to support their current athletes and continue vie for the nation's top talent.

Although important to this study, the above studies do not address social media, athletic departments, or student-athletes' reactions to social media postings. This study will fill gaps in existing research and develop new data and insights which could be useful for college athletics department staff in terms of inclusivity, organizational culture and support of student-athletes, and recruiting. Because social media messages (or lack thereof) are an outwardly facing public relations channel representing the athletic department, the results of this study will provide athletic department staff, including sports information staff, coaches, and administrators, knowledge to make decisions concerning what to post and if communications departments should provide social media training to coaches.

<center>**Study Context**</center>

To fully grasp the societal backdrop of this study, it is crucial to also understand the history of the Black Lives Matter movement. #BlackLivesMatter first appeared on Twitter July 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin. Over the past seven years the hashtag gained momentum in response to brutality towards African Americans, primarily from law enforcement. #BlackLivesMatter was used approximately 30 million times on Twitter in the first five years of the hashtag's use. After the death of George Floyd, the hashtag was utilized 47.8 million times on Twitter from May 26, 2020 to June 7, 2020 (Anderson et al., 2020). These numbers demonstrate the increased public attention and engagement during 2020 as more athletic departments also began to post about racial injustices on social media.

Student-athletes think positively of athlete activism overall (Intosh et al., 2020), but athletics departments do not know if these positive sentiments extend to their work on social

media. Finding out student-athletes' affective reactions help this understanding. Previous findings show how fans perceive athlete activism out of the scope of their job and expertise (Frederick et al., 2017). An exploration into athlete role and lack of qualification would show if this same sentiment exists between student-athletes and their universities' athletics departments. Lastly, due to the fact that past research indicates social media as a way to cultivate community (Skoric et al., 2015), I am interested in analyzing the effects of the university's athletics department's postings on team culture. Based on these understandings, the following questions were proposed to look into university athletics department's role in social media activism for race relations and specifically, the BLM movement.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do student-athletes feel about social media posts made surrounding race relations and the BLM movement by their university's athletics department (affective reaction)?

RQ2: Do student-athletes believe team conflict can arise due to their university's athletics departments social media posts about race related issues and the BLM movement on social media (perceived conflict)?

RQ3: Do student-athletes believe it is the role of their university's athletics department to post about race related issues and the BLM movement on social media (athletic department role)?

RQ4: Do student-athletes believe their university's athletics department are qualified to post about race related issues and the BLM movement on social media (lack of qualifications)?

RQ5: Does posting about race related issues and the BLM movement on social media affect Black student-athletes more than non-Black student-athletes?

RQ6: What type of social media content from university athletics departments do student-athletes believe would be most effective surrounding the issue of race relations and the BLM movement?

3 METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A 41-question online survey was developed based on the literature and distributed via Qualtrics. After Institutional Review Board approval, the survey was distributed to NCAA student-athletes. I emailed a sports information director from every school that had a working website and an identifiable person to contact on the College Sport Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) directory. A total of 933 sports information directors in athletic departments across Division I, II, and III were emailed. Additionally, I shared the survey with 18 contacts through networking who worked in various roles in athletic departments across the country. Seventy-five athletic departments responded to the research request. Of those, 24 athletic departments decided to not share the survey among their student-athletes while the remaining athletic departments said that they would either pass the request through administration or they would send to student-athletes in differing capacities. Those who shared the survey mentioned various methods of distribution which included: sharing the survey through their coaching staffs, their student-athlete advisory board, or directly to all student-athletes. In hopes of reaching other sport information directors, I received permission from CoSIDA to post the survey on a group forum. I also posted the survey on my personal social media accounts to gather additional responses via snowball sampling.

Over a six-week period, 431 participants took the survey. Any NCAA student-athlete, 18 years or older, was deemed eligible for participation in the study. After ensuring that participants met the eligibility requirements, I removed any incomplete surveys and responses which did not appropriately fulfill the survey's requirements or reading checks. In total 256 survey responses were utilized.

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 431 people participated in the survey. 48 of the responses were thrown out due to not meeting the criteria of being a consenting NCAA student-athlete and 18 years old. Additionally, 100 responses were not utilized due to incompleteness. Meanwhile, a final 27 were discarded after checking the survey's reading checks of one positively coded ATAAQ item and one prompt to select a certain answer. After cleaning the data, 256 surveys were utilized, yielding a response rate of 71% female ($n = 137$) and 29% male ($n = 57$). A vast majority of respondents identified as White/Caucasian, 77.8% ($n = 182$). Meanwhile, 9.8% of the participants identified as Black or African American ($n = 23$). Additionally, 1.7% of the student-athletes identified as Asian ($n = 4$), 0.4% Native Hawaiian ($n = 1$), 7.3% biracial ($n = 17$), and 2.9% identified as other ($n = 7$). The composition of participants' year in school resulted in roughly equal representation: 29.5% freshmen ($n = 71$), 19.2% sophomores ($n = 46$), 25.8% juniors ($n = 62$), 19.6% seniors ($n = 47$), and 5.8% fifth-year or graduate transfer ($n = 14$). The average age of the participants was 19.9 years old with an age range of 18-24 (Table 1).

Additionally, the participants equally represented NCAA Division I ($n = 76$), II ($n = 79$), and III ($n = 85$; Table 1). Of those who attended Division I institutions, 27% ($n = 21$) represented Power Five athletic departments, 31% participated in Group of Five athletics, and 18% ($n = 14$) played in FCS conferences. Student-athletes participated from a total of 40 different universities across the three divisions, including 19 in Division I, 11 in Division II, and 10 in Division III. This item was unanswered by 31 individuals who may not have wanted their school identified.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Instrument

The 41-item questionnaire allowed me to assess three areas about the student-athletes: their (1) perceptions of athletic departments' social media about race relations and Black Lives Matters, (2) personal social media usage, and (3) demographics.

To examine RQs 1-5, a series of questions were adopted and modified from the ATAAQ (Sappington et al., 2019). Four of the five subscales were used to assess the student-athlete's response (affective reactions, perceived conflict with the team, athlete role, and lacking qualification). Consistent with the ATAAQ, items were set on a 7-point Likert-type scale using the anchors "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree." (7). Past internal consistency estimates for the ATAAQ met the commonly accepted standards ($\alpha > .70$) and all subscales resulted in strong correlations in expected directions (Sappington et al., 2019). Due to the purpose of this study to examine athletic departments' social media usage, a few modifications were made for each survey question. First, the word "athlete" was exchanged for "athletic department." By using an organization, I showed how the ATAAQ can be applied in investigations regarding organizational behavior and attitudes towards activism. Secondly, I was primarily focused on activism in regard to the BLM movement and race relations. Therefore, I narrowed the scope of each question from "political or social issues" to "race relations and the BLM movement." For example, to ascertain a student athlete's perception of their athletic department's qualifications of posting about race relations and the BLM, I asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with I asked "I do not think that athletics departments are informed enough to speak out on social media publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement" rather than "I do not think athletes are informed enough to speak out on political or social issues". There was a total of 15 items used to measure student-athlete perceptions (5 items for affective reaction, 4 items for perceived conflict, 3 items for athletic department role, and 3 items for lack of qualification). It is

Commented [EW1]: You don't have to write it, but I'm curious to know why one of the subscales was not used.

Commented [nb2R1]: The punishment factor and the related questions did not make sense in terms of the athletics deparment

important to note that the majority of items were reverse coded, following Sappington et al. (2019), who wanted to use uniform wording to avoid issues with reverse coding. In this particular investigation, I wanted to ensure that participants were thoroughly reading the survey, therefore one question from the modified ATAAQ was positively written to act as a reliability check. This question came from one of the three lack of qualification variables.

To investigate RQ6, I created four additional questions comprised of three original open-ended and one yes/no items to further understand the attitudes of student-athletes. The goal of the single item was to provide a basis on how many athletes think their schools managed the rising racial tensions in 2020 well. The open-ended questions allowed participants to openly reflect on collegiate athletics departments' posting behaviors around the BLM movement during the summer of 2020. This information provided further insight into what posts are effective or ineffective for practitioners to publish in the future. Participants were prompted to describe social media posts that stood out to them, describe ways athletic departments could improve their posting, and provide any additional comments or insights.

I also collected information about the participants' demographic makeup and social media usage. I collected the student-athletes' demographic information (Conference, Year in School, Race, Gender, and Age) for descriptive purposes and group comparisons based on racial identity (RQ5). Because my study focuses on perceptions of the athletic departments' social media presence, I ascertained the personal social media usage information about the student-athletes. Eight scaled and multiple-choice questions were asked to best gauge and understand student-athlete usage of social media. The scaled questions asked student-athletes to identify their overall usage of social media along with their individual use of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The questions were based on a 1-7 Likert scale with anchors of "never" and

"all the time." These results allowed for additional comparisons to be drawn between student-athlete perception and usage of social media platforms. Additionally, student-athletes' social media usage was measured by asking the student-athletes if they followed their university athletic department (e.g., @GSUPanthers), their specific sport (e.g., @GSUBeachVB), or their coaches on social media.

Finally, to ensure response validity, I created attention checks. Participants were instructed to select a specified response number in the middle of the modified ATAAQ questions. Further, as previously mentioned, one of the ATAAQ modified questions for the lack of qualification factor was positively worded instead of negatively worded. Lastly, two social media related questions were positively worded. There were two other positively worded questions that served as attention checks.

Data Analysis

After I ensured a good dataset was being used, I measured the reliability and credibility of the quantitative questions. I measured by evaluating the Cronbach's alpha (α), which I looked for results greater than 0.70 for each factor (Hair et al., 2019).

To answer research questions 1-4 the descriptive statistics, specifically composite means and standard deviations for each factor, were calculated with SPSS 25. Each research question was answered by measuring the responses for the corresponding factor from the modified ATTAQ questions. RQ1 was answered through examining the affective reaction response items ($N = 5$). RQ2 was calculated the perceived conflict responses ($N = 4$). RQ3 was tabulated through the athletic department role questions ($N = 3$), while RQ4 was analyzed through the lack of qualification responses ($N = 3$). Because the scale items are negatively written, low scores indicated a more positive view on activism (Sappington, 2019). If affective reaction means were

high (>4.0), then student-athletes had negative reactions to athletic departments posting on social media. If perceived conflict scores were low (<4.0), then in terms of team culture and success, student-athletes perceived athletics departments posting on social media about race relations and the BLM movement less of an issue. If scores were high (>4.0) for athlete role, or in this instance athletic department role, then student-athletes did not believe that posting about race relations or the BLM movement should be a duty of their athletics department. Furthermore, if the lack of qualifications means were high (>4.0), then student-athletes did not believe athletics departments are informed enough to voice opinions on the subject. The reference point of 4.0 was determined due to the fact this was the "neutral" point on the survey scale. Therefore, answers below or above suggest a certain attitude towards athletics department activism.

After tabulating the average responses, I ran multiple t-tests to analyze if a difference in attitudes existed between non-Black and Black student-athletes' attitudes towards the BLM movement, which answered Research Question 5. A t-test was run on each of the factors that answered RQ1-RQ4. Significant results ($p < .05$) showed that the group means were different between non-Black and Black student-athletes on each of the four means. Additionally, I ran an ANCOVA test to determine if the perceptions of Black and non-Black student-athletes were affected by self-reported social media usage.

Research Question 6 was answered through analyzing the open-ended questions. I entered and stored the responses in NVivo 12. I coded the qualitative information by myself. The coauthor offered advice and feedback throughout the coding process. The answers were coded for consistent responses. Themes emerged from these codes, which were developed for a better understanding of student-athlete perceptions of their athletics department's role in racial justice and what social media content they would want to see in the future.

4 RESULTS

Reliability

Reliability was checked for each of the factors from the modified ATAAQ. Three of the

four factors yielded Cronbach's alphas above the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019): affective

reaction (.97), perceived conflict (.91), and Athletic Department Role (.92). The Cronbach's

alpha for lack of qualification was .68, slightly below the noted threshold. The reliability did not

increase by disregarding any of the three items which comprised the factor. Due to the

importance of the factor, the three items for this factor were kept in the dataset.

Each of the factors held positive moderate or strong correlations with each other.

Affective reaction and perceived conflict were found to have a strong, positive correlation, $r =$

.85, $p =$ <.01. Affective reaction and athletic department role were strongly correlated, $r = .87$, p

= <.01. Lastly, affective reaction held a moderate correlation with lack of qualification, $r = .55$, p

= <.01. Athletic department role was strongly correlated with perceived conflict, $r = .80$, $p =$

<.01. A moderate correlation was found between lack of qualification and perceived conflict, $r =$

.57, $p =$ <.01. Lastly, a moderate correlation was discovered between athletic department role

and lack of qualification $r = .57$, $p =$ <.01.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Social Media Usage

The participants registered a mean score of 5.67 (out of 7.0) for overall social media

usage. The platforms with the lowest reported usage were Facebook ($M = 2.71$) and Twitter (M

=3.00). TikTok ($M = 4.19$) and Instagram ($M = 5.55$) were deemed the most utilized platforms

by the student-athletes. A positively skewed item gauging social media usage served as one of

the survey's attention checks. Additionally, 85% ($n = 218$) of participants noted following their

university's athletics department on social media. Meanwhile, only 54% (n = 137) of

respondents followed their coaching staff (Table 3).

<div align="center">TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE</div>

Research Questions 1-4

One of the primary goals of the present research was to determine how student-athletes

perceived social media activism centered around the Black Lives Matter movement and racial

justice in terms of factors identified by the ATAAQ (Sappington et al., 2019). The participants

reported less than the 4.0 midpoint on each of the four factors (Table 4). The participants rated

athletic department role (RQ 3; M = 2.94; SD = 1.79) the highest, followed by lack of

qualification (RQ 4; M = 2.89; SD = 1.57), perceived conflict (RQ 2; M = 2.65; SD = 1.52), and

affective reaction (RQ 1; M = 2.39; SD = 1.66).

<div align="center">TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE</div>

Research Question 5

Due to previous research that indicates African-American student-athletes commonly

perceive their institutions as unsupportive (Cooper, 2017), I was interested in analyzing if any

differences in student-athlete perceptions existed between Black and non-Black student-athletes.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to detect differences in the mean scores for each

factor (affective reaction, perceived conflict, athletic department role, and lack of qualification)

based on the racial categorization. Black student-athletes (M = 2.12, SD = 1.77) were

significantly more likely to believe that it was the athletic department's role to address racial

justice than their non-Black counterparts (M = 2.99, SD = 1.81), $t(225)$ = 2.39, p = .02. Black

student-athletes (M = 2.20, SD = 1.73) and non-Black student-athletes (M = 2.39, SD = 1.66)

were not significantly different in terms of affective reaction. Additionally, Black student-

athletes (M = 2.40, SD = 1.69) and non-Black student-athletes (M = 2.65, SD = 1.51) did not

register significantly different responses in terms of perceived conflict. Lastly, Black student-athletes (M = 3.44, SD = 1.55) and non-Black student-athletes (M = 3.48, SD = 1.27) were not significantly different in terms of lack of qualification.

Additionally, I ran an ANCOVA to determine if differences existed between Black and non-Black student-athletes when controlling for social media usage. There is a significant effect on perceptions of the athletics department's role between Black and non-Black student-athletes after controlling for self-reported social media usage, $F(1, 222)$ = 4.46, p = .04.

<div align="center">TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE</div>

Research Question 6

Of the 383 surveys which met the eligibility requirements of being a NCAA student-athlete and 18 years or older, 188 contained written comments. Upon review, 14 responses were eliminated due to not actually providing further information such as saying "I do not know" to the asked questions. Of the 174 analyzed surveys, 113 comments answered which social media posts centered around athletic department activism stood out to them during the summer of 2020. Secondly, 129 comments provided insight into how their athletic department could improve their activism efforts in the future. Additionally, 37 comments were analyzed which were unsupportive of the athletics department's activism efforts. As the "provide additional comments" section allowed participants to write in whatever they felt, all of these responses addressed a pre-existing node. Therefore, these comments are included in the total responses which address the two primary open-ended questions.

The 174 utilized surveys yielded a response rate of 72% female (n = 94) and 28% male (n = 35). Participants had a racial composition of 13% Black (n = 21), 74% White (n = 117), 2% Asian (n = 3), 7% biracial (n = 10), and 4% other (n = 5). In terms of social media usage, participants registered a mean score of 4.84 (out of 7) for social media usage. About 80% (79%)

of this group of student-athletes followed their athletics department, while 50% followed a

member of their coaching staff on social media. Lastly, 43% of these participants believed that

their athletics department responded well to the BLM in 2020, while 27% did not believe their

athletics department did a sufficient job.

A content analysis was conducted for each question. Responses were broken into

subthemes and then related subthemes were grouped into themes. Direct quotations from

participants are displayed in the analysis of the themes. Participants are labeled by their gender,

race, and Division, if provided.

Part I. What social media posts stood out?

This question aimed to gauge what type of athletics department social media content

centered around race relations and the BLM movement student-athletes remembered. Analysis of

the materials which corresponded to which social media posts stood out to the student-athletes

resulted in 10 preliminary nodes which comprised 3 themes: mechanism, allyship, and

supportive action.

Mechanism

Platforms. Student-athletes most commonly reported seeing information regarding race

relations on Instagram, which is not surprising when one considers that the surveyed student-

athlete population utilized Instagram with the most frequency.

Frequency. Additionally, it appeared that student-athletes took note of the frequency of

posts they saw. Student-athletes were cognizant of if their athletics department made decisions to

post about the subject frequently or if they decided to avoid discussing it on social media. One

student-athlete noted, "They posted multiple items." Meanwhile, other student-athletes said that

"the lack thereof" in terms of posting stood out to them.

Specific Posts & Teams. Student-athletes often cited seeing their school engage in #BlackOutTuesday or post on relevant holidays such as Juneteenth. Participants also remembered specific teams which posted, most memorable being posts made by the football team. It is important to note that since we did not ask the student-athletes the sport they play, they could remember the posts because it pertained to their sport.

Allyship

Highlight Individuals. Student-athletes received content from an authentic source positively. For example, the student-athletes remembered posts that highlighted the lived experience of their teammates or athletics department staff. The student-athletes preferred when their athletic department staff highlighted an individual's story instead of speaking for the student-athletes or athletics department staff. Participants shared sentiments such as "promoting student-athlete voices, a teammate shared her experience as a Black woman in the United States."

Unity & Values. Participants also noted posts which displayed positivity, unity, and stood up for those affected by the country's injustices. Lastly, student-athletes remembered posts which were genuine and that reinforced the values of the athletics department, stating "Posts that were genuine and heartfelt, not just posting a black square like everyone else," when it comes to which posts were the most memorable.

Supportive Action

On-Campus Action. Student-athletes seemed concerned with not only the postings on social media, but also with the athletics department's actions off the court and the digital screen. Many of the participants wanted to ensure that the social media posts were not just for show, but equated to actual change in the athletic department. Student-athletes noted remembering posts

which highlighted their school's on campus marches and peaceful protests. Additionally,

student-athletes noted posts that showed meetings between coaching staff and student-athletes to

discuss these topics.

Providing Resources. Along the same lines, student-athletes noted educational posts,

especially posts that provided resources for getting involved or coping. These posts made

student-athletes feel as though the messaging was not just for show, "Posts with resources and

ways to get involved that did not appear performative (like the black squares)."

Against Performative Activism. Student-athletes not only remembered posts which

highlighted resources, but they also remembered those posts that did not seem to address change

away from the digital screen, "I saw many posts with empty promises from the athletics

department to better itself in terms of antiracist work without any concrete action." Additionally,

student-athletes realized when the athletics department seemed uneducated on the topic. If

athletic departments are going to make postings, student-athletes want the staffers to be educated

and sensitive to the issue at hand. Students noticed when there were either inaccuracies or

statements that felt lacked thought/knowledge. For example, a female Division III student-athlete

who identified as White and Black said:

> (Specifically, for the BLM at my school) The university's main Instagram account posted
> a statement from the president of the school about the injustices that minorities, more
> suggestively, black people at {school} face. It opened up with a quote from a white man
> that not only had slaves, but raped them and then didn't claim the children (Thomas
> Jefferson). Everyone thought that this post was so very wonderful, however, I grew up in
> a place (Charlottesville, VA) where the ground that sick man walked on was
> worshiped…To be blunt: it pissed me off to see this post. The number of POC that
> could've been chosen to quote to show that there are strong POC, smart POC, successful
> POC is unmatched and instead our white president chose a white man.

Part II. How do you think athletics department could improve their discussions of race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media?

This question aimed to provide athletics department staff tangible feedback, which could be implemented in future posts. Analysis of the corresponding responses resulted in nine preliminary codes, which accounted for 4 themes: social media posting strategies, relevant perspective, off-screen action, and content with school response.

Suggested Social Media Posting Strategies

Stronger Stance. Several student-athletes wanted their athletics department to make a stronger stance. Student-athletes were not pleased when athletics departments tried to indirectly discuss the racial tension at hand. Some student-athletes took this as a sign that the athletics departments was attempting to balance pleasing their athletes and pleasing other key target audience members, including their boosters or season ticket holders. A female Division I student-athlete who identified as White said:

> I think our athletic department can do a better job of taking an actual stance. Currently they are trying to walk a thin line of supporting Black student athletes enough that they feel better while not upsetting their season ticket holders. Our AD has said that they support student athletes but they don't want to be divisive.

Inclusivity. Due to the incidents of police brutality against African-Americans in 2020, most of the overall social media response was specifically targeted at the BLM movement. A couple of student-athletes suggested that athletics departments recognize their other minority student-athletes in the future postings. A Division II student-athlete stated, "If they are to talk about BLM why wouldn't they post about every other race? I understand that there are injustices within the black community but there is no talk of other minorities."

Consistency. Lastly, several student-athletes believed that the discussions on social media occurred too seldomly. For example, participants often shared sentiments similar to "Talk about

it more often, not just once in a while." It appeared that many student-athletes urged on-going conversations which would make the athletics department proactive in their handling of race relations, rather than merely reactive.

Relevant Perspective

Highlight Individuals. Student-athletes expressed that athletics departments could show more relative perspective, by highlighting the individual stories of BIPOC staff and student-athletes. The respondents did not want to feel as though BIPOC individuals were being spoken for, and participants wanted BIPOC individuals to have the platform to highlight their stories and experiences. A female Division II student-athlete who identified as Black said, "By letting actual African Americans or any people of color speak out on the issues instead of trying to speak for them."

Student-athletes were aware of the racial composition of their athletics department making statements like, "Our student-athletes and coaching staff lack diversity in general, so it is hard for me to see the athletics department as a credible source of the race relations movement." Therefore, if an individual is not being highlighted, student-athletes wanted to ensure that whoever is making the social media posts centered around race relations is educated on the topic. A female Division III student-athlete who identified as White and Black noted, "Educate themselves. Listen to their athletes that have experiences with this. Regardless of demographics discuss this."

Education. Along with ensuring the posts were made from a point of understanding and being well-informed, student-athletes wanted the posts to be educational and provide information to the audience members sharing sentiments such as, "Post more factual information."

Call for Off-Screen Action and Activism

School Resources and Activities. The third theme which emerged was the desire for off-screen action. Similarly, to how student-athletes did not want to see posts merely for show, student-athletes noted an interest in activism efforts to extend beyond social media (the phone or computer screen). Student-athletes suggested that their college athletics departments should highlight activities occurring on campus. Additionally, student-athletes were cognizant of their athletics department's hiring practices and student body racial composition making statements like, "Our student-athletes and coaching staff lack diversity in general, so it is hard for me to see that the athletics department as a credible source of the race relations movement."

Promote Discussions. Of the student-athletes who seemed concerned, a majority wanted the athletics department to foster an environment which would promote discussion around the BLM movement. Student-athletes tended to be interested in discussions with their team, which would be led by coaches or student-athletes. For example, a Division III student-athlete who identified as White said:

> I think addressing it is a good place to start for a public social media page so current students and prospective students can know where the university stands on these issues, but individual team meetings are the best place to have personalized discussions on what we can do as individuals.

Along with discussion, some student-athletes suggested that athletics departments promote on-campus diversity and inclusion events or create their own programs which address the topic.

Maintain School Response

Despite concerns and changes discussed by student-athletes, it should be noted that 9% of the respondents to this question expressed that they were content with their athletics department's social media response to the BLM movement in 2020. For example, a female

Division I student-athlete who identified as Black said, "I think it was the perfect amount. They did not overstep by having white leadership speak like they understood."

Views Against Athletic Department Activism

Although a majority of respondents expressed a positive or neutral view in regards to wanting their athletic department to be involved in digital activism, 28 commenters expressed negative views of their athletics department's activism efforts. Three themes emerged from these participants. Some student-athletes opposed the athletics department's involvement because they did not believe it was the athletics department's role, "I don't believe that sports and politics should be intertwined". Some student-athletes shared this sentiment when discussing the athletics department as a whole, while other participants also did not believe these topics should be discussed within individual teams as well.

A Division I student-athlete who identified as White said:

> I do not think it should be discussed within the teams. We are here to play and not here to get involved with all of the politics that is involved with all the BLM. If you want to support it then that is up to you and should not be brought up for discussion as a team.

Aside from not believing that politics and sport should overlap, other respondents displayed disdain towards the movement in general. A male Division I student-athlete who identified as White said:

> I believe we could focus on promoting equality and loving each other regardless of the color of our skin instead of promoting the Black Lives Matter movement. BLM does not focus on equality, and it instead preaches that all White people are racists and bigoted. I feel like this discourages people like myself from engaging in important discussions to help race relations and champion equality, as it instills the fear in me that I will be labeled a racist not because of my actions but because of the color of my skin. This is the very problem we are trying to avoid- judging people by their looks and skin instead of their actions and character. It has to go both ways.

Lastly, some participants were not supportive of athletics department activism efforts because they did not want the athletics department trying to sway their opinions. Additionally,

student-athletes did not want to feel pressure to partake in activism activities such as marches,

stating, "Marches, rallies, etc. should not be made mandatory or strongly advised".

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Additional Findings

Due to the current gap in literature in terms of social media activism and sport

organizational behavior, I decided to test if any additional differences between groups could be

discerned. Two primary differences were discovered. In independent sample t-tests conducted

for each of the four factors, between male and female student-athletes, male athletes registered

consistently higher mean scores. In terms of affective reaction, males registered a statistically

significantly higher mean score ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.90$) than females (($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.47$) [

$t(85.32) = 3.03$, $p = .00$]. For perceived conflict, males registered a mean score of 3.21 ($SD =$

1.70), while females reported a mean score of 2.41 ($SD = 1.42$), $t(90.14) = 3.11$, $p = .00$. The

largest difference in perception between gender was in terms of the athletics department's role.

Male athletes had a mean score of 3.75 ($SD = 2.00$), while females reported a mean score of 2.59

(SD = 1.62), $t(87.99) = 3.89$, $p = .00$. Lastly, males reported higher mean scores in terms of lack

of qualification ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.25$) than females ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(192) = 2.87$, $p = .01$.

Equal variances were not assumed for affective reaction, perceived conflict, and athletic

department role. Equal variances were assumed for lack of qualification. These suggests that

overall males felt significantly less favorable of their athletics department's role in racial justice

movements via social media.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

Additionally, a MANOVA was conducted to test differences in mean scores for each of

the four factors from the ATAAQ across NCAA Division level (Division I, II, III). Results

indicated that there were statistically significant differences between at least one NCAA Division

level and one factor, Wilk's Λ = .91, F (8, 468) = 2.75, p = .01, $\eta2$ = .05.Significant differences

were discerned between Division II and Division III athletes in term of their affective reaction

$F(2, 237)$ = 3.98, p = .02. Division II student-athletes registered a mean score of 2.77 (M = 2.77,

SD = 1.90). Meanwhile, Division III participants reported a lower mean score of 2.04 (M = 2.04,

SD = 1.47). In addition, Division II and Division III reported significantly different in terms of

perceived conflict F(2, 237) = 4.10, p = .01. Division II student-athletes again reported a higher

mean score with 2.99 (M = 2.99, SD = 1.75), while Division III student-athletes reported a mean

score of 2.31 (M = 2.31, SD = 1.38).

<div align="center">TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE</div>

Furthermore, ANOVA tests were conducted to discern difference in means between

student-athletes who follow their team, follow their coach, have varying social media usage, and

their year in school, none of which yielded statistically significant results.

With a primary objective of delivering working advice to collegiate sport marketers and

communication staffs, I asked an additional set of scaled and multiple-choice questions to gauge

student-athlete perceptions of posts and future practices. Thirty-five percent of participants

believed their university athletics department did a good job responding to the Black Lives

Matter movement and social justice issues during Summer 2020. Additionally, using the same

Likert scale as before, the participants were asked their perception of social media posts being

made on racially centered holidays (e.g., Juneteenth, MLK Day, etc.). Student-athletes registered

a mean score of 2.88 and standard deviation of 1.711. Lastly, the participants were asked their

perception of their collegiate coaching staffs engaging in conversations of race on social media.

The participants recorded a mean score of 2.98 and standard deviation of 1.931.

TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

5 Discussion and Research Implications

Social media provides organizations, including college athletics departments, a platform to disseminate their message and branding to key target audiences. During the rise of racial tensions in 2020, college athletics departments made decisions to speak or not to speak out on the country's injustices on social media. Because 2020 marked the first time that many college athletics departments tackled race relations, many athletics department staff may have been nervous and unsure how their decisions would affect key target audience members including their student-athletes. The purpose of this study was to discern student-athlete perceptions of their athletics departments' role in racial justice movements and the BLM movement by using the foundational factors (students' affective reactions, perceived conflict, views of athletic department role in the racial justice movement, and lack of qualifications to speak out) from the existing ATAAQ survey (Sappington et al, 2019) and original open-ended questions. Despite research on teams and individual athletes, there is a gap in research in terms of sport organizations' role in activism, especially in terms of college athletic departments. Additionally, the views of the student-athletes, the main participants in college athletics, has been limited.

In this study each of the four factors tested: affective reaction (RQ1), perceived conflict (RQ2), athletic department role (RQ3), and lack of qualification (RQ4), yielded relatively low group means. Participants reported a mean less than the scale's midpoint ($M < 4.0$.) on each of the four factors. Due to the fact that the items were negatively worded, the results indicate that student-athletes were overall accepting of their athletics department's social media activism efforts. Previous research indicates that student-athletes hold favorable views of engaging in activism, but student-athletes may be nervous to act on those intentions due to potential backlash, including from their athletics department (Intosh et al, 2020). Seeing their own athletics

department opening dialogue around social activism may be comforting to those student-athletes who want to speak out.

The student-athletes reported the lowest scores in terms of affective reaction (RQ1) and perceived conflict (RQ2) ($M = 2.39$, $M = 2.65$). The results suggest that overall, student-athletes were not angered by their athletic department's social media activism on the topic of racial justice, which was not surprising considering the student-athlete support for activism, as also observed in Intosh and colleagues' (2016) work. Additionally, due to the fact that current collegiate student-athletes have grown-up with technology and social media platforms, I predict that student-athletes will grow increasingly comfortable with these difficult conversations happening online. Therefore, this finding may be long lasting and not just a current trend. In addition, student-athletes did not believe teams would experience additional conflict due to the postings. Therefore, coaching staffs should not be worried about inciting team conflict among their players due to posts centered around race relations.

Although remaining relatively supportive, student-athletes showed larger dissatisfaction in terms of athletic department role (RQ3) and lack of qualification (RQ4), which yielded higher means of ($M = 2.94$, $M = 3.51$). The higher mean indicates that participants were less likely to believe that their university athletics department was qualified or that it was their role to speak out on racial justice. College athletics departments could appear more qualified by showing diverse voices in their messaging. In addition, if using the words of celebrities or historical figures, the athletics department should be cognizant that the people they decide to quote actually represent the movement and values. The mindset that politics and sports should not mix is a sentiment that previous researchers have discovered when evaluating fan reaction to athlete activism (Frederick et al., 2017).

Previous researchers indicated that Black student-athletes perceive their institutions as unsupportive (Cooper, 2017). Therefore, it was important to investigate if there was a racial divide in the student-athletes' reactions to the athletics departments' social media activism efforts. Out of the four factors tested in this inquiry, Black and non-Black student-athletes only registered significantly different responses in terms of the athletic department's role in the BLM movement. Black student-athletes were more likely to believe it was their athletics department's role. When interpreting these results, it is important to note that there was a large discrepancy between the number of non-Black and Black participants. Therefore, these findings may not robustly depict group differences.

The open-ended questions offered a more in-depth understanding of the social media content that influenced the student-athletes. Additionally, the responses generated ideas and feedback for future activism posts. This information is vital for collegiate marketing and sports information staff to understand as they continue to assess ways to have ongoing conversations around race relations and the BLM movement. Student-athletes were most likely to remember seeing activism posts on their athletic department's Instagram accounts. Therefore, athletics departments should utilize this platform if trying to engage with their student-athletes on the topic. Student-athletes were concerned that messaging would be merely performative. Marketing and sports information staffs should be cognizant of engaging in "Slacktivism" behavior. The concern from participants that change occurs off the digital screen coincides with previous research, which indicated that organizations did not believe that the #NCAAInclusion social media campaign sparked enough long-term actual change (Kluch & Wilson, 2020). Therefore, it was not surprising that the student-athletes in this investigation remembered and responded well to posts which showed supportive action off the screen (i.e., university and athletics department

activities and educational resources). The participants thought positively of posts that were genuine and highlighted the lived experiences of African American student-athletes and staff.

In terms of what student-athletes thought could be improved, participants wanted stronger messaging from their athletics department staff. Specifically, athletics departments should be cognizant of being proactive rather than reactive. One way to do this, which was noted by the student-athletes, would be to consistently post about race relations and to not forget about the subject when it is not in the current news cycle. Additionally, student-athletes urged athletics departments to increase content which features affected student-athletes and athletics department staff. Participants did not want to feel as though their athletics department was speaking for those who were affected, especially if those crafting the messages are not BIPOC individuals. By using input from affected student-athletes, the marketing staffs' messages would appear more authentic, which seemed to be a primary concern of the participants. Another way in which college athletics departments can show authenticity is by ensuring their social media messages coincide with off-screen campus offerings and campus culture. The athletics departments should highlight the university's initiatives and related resources, which student-athletes and the community could use to better their understanding of race relations.

Those that expressed negative sentiments toward athletics department's activism efforts noted three primary concerns. First, some participants did not believe that politics and athletics should intertwine. This sentiment is not surprising when considering that participants reported less favorable scores in terms of the athletics department's role in the modified ATAAQ. Other student-athletes showed contempt for the BLM movement as a whole. The final group was concerned with feeling like the department was trying to sway their opinions.

College athletics departments should be aware that these sentiments exist. Marketing and sports information staff can utilize this insight in crafting their messaging. For instance, collegiate marketing staff could promote resources in a way which allows interested student-athletes to access information, but does not make other student-athletes feel forced to partake. Furthermore, if college athletics departments are concerned about this sentiment in their department they could distribute internal surveys or hold small groups to gauge student-athlete perception of digital activism efforts at their specific institution.

In addition to the primary research questions, other findings were discovered. First, male and female student-athletes registered significantly different results for each tested factor. This falls in line with previous research (Intosh et al., 2020), which indicated that female athletes were more likely to engage in and hold more positive attitudes toward activism. Once again it is imperative to note that the sample size of female student-athletes was much larger than male student-athletes. Therefore, the variability of the male student-athletes' responses may be further than the actual population mean than the female responses. Also, both groups still reported relatively low scores, which shows a favorable attitude towards the athletics departments activism efforts. Therefore, athletics department staff should not be too concerned about making posts different based on the gender makeup of their teams.

Additionally, differences were detected between Division II and III student-athletes in terms of affective reaction and perceived conflict. This result was surprising due to the fact there is a slightly larger difference in racial composition between the athletes and administration of Division I and Division III than in Division II (Lapchick et al., 2017). Despite registering significant differences, both groups recorded mean scores below the scale's midpoint. Therefore, athletics departments should not be concerned about posting due to their division of play.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research contributes to the academic literature by acting as one of the first applications of the ATAAQ (Sappington et al, 2019). In addition, the research demonstrates how this survey, which originally was based on individual athletes, can be modified to investigate questions around sport organization activism efforts. This investigation closes the existing gap in sport organization activism research, especially in terms of collegiate athletics departments. At Division I, II, and III administration is 80% White (Lapchick et al., 2017). Therefore, it is increasingly important that there is an understanding in how to properly respond to racial tension and engage in activism. Simultaneously, student-athletes have the access to a large fan base via their own social media platforms in which they have shown and can continue to show discontent for insensitive practices. Given that the athletics departments social media pages act as one of the most accessible faces of the organization and represent those student-athletes competing, these student-athletes should support the social media practice implemented by collegiate marketing and sports information staffs. This research will lay groundwork for future investigations, which can attempt to further understand how collegiate athletics departments' social media activism efforts affect other key target audience members.

In addition to contributing to the academic literature, the goal of this research was to provide athletics department staff a better understanding of their role in racial justice movements, particularly the BLM movement. Collegiate athletics is a large industry which should not steer away from one of its primary purposes, serving their student-athletes as a byproduct of an institution of higher education. Student-athletes are young and impressionable. Previous research indicates that minority student-athletes often perceive their institutions as unsupportive (Cooper, 2017). The future leaders of tomorrow could be positively impacted by seeing their athletics department support minority student-athletes and educating the surrounding fan community.

Previous research indicates that coaches and players of leagues that seem supportive of activism efforts (i.e., the NBA and WNBA) are more likely to participate in individual activism efforts (Cunningham et al., 2021). Therefore, a student-athlete who feels that they are supported by their athletics department may feel compelled to engage in their own activism efforts, which in turn, would help today's youth find their voice.

Despite concerns around posting about the polarizing topic due to fan response (Frederick et al., 2017; Sanderson et al., 2016), this investigation shows that collegiate athletics departments digital activism efforts are largely welcomed by the student-athletes. The findings indicate that college athletics departments should have limited reservations when posting about race relations, as student-athletes held relatively favorable attitudes towards the athletics department's activism efforts in each of the four factors tested, especially in terms of affective reaction and perceived conflict. Due to the only minor differences in student-athlete perception based on their gender, race, and Division, athletics departments should engage in these conversations no matter the gender or racial composition of a team or the Division of play.

One of the primary takeaways for collegiate athletic department staff is the fact that their student-athletes are more likely to perceive that the staff is not qualified to tackle these issues. This sentiment was detected in higher means scores in response to the ATAAQ, but was also reflected in the qualitative responses. Student-athletes expressed interest in hearing messages which highlighted the BIPOC community and those that were affected by the country's injustices. Therefore, athletics department staff should involve their affected student-athletes and staff in their messaging efforts. In turn this would increase the athletics department's credibility on the topic, which will make the messaging more reliable to audience members (Cunningham et al., 2021). Collegiate athletics departments should ask their affected student-athletes and staffs to

share their experiences through Instagram stories or static posts. A collection of the Instagram

stories could be created using the highlight feature. Therefore, interested audience members

could view this content beyond the original post-date in one place. If the athletics department

does not ask student-athletes to share their own stories, then college athletics departments should

consider engaging the athletics community when crafting messages. Tactics could include

distributing an internal survey, holding small group breakout sessions, or creating a diversity

branch of the athletics department's Student-Athlete Advisory Council. This would ensure that

student-athletes voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process. As

"Slacktivism" continues to be a concern, the athletics department staff should ensure that their

activism efforts extend from the digital screen and are prevalent within the department and

university as a whole. If the athletics department or university offers relevant programming, then

the athletics department should promote these events. This would help ensure interested student-

athletes can attend. Additionally, collegiate marketing staff should consider posting a relevant

resource with each post. This could include asking student-athletes to share what resources they

are using to stay educated on the topic or by providing information about on-campus resources

(i.e., mental health counseling, diversity offices, multicultural programs).

Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research is not without limitations. Although efforts were made to contact every

athletic department in the country with hopes in reaching every student athlete and students from

40 different universities participated, the sample size of 256 student-athletes is small in

comparison to the entire NCAA student-athlete population ($N = 480,000$). Furthermore, a large

disparity existed in terms of the race of the student-athletes who participated. Due to the fact that

I am unsure of the population that had the opportunity to fill out the survey, no conclusions can

be drawn on why a disparity in responses existed. Additionally, due to the nature of this survey,

there is strong potential for response bias. Therefore, those who feel strongly for either side are more likely to participate in the survey. Due to the problems listed above, the results may not be generalizable to the entire student-athlete population.

The present study served as one of the first applications of the ATAAQ. The survey was not designed specifically for inquiries centering around organizational behavior. The reliability score for the lack of qualification factor fell slightly below the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, future researchers should continue to test the ATAAQ, especially in terms of organizational behavior, to determine if the reliability issue is indicative of the application of the survey or an issue in this particular investigation.

For future investigations of student-athletes, researchers should devise a sample selection process that would ensure racial breakdown is more equitable. Additionally, the present study did not ask student-athletes to report their sport. This decision was made to help ensure the anonymity of participants. In the future, researchers should consider ways to ask student-athletes which sport they play. Due to the difference in racial makeup of teams and media attention, those who participate in revenue producing sports may have differing opinions than those in non-revenue producing sports.

In addition to student-athletes, university athletics departments have various other stakeholders who follow the athletic department on social media. These stakeholders include but are not limited to fans, alumni, general body students, sponsors, and potential recruits. Future researchers should investigate the effects of university athletic departments' racial justice social media activism on the various stakeholders. The findings would provide athletic departments a more robust understanding of the effects of their social media postings in terms of revenue, school pride, and fandom. Aside from collegiate athletics, future researchers could examine

perceptions of sport organization's activism efforts at the professional level. Like collegiate athletics, professional sports have varying target audiences, therefore perception could be tested from their fans, sponsors, players, and other publics.
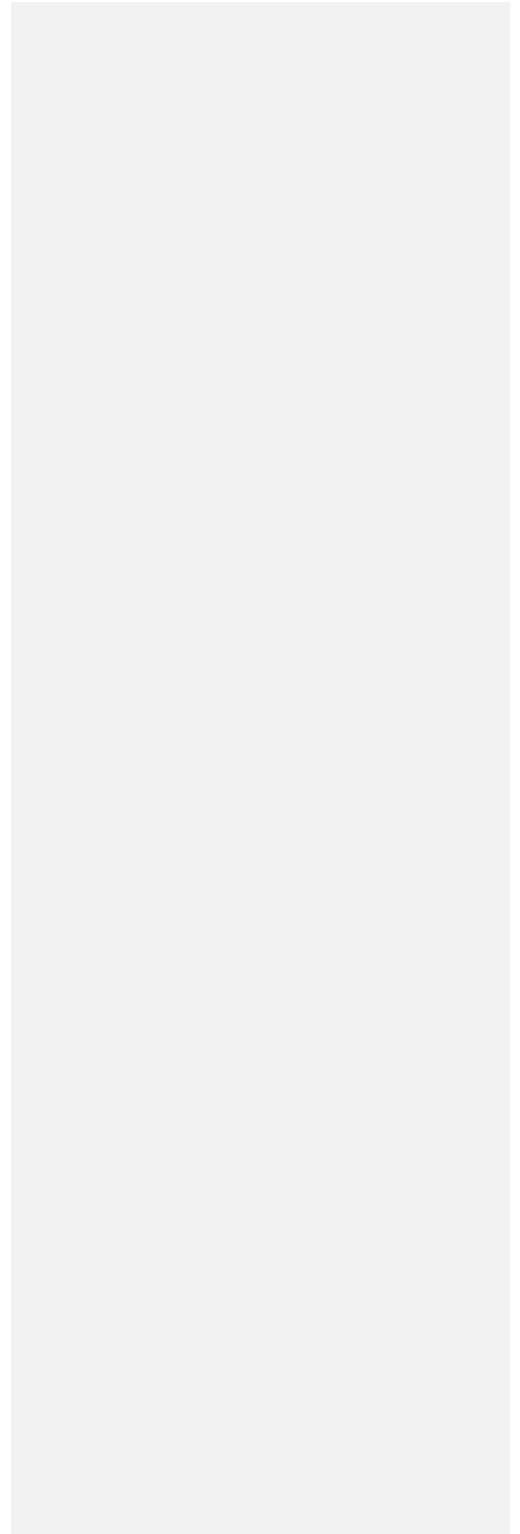
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TABLES

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Personal Background Variables with Respect to Participants (N= 256)

Background Variable	Category	Participants	
		N	**%**
Gender	Male	57	29.4
	Female	137	70.6
Race	Caucasian/White	182	77.8
	Black or African American	23	9.8
	Asian	4	1.7
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	.4
	Biracial	17	7.3
	Other	7	2.9
Ethnicity	*Hispanic Origin*	19	7.4
Year in School	Freshman	71	29.5
	Sophomore	46	19.2
	Junior	62	25.8
	Senior	47	19.6
	5th Year	12	5.0
	Graduate Transfer	2	0.8
Division	Division I	76	31.6
	Division II	79	32.9
	Division III	85	35.4
Grouping	Power Five (FBS)	21	8.2
	Group of Five (FBS)	24	9.4
	FCS	14	5.5
	Other	177	77.0

Table 2

Factor Correlations

Factors	AR	PC	ADR	LQ
Affective Reaction (AR)	1			
Perceived Conflict (PC)	.854**	1		
Athletic Dept. Role (ADR)	.868**	.797**	1	
Lack of Qualification (LQ)	.549**	.573**	.570**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

Participant Social Media Usage (N = 256)

Background Variable		M	SD
Overall Social Media Usage (1-7 scale)		5.67	1.459
Facebook Usage (1-7 scale)		2.71	1.832
Twitter Usage (1-7 scale)		3.00	2.160
TikTok Usage (1-7 scale)		4.19	2.415
Instagram Usage (1-7 scale)		5.55	1.615

Background Variable		N	%
Do You Follow Your University's Athletics Dept. on Social Media?	Yes	218	85.2
	No	28	10.9
	Not Sure	10	3.9
Do You Follow Your Coaches on Social Media?	Yes	137	53.5
	No	114	44.5
	Not Sure	5	2.0

Table 4

Measurement Scales for Modified Attitudes Toward Athlete Activism Questionnaire (ATAAQ)

Adapted Scales	α	M	SD
AFFECTIVE REACTION	.966	2.39	1.656
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, it makes me upset		2.59	1.880
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, it makes me angry.		2.29	1.711
It bothers me when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		2.50	1.828
I get annoyed when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		2.49	1.788
It disgusts me when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		2.09	1.600
PERCEIVED CONFLICT	.905	2.65	1.521
		2.33	1.657
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, I think it can hurt their team's performance.			
When athletics departments speak out publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, I think it causes tension among teammates.		3.09	1.825
I think that it disrupts the team culture when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		2.67	1.778
I think that it creates issues in the locker room when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		2.51	1.632
ATHLETIC DEPT. ROLE	.924	2.94	1.791
I think that it's not part of an athletics departments job to speak out publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.		3.15	2.089

I do not think athletics have a duty to speak out publicly on social media on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement.   3.05   1.930

I do not think it is important for athletics departments to speak out publicly on social media on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement.   2.63   1.732

LACK OF QUALIFICATION   .681   3.51   1.295
I do not think that athletics departments are informed enough to speak out on social media publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement.   3.71   1.776

I do not think that athletics are intelligent enough to speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.   2.89   1.572

I do not think that athletics departments have the necessary expertise to speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media.   3.92   1.618

Table 5

T- Test Results Group Differences Between Black (N = 28) and Non-Black Student-athletes (199)

Factor	Race	M	SD	t(225)	p
Affective Reaction	Black	2.20	1.73		
				.55	.59
	Non-Black	2.39	1.66		
Perceived Conflict	Black	2.40	1.69		
				.81	.42
	Non-Black	2.65	1.51		
Athletic Department Role	Black	2.12	1.77		
				2.39	.02
	Non-Black	2.99	1.81		
Lack of Qualification	Black	3.44	1.55		
				.14	.89
	Non-Black	3.48	1.27		

Table 6

Qualitative Responses

	Q1. Which Content Stood Out to You?		
	Subthemes	*Description*	*Example Quote*
Theme 1: Mechanism	Platform	Describes which social media platform student-athletes remembered seeing race related posts made by their athletics department	"Instagram posts, stories"
	Frequency	Describes how often student-athletes recalled seeing content centered around race relations	"Really not many posts were made"
	Specific Posts	Describes specific posts student-athletes recalled	"Black out post"
	Specific Team	Describes student-athletes recalling certain teams which posted	"Our football team made a post on their stance"
Theme 2: Allyship	Highlight Individuals	Describes student-athlete desire to see individuals' stories featured in their athletics department's social media response	"Videos including the voices of black athletes"
	Unity	Describes student-athletes that noted feelings of unity and community	"I remember seeing a post where all of our score boards had the Black Lives Matter words written on them, and I think this was a great showing of unity as a school and as an athletic department."
	Values	Describes student-athletes who noted seeing posts which were genuine and	"Post about values"

		displayed the athletics department's values	
Theme 3: Supportive Action	On-Campus Activities	Describes student-athletes who remembered posts about school/athletics department's diversity events	"The post about our walk for equality"
	Providing Resources	Describes student-athletes who remembered posts which featured resources	"Posts about mental health and availability of counselors if student athletes need to talk about how they feel about the racial tension in our country"
	Against Performative Activism	Describes student-athletes who did not like posts which seemed for show	"I saw many posts with empty promises from the athletics department to better itself in terms of antiracist work without any concrete action"

Q2. How do you think athletics department could improve their discussions of race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media?

Theme 1: Suggested Social Media Strategies	Stronger Stance	Describes desire for athletics department's to create stronger messaging	"Be proactive, not just reactive"
	Inclusivity	Describes student-athletes who wanted acknowledgment of other minorities	"Address/Include other minorities"
	Consistency	Describes student-athletes desire for more consistency	"Continually talking about it, not quitting when the "trend" is over. Because it isn't a trend"
Theme 2: Relevant Perspective	Highlight Individuals	Describes student-athletes desire to see more authentic voices	"By letting actual African Americans or any people of color speak out on the issues instead of trying to speak for them"

	Education	Describes student-athletes desire for athletics department's to be educated on the manner and share educational information	"Post more factual information"
Theme 3: Off the Screen Action	School Resources	Describes student-athletes desire for their institution provide additional resources toward promoting the BLM movement or better educating the community	"They could post resources and keep us updated on what is happening on campus."
	School Activities	Describes student-athletes concern with hiring practices in terms of race and lack of diversity training	"Have more diversity training for coaches and recruitment, have diversity training to student-athletes."
	Promote Discussion	Describes student-athletes want for small breakout sessions among teammates and coaches on the topic of race relations	"Coaches/trainers/etc. need to start an open discussion with their athletes and colleagues about their experiences related to the BLM movement and race relations in everyday athletics."
Theme 4: Maintain School Response			"I think they are doing a good job"
View Against Athletics Department Activism			
Theme 1: Not the Athletic Dept. Role			"Schools should not post anything political/anything BML because they should focus on posting about the school and not anything people can get upset about"
Theme 2: Disdain for the Movement			"Stop them. Stop supporting a radical ideology and hate for this country"
Theme 3: Not Wanting to be Swayed			"Focus on not swaying athletes' opinions"

Table 7

T-Test Results Group Differences Between Male (N = 57) and Female (N = 137) Student-Athletes

Factor	*Gender*	M	SD	*df*	*t*	*p*
Affective Reaction	Male	2.94	1.90			
				85.32	3.03	.00
	Female	2.08	1.47			
Perceived Conflict	Male	3.21	1.70			
				90.14	3.11	.00
	Female	2.41	1.42			
Athletic Department Role	Male	3.75	2.00			
				87.99	3.89	.00
	Female	2.59	1.62			
Lack of Qualification	Male	3.89	1.25			
				192	2.87	.01
	Female	3.32	1.27			

Table 8

MANOVA Comparisons of Student-Athlete Perceptions Between Divisions

Factor	*Division I*	*Division II*	*Division III*	*F* value	η^2
Affective Reaction	2.34_{ab}	2.77_b	2.04_a	3.98*	.03
	(1.58)	(1.90)	(1.47)		
Perceived Conflict	2.65_{ab}	2.99_b	2.31_a	4.10*	.03
	(1.42)	(1.75)	(1.38)		
Athletic Department	2.84_a	3.12_a	2.80_a	.73	.01
Role	(1.68)	(2.00)	(1.75)		
Lack of Qualification	3.27_a	3.72_a	3.45_a	.09	.02
	(1.26)	(1.37)	(1.21)		

Note: Means with the same subscript are not significantly different from each other. Standard deviations are in parentheses.
* $p < .05$

Table 9

Student-Athlete Insight into College Athletic Department Social Media Activism Practices

Question		*M*	*SD*
I do not believe that university athletics departments should make social media posts on racially centered holidays (i.e. Juneteenth, MLK Day, etc.)		2.88	1.711
I do not think that my collegiate coaching staff should make social media posts centered around race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement		2.98	1.931
		N	*%*
Do you think your university did a good job responding to the BLM and racial justice issues on social media	Yes	92	35.9
	No	54	21.1
	Not Sure	90	35.2

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Social media post used for recruiting participants

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

STUDY FOCUS:
THE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT:
PERCEPTIONS OF NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETES

- ARE YOU A CURRENT NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETE?

- DO YOU FOLLOW YOUR ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT OR SPORT ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO BOTH QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONSIDER PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY
LEAD RESEARCHERS: NATALIE BUNCH (NBUNCH1@STUDENT.GSU.EDU) & DR. BETH CIANFRONE (BCIANFRONE@GSU.EDU)

Appendix B

Survey

Athletic Department's Role in the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Start of Block: Intro/Informed Consent

Q1.1 Hello!
  You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate student-athletes' perception of their athletics department's social media posts around racial injustice. Please understand that some items may sound similar, but it is important that you answer each question as the subtle differences mean a lot to the researcher. If you decide to participate, you will select YES at the bottom to access the online questionnaire. The questionnaire asks questions regarding your opinions of your athletics department's social media use, and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. Participation in this study may not benefit you personally, but the information you provide will provide collegiate digital marketing coordinators insight on best practices for posting about racial injustice and the Black Lives Matter movement.

 Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to stop participating at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

 We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The investigator (Natalie Bunch) will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use a study number rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on the principal investigator's password and firewall protected computer. Your name will not be asked on the questionnaire and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form.

 Contact Natalie Bunch (nbunch1@student.gsu.edu) or Dr. Beth Cianfrone (bcianfrone@gsu.edu) if you have questions about this study.   You may print or save a copy of this consent for your records

 Statement of Age of Subject and Consent
 By clicking 'YES' below, you indicate that:

* You are at least 18 years of age
* You have read the above information explaining this study
* You freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

End of Block: Intro/Informed Consent

Start of Block: Qualifiers

Q2.1 Are you a NCAA student-athlete?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

- -

Q2.2 Are you active on social media?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

- -

Q2.3 Do you follow **your university's** main athletic account (for example Georgia State's is @GSUPanthers) or one of **your** university's sport specific accounts (for example @GSUBeachVB) on social media?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Not Sure (6)

- -

Q2.4 Do you follow any of your coaches on social media?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Not Sure (3)

Q5.10 On a 1-7 scale, how often do you use the following:

	Never (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	All the time (7) (10)
Social Media (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Facebook (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
TikTok (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	1- Strongly Disagree (1)	2- Disagree (2)	3- Slightly Disagree (3)	4- Neutral (4)	5- Slightly Agree (5)	6- Agree (6)	7- Strongly Agree (7)
I do not think that athletics departments are informed enough to speak out on social media publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, it makes me upset. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe that university athletics departments should make social media posts on racially centered holidays (i.e. Juneteenth, MLK Day, etc.) (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
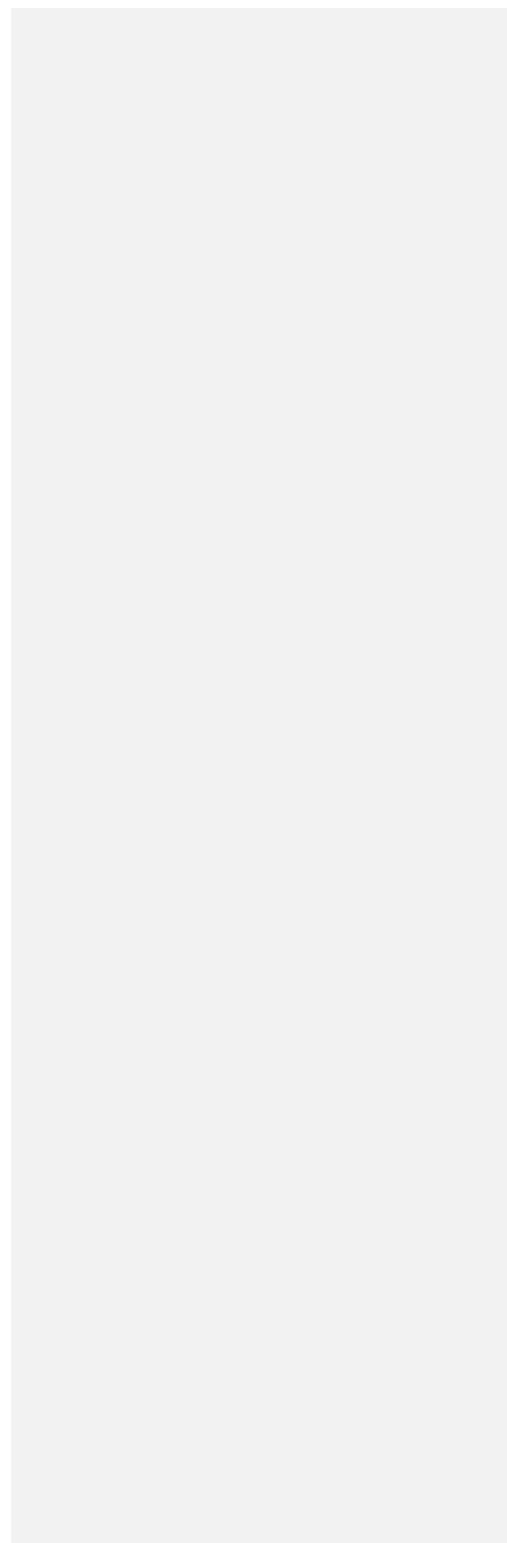
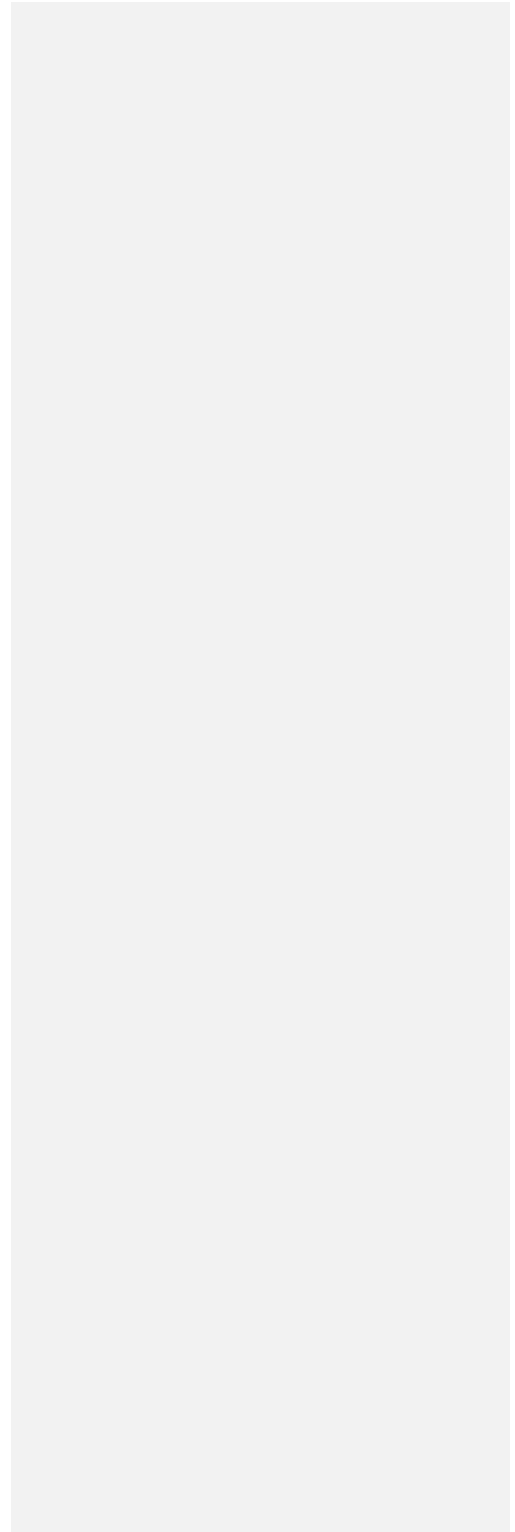|							
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, I think it can hurt their team's performance. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think that it's not part of an athletics departments job to speak out publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I consider myself an active social media user. (19)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: We want your thoughts on athletic department's social media use & race relations

Start of Block: We want your thoughts on athletic department's social media use & race relations

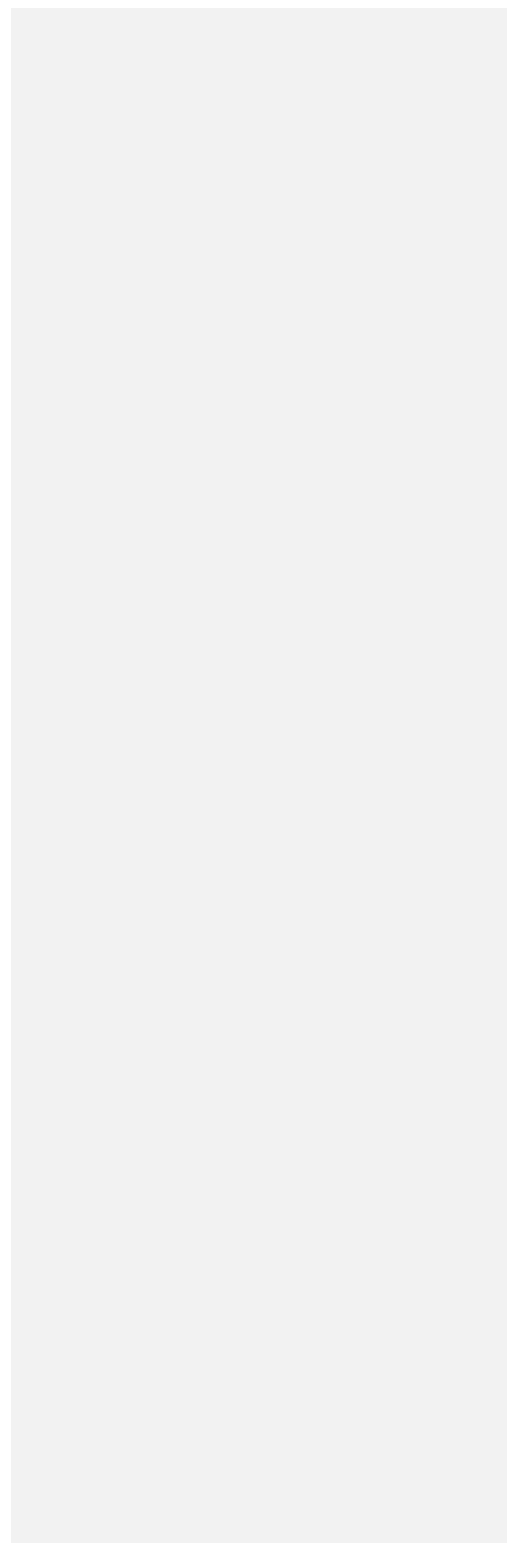|	1- Strongly Disagree (1)	2- Disagree (2)	3- Slightly Disagree (3)	4- Neutral (4)	5- Slightly Agree (5)	6- Agree (6)	7- Strongly Agree (7)
When athletics departments speak out publicly on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, I think it causes tension among teammates. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not think that athletics departments are intelligent enough to speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

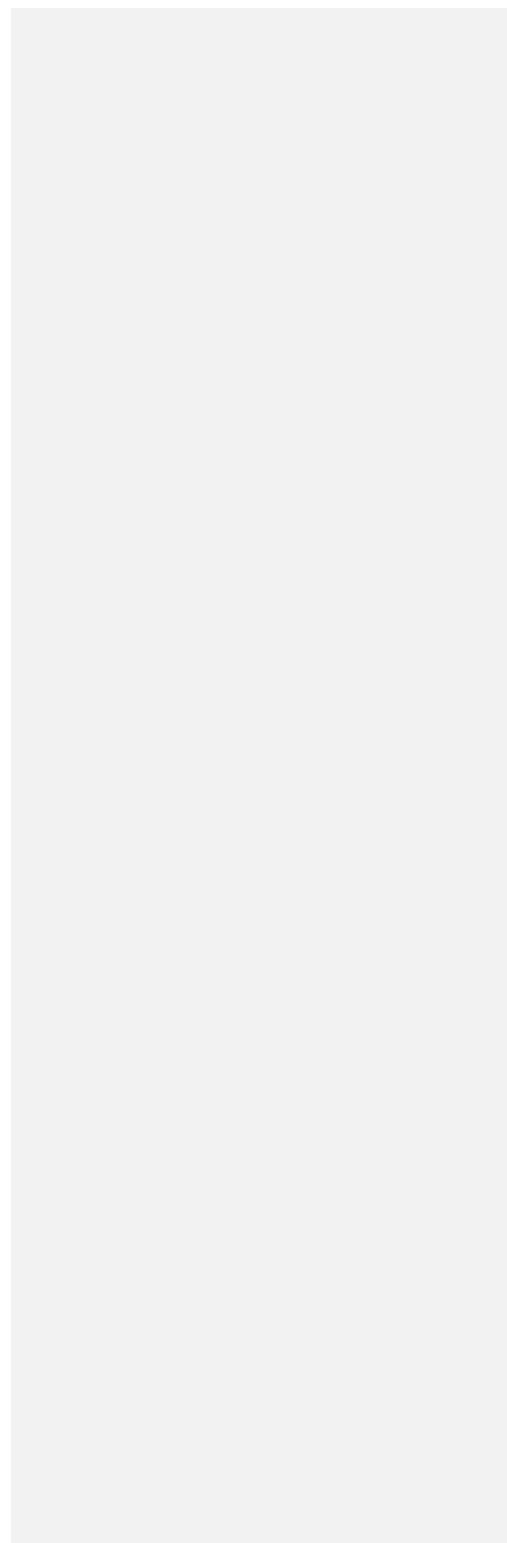|						
When athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media, it makes me angry. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not think athletics departments have a duty to speak out publicly on social media on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select the second bullet for this item (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It bothers me when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: We want your thoughts on athletic department's social media use & race relations

Start of Block: We want your thoughts on athletic department's social media use & race relations

|	1- Strongly Disagree (1)	2- Disagree (2)	3- Slightly Disagree (3)	4- Neutral (4)	5- Slightly Agree (5)	6- Agree (6)	7- Strongly Agree (7)
I do not think that my collegiate coaching staff should make social media posts centered around race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think that it disrupts team culture when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I get annoyed when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not think it is important for athletics departments to speak out publicly on social media on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think that athletics departments have the necessary expertise to speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
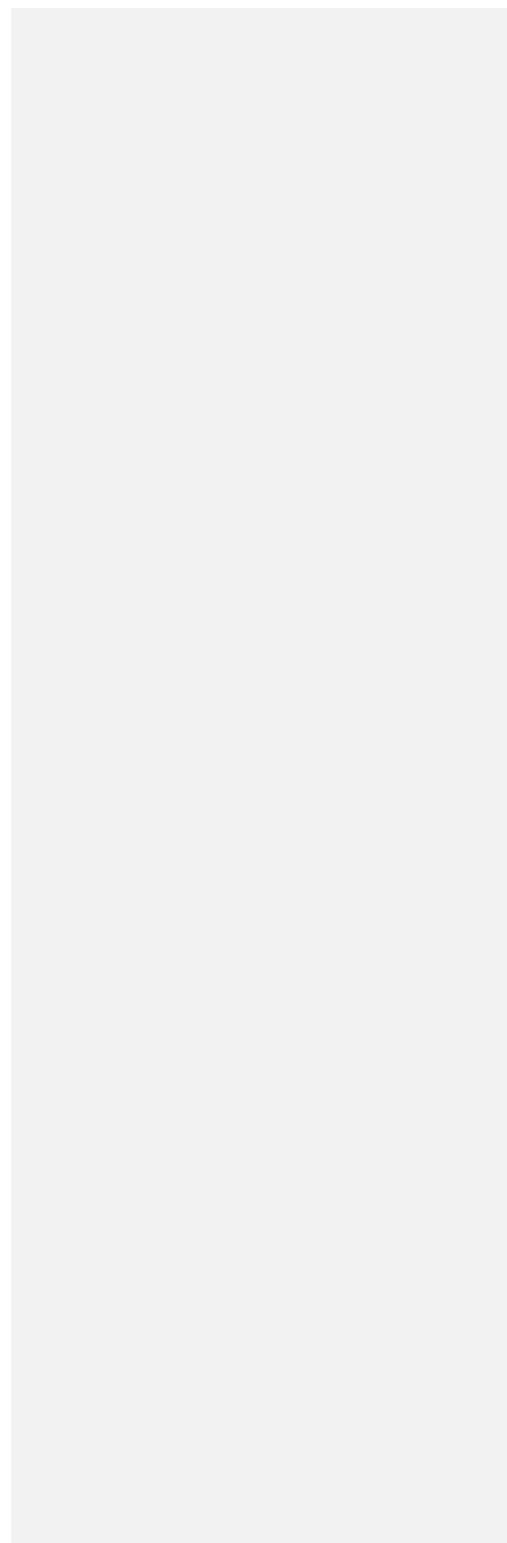
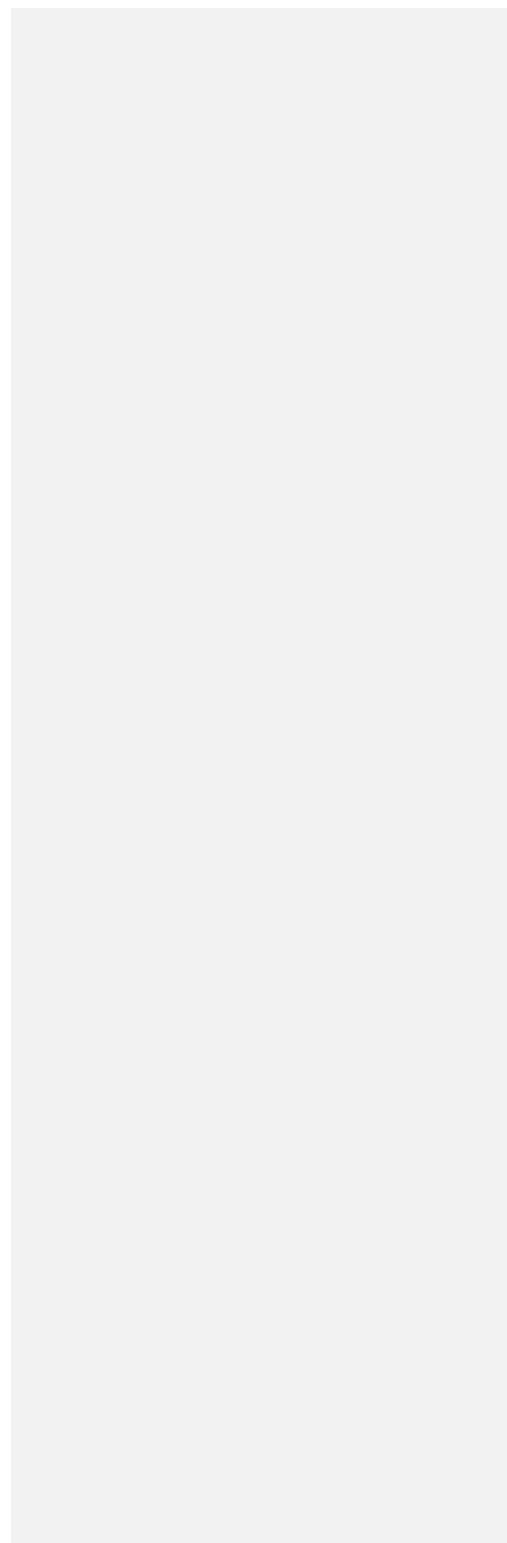| It disgusts me when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (18) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| I think that it creates issues in the locker room when athletics departments speak out on race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. (19) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q5.1 I identify my gender as:

_____

Q5.3 Ethnic identification (select all that apply)

☐   White/Caucasian (1)

☐   Black or African American (2)

☐   American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

☐   Asian (4)

☐   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

☐   Other (6)

☐   I wish to decline this question (7)

Q5.4 Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I wish to decline this question   (3)

Q5.2 What is your age?

_____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Demographics

Q5.5 Year in School

   ◯ Freshman (1)

   ◯ Sophomore (2)

   ◯ Junior (3)

   ◯ Senior (4)

   ◯ 5th Year (5)
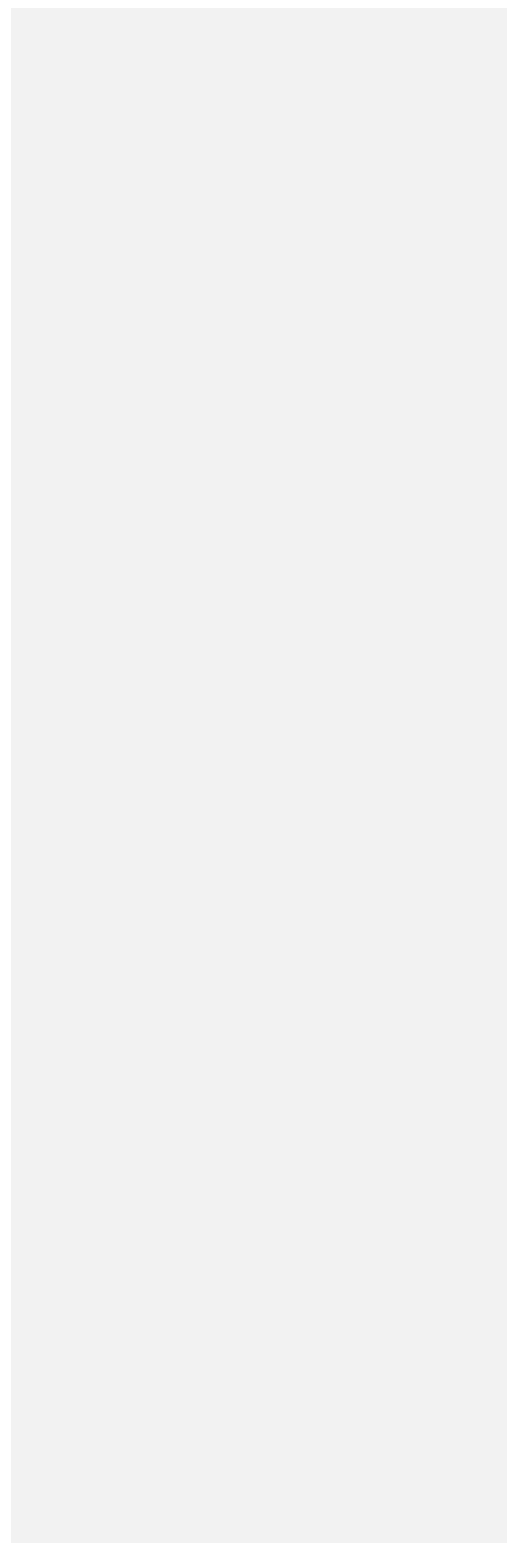
   ◯ Graduate Transfer (6)

Q5.6 What university do you attend?

_____

Q5.7 Which division do you play for?

   ◯ Division I (1)

   ◯ Division II (2)

   ◯ Division III (3)

Q5.8 Conference affiliation

○ AAC (1)

○ ACC (2)

○ Big 10 (3)

○ Big 12 (4)

○ Conference USA (5)

○ MAC (6)

○ Mountain West (7)

○ PAC 12 (8)

○ SEC (9)

○ Sun Belt (10)

○ Other (11) _____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Share your thoughts to guide future social media posts on race relations and BLM

Q4.1
LAST ONES- THANK YOU!
  Do you believe your university's athletics department addressed the Black Lives Matter movement well on social media this summer?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Not Sure (3)

Q4.2 What types of social media posts or content stood out to you?

_____

- -

Q4.3 How do you think athletics department could improve their discussions of race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media?

_____

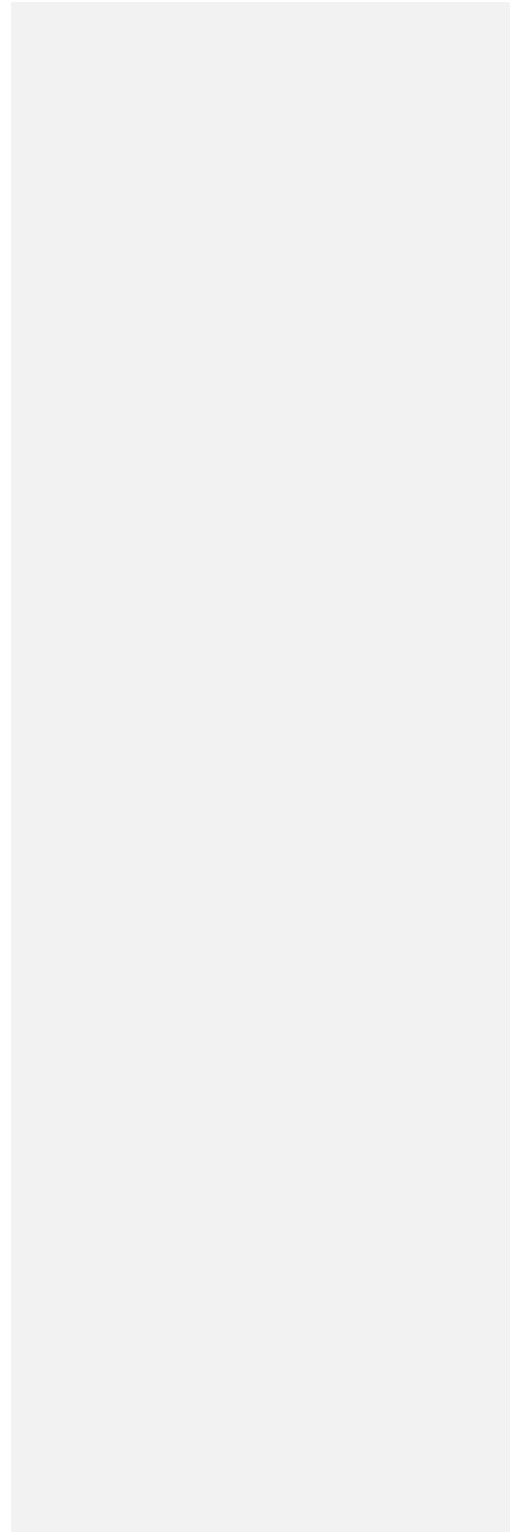- -

Q4.4 If you have any **other thoughts on university athletics departments and their social media response to racial justice movement and the Black Lives Matter movement**, please share in space below.

Click Right Arrow to submit survey! Thank you!

_____

End of Block: Share your thoughts to guide future social media posts on race relations and BLM

Appendix C – IRB Approval

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999	In Person: 3rd Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999	58 Edgewood
Phone: 404/413-3500	FWA: 00000129

Georgia State University

November 02, 2020

Principal Investigator: Beth Cianfrone

Key Personnel: Bunch, Natalie N; Cianfrone, Beth; Kellison, Timothy B; Wendling, Elodie

Study Department: Kinesiology & Health

Study Title: THE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETES

Submission Type: Exempt Protocol Category 2

IRB Number: H21232

Reference Number: 362867

Determination Date: 10/30/2020

Status Check Due By: 10/29/2023

The above-referenced study has been determined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to be exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 CFR 46 and has evaluated for the following:

1. Determination that it falls within one or more of the eight exempt categories allowed by the institution; and
2. Determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards

If there is a change to your study, you should notify the IRB through an Amendment Application before the change is implemented. The IRB will determine whether your research continues to qualify for exemption or if a new submission of an expedited or full board application is required.

A Status Check must be submitted three years from the determination date indicated above. When the study is complete, a Study Closure Form must be submitted to the IRB.

This determination applies only to research activities engaged in by the personnel listed on this document.