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## PRAY AND PLAY: THE IMPACT OF FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES AMONG DI AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN KENTUCKY

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PRAY AND PLAY: THE IMPACT OF FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES  
AMONG DI AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN  
KENTUCKY

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Rasheed Flowers  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Kelly Bradley, Professor of  
Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation  
Lexington, Kentucky  
2022

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### PRAY AND PLAY: THE IMPACT OF FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES AMONG DI AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN KENTUCKY

Participation in athletics provides student-athletes with opportunities to further themselves outside of athletics through academic assistance, educational opportunities and experiences, physical wellness, and personal/professional development. One often overlooked portion of this holistic development is spiritual development. As demonstrated in the name student-athlete, it implies a dual identity. Few student-athletes navigate multiple identities and a myriad of additional challenges in their collegiate journey than African American football student-athletes (AAFSAs). Spiritual development is vital for student-athletes; the literature validates that student-athletes growing in their faith may be better equipped to navigate the tension of multiple identity roles and cope with various circumstances.

Sport ministry organizations (SMOs), specifically Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at higher education institutions, exist to support student-athletes in Christian spiritual development, coping, relationship formation, and identity formation. Using Fowler's and Park's faith development theories, this research focuses on a sample of Division I Kentucky AAFSAs perceptions of FCA, factors that influence participation, if FCA functions as a coping mechanism, and if FCA participation is indicative of spiritual development. As football remains a staple of higher education, understanding Christian spiritual development could be a useful tool for higher education professionals, athletic programs, and FCA staff to better serve student-athletes.

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education Institutions, Spiritual Development, Sport Ministry Organizations (SMOs), Athletics, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)

Rasheed Flowers

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04/23/2022

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Date

PRAY AND PLAY: THE IMPACT OF FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES  
AMONG DI AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN  
KENTUCKY

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Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT) “*Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.*” I want to first thank God for allowing me to complete this work. I went from academic probation my freshman year to now completing a doctoral degree. None of this is due to any of my own merits, but simply His grace and mercy. I give all glory and thanks to God for strengthening me and empowering me to do this work.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of the United States' growing appetite for sporting events (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 35). Pascarella et al. explain that often, "the public's image of an institution as well as its attractiveness to prospective students are often influenced by the performance of its athletic teams" (1999, p. 1). Nowhere else in the world does athletics have such an integral part within the higher education system. Intercollegiate athletics has transitioned to the leading means by which people experience the American higher education system (Botts, 2012, p.1). Higher education historian John Thelin said, "nothing compares to the U.S. institution's commitment to college sports. No other university system relies so heavily on athletics as an integral part of its functions" (personal communication, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Perhaps no other sport matches the notoriety and prestige of Division I intercollegiate football. In 2019, regular-season telecasts on major networks averaged 1,839,000 viewers per game, reaching more than 145 million unique fans (National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame, 2020). The football powerhouse conference, the Southeastern Conference (SEC), led all FBS conferences in attendance for the 22<sup>nd</sup> straight year, averaging 72,723 fans per game (National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame, 2020). Characteristically, at most institutions, the highest amount of revenue generated by the athletic department, in addition to its' expenses, is a product of a football program.

The largest governing body of collegiate athletics—the National Collegiate Athletic Association—and higher education institutions (HEIs) acknowledge that athletics affords student-athletes the chance to become well-rounded individuals.

Participation in athletics provides student-athletes with opportunities to further themselves outside of athletics through academic assistance, educational opportunities and experiences, physical wellness, and personal/professional development (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020). Moreover, research maintains that participation enhances both learning and character development, including leadership, interpersonal skills, social self-esteem, discipline, personal health, motivation, dedication, and life lessons (Astin, 1993; Aries & Richards, 1999; Childs, 1987; Hirko, 2009; Miracle & Rees, 1994; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shulman & Bowen, 2002). Athletics can develop student-athletes holistically (physically, psychologically, mentally, etc.) through teaching such skills and providing student-athletes a strong sense of self as well as a means to fit in a social group such as a team (Aries & Richards, 1999; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 2012; Griffith & Johnson, 2002; Washington, 2016).

However, an often-neglected portion of holistic development in student-athletes is spirituality. Spiritual development is vital for student-athletes; the literature validates that student-athletes who are growing in their faith may be better equipped to navigate the tension of multiple identity roles and cope with various circumstances (Clarke, 2010; Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020; Knabb & Grigorian-Routon, 2014; Ramsey, 2015; Sceggel, 2018).

Few student-athletes navigate multiple identities and a myriad of additional challenges in their collegiate journey than African American football student-athletes (AAFSAs). Studies continually demonstrate that African American student-athletes face many challenges, such as stereotyping, discrimination, being a first-generation college

student, being a highly solicited scholarship athlete, and coming from low socioeconomic environments (Person & LeNoir, 1997; Ramsey, 2015). Moreover, some AAFSAs struggle to have a sense of belonging at their institution, especially predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Ramsey, 2015, p. 29).

Historically, religious faith has been an important part of the African American community. Christianity, in particular, has played an immense role in African American history (Masci, 2018). Masci illuminates that while most Africans brought to the New World in slavery were not Christians when they arrived, many of them and their descendants embraced Christianity, finding comfort in the Biblical message of spiritual equality and deliverance (Masci, 2018). In post-Civil War America, Masci reports that “a growing Black church played a vital role in strengthening African American communities through providing support and resources to the civil rights movement” (Masci, 2018, para. 1). Christianity has helped community members cope with many different situations and is often what people might turn to during adverse circumstances.

Furthermore, the first HEIs in the U.S. was founded on religious roots (particularly Christianity). These HEIs objective was to train young men going into ministry. The central role among early colleges and universities was to create young men who would be useful to society through character development (Jenney, 2010, p. 2). Due to the historic impact Christianity has had on HEIs, athletics, and the African American community, Christian spiritual development serves as the focus of this study. Sport ministry organizations (SMOs), specifically Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at HEIs, exist to support student-athletes in Christian spiritual development, coping, relationship formation, and identity formation. This research focuses on DI Kentucky



AAFSAs perceptions of FCA, if it alters how they view themselves as athletes, and if FCA participation is indicative of spiritual development.

### **Sport Ministry Organizations**

Recognizing that sport carries a great deal of cultural significance in the United States and the world, Evangelical Christians have formed organizations that combine sport and Christianity for evangelism since the 1950s (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. 10). Today, over ninety sports ministry organizations (SMOs) exist in the United States, working with nearly every sport. SMOs serve athletes of all ages, ranging from youth to professional. SMOs are para-church organizations, which Blakeney-Glazer defines as “working alongside traditional churches rather than as a replacement for church experience” (2008, p. 11). Their work provides a mutually beneficial relationship to churches in general and Christianity. SMOs support meeting people from different spiritual interest levels and backgrounds (White, 2005, p. 38). According to White, “the sports ministry is a fun and non-threatening way to get people plugged into the life of the church” (2005, p.114).

Among the ninety-plus SMOs, two stand out as the most prominent and active at HEIs: Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Athletes in Action (AIA). For this study, the scope of SMOs will be limited to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The justification for narrowing the scope to FCA is threefold: The limited research on spirituality that focuses on this organization, serve as expansion of the research of Ramsey (2015) who focused on only a single institution from solely a qualitative perspective, and the prominence of this SMO at Kentucky HEIs.

## **Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)**

Don McClanen founded FCA in 1954. Since that time, FCA has been challenging coaches and athletes on the professional, college, high school, junior high, and youth levels to “use the powerful platform of sport to reach every coach and every athlete with the transforming power of Jesus Christ” (FCA, 2020). FCA focuses on serving local communities and around the globe through engaging, equipping, and empowering coaches and athletes to unite, inspire and change the world through the good news of Jesus Christ (FCA, 2020). The “E3” method (engage, equip, and empower) entails engaging relationally by connecting with individuals through building genuine trust and sharing life together (Figure 1.1). Equipping means providing training, events, resources, and ongoing support to help athletes grow and apply their faith to all parts of their life. Empower means enabling faithful leaders who desire to use their time, talents, and treasures to help other coaches and athletes grow in their faith and share it with others. The mission, values, and methods FCA hold expresses that spirituality is a crucial aspect of student-athletes’ lives and that the spiritual quest is integral to the developmental process (Parks, 2000; Ramsey, 2015).

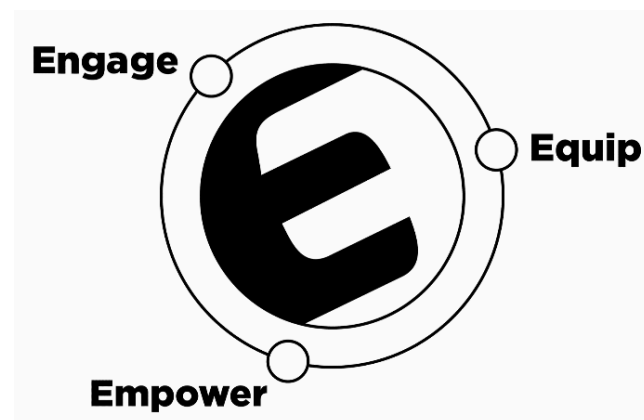


Figure 1.1 FCA’s “E3” Method

## **Statement of the Problem**

Student-athletes, like all students, undergo extreme searches for identity development, which plays a role in the individual's search for authenticity (Clarke, 2010, p. 121). As evidenced in the name "student-athlete," they navigate multiple identity roles as they develop as young adults. Identity development closely aligns with how an individual uncovers a personalized sense of meaning and purpose in life. College is a time when these student-athletes are searching to find meaning and purpose in their lives (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006; Parks, 2000). Meaning and purpose tend to be centered on a focus outside of oneself, leading to examining spiritual beliefs and values. Clarke notes that student-athletes are only a single example of a subpopulation of college students whose spiritual development occurs differently than other students (Clarke, 2010, p. 122). Thus, spiritual development plays a crucial role in holistic learning and can benefit overall student development.

As previously stated, fewer student-athletes navigate multiple identities and challenges associated with those identities than African American football student-athletes (AAFSAs). Although the population of African American male students is obviously smaller than their White counterparts, they tend to be overrepresented in revenue-generating sports like football, as observed in Table 1.1 (Smith, Clark, and Harrison Jr., 2014, p. 222). Though these players represent a relatively small population at HEIs, athletic departments and student affairs professionals need to be aware of their developmental needs. More than any other subgroup, AAFSAs have immense pressures due to the rigor, demands, and expectations placed upon them for representing a Division I football program.

Table 1.1 Racial demographics of NCAA DI Football student-athletes

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Percentage of White, male athletes</i> | <i>Percentage of Black, male athletes</i> | <i>Percentage of other races and/or biracial, male athletes</i> |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| <b>2021</b> | 40%                                       | 44%                                       | 17%   |
| <b>2020</b> | 39%                                       | 45%                                       | 16%   |
| <b>2019</b> | 39%                                       | 45%                                       | 16%   |
| <b>2018</b> | 40%                                       | 45%                                       | 15%   |
| <b>2017</b> | 41%                                       | 44%                                       | 14%   |
| <b>2016</b> | 43%                                       | 44%                                       | 14%   |
| <b>2015</b> | 43%                                       | 44%                                       | 13%   |
| <b>2014</b> | 44%                                       | 43%                                       | 13%   |
| <b>2013</b> | 45%                                       | 43%                                       | 12%   |
| <b>2012</b> | 47%                                       | 43%                                       | 10%   |

Matters surrounding African American male college athletes attending Division I colleges have been the topic of interest of many academic scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and sports enthusiasts (Donnor, 2005). The literature illustrates various issues that the general population of African American males face in college, from arriving on campus academically underprepared to having to experience social and psychological stressors that make it more difficult to succeed while on campus (Benton, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Messer, 2008; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985; Willis, 2000).

The literature also provides examples of characteristics of African American students and African American student-athletes who have been successful in navigating the rigors of college life through campus and community involvement, the formation of strong peer groups, or additional support and encouragement from their families (Harrison, 1999; Messer, 2008).

However, past research does not give ample attention to the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African American male college athletes (Cuyjet, 2006; Waller, 2015; Watson, 2006). It also does not consider the impact of religion and spirituality on racism, racial prejudices, and stereotyping that African American male college athletes experience while engaging at a PWIs (Harper, 2012; Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Walker, 2019). Moreover, research does not consider the impact of engagement in a SMO, which could assist African American student-athletes in being equipped to navigate multiple identity roles, employ faith as a coping mechanism, and build community/mentorship opportunities.

This research gap points to a need to intentionally design each part of the student-athlete experience as the potential to integrate the Christian faith into all areas of college life (Sceggel, 2018, p. 10). For higher education professionals, it is imperative to continue to gain knowledge and understanding of how the Christian faith interacts with athletics on the grandest stage (Epting, 2013, p. 120). Epting furthers this argument by stating that “as a student-athlete, the role that Christian faith plays in the student’s success should not be overlooked as it is part of holistic learning” (2013, p. 3). Through a better understanding Christian spiritual development, as facilitated by the SMO FCA among traditional-aged AAFSAs, all those involved in collegiate athletics can gain greater

insight into the issues and opportunities of balancing collegiate sports for AAFSAs that identify with the Christian faith (p. 121). There is a general belief that FCA has had a positive impact on students and programs, yet empirical research on the FCA and its Chaplaincy Ministry Program and its effects on student-athletes and others involved in the program appear sparse (Chizik, 2011; Ramsey, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to observe, measure, and evaluate the levels of spiritual development of AAFSAs at, as facilitated by FCA at their respective HEIs. The study aims to understand AAFSA's perceptions of FCA and its relevance to their spiritual development.

The potential impact of this research is fivefold:

1. Contribute new knowledge to the field of spiritual development and student-athletes, especially African American student athletes at Division I PWIs.
2. Uncover the impact spiritual development has on the collegiate experience of African American student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.
3. Assist institutions in understanding the best way to provide supportive services and resources to encourage spiritual development in African American student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.
4. Provide an evaluative tool for FCA (with access to empirical data) to understand what they are currently doing well and how they can improve in certain areas to further engage and cultivate spiritual development in student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.

5. Extend perceptions and understanding associated with the student-athlete experience and Christian faith development within all HEIs (Epting, 2013, pp. 3-4).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Scholars studying spiritual development often primarily focus on traditional students (18–25-years of age) in higher education. However, little research investigates how spirituality impacts the collegiate experience amongst student-athletes. In the nominal amount of research on spiritual development amongst student-athletes, researchers employed the Faith Development Theory of Fowler and Parks (Clarke, 2010; Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020; Ramsey, 2015; Sceggel, 2018).

Fowler described seven stages that people go through when developing faith. Fowler provides an example of someone who becomes a Christian at a very early age, but as they move forward in their faith journey, their faith will need to deepen and expand several times for actual faith development to occur. Stages of faith can be used to measure and explain such growth. Park's work expanded on Fowler's stages by explicitly focusing on young adulthood (college-aged) stages, investigating how college students develop spiritually concerning their search for meaning and purpose in life (2000).

The Faith Development Theory is the most appropriate since young adulthood is a very impressionable time that could be used as an opportunity to develop the core faith of an individual (Parks, 2000). Thus, they can understand who and what they trust, their personal beliefs, and their journey associated with faith development (Parks, 2000). Young adults' spiritual development is often related to their search for meaning and

purpose in life (2000). Parks contended that the college setting provides an optimum environment for young adults to explore faith-based beliefs (2000).

Utilizing the Faith Development Theory, the researcher will understand how student-athletes manage the ongoing conflict between role identities, use faith to cope, and how spiritual development is facilitated through FCA. Furthermore, the Faith Development Theory and FCA's "E3" method (engage, equip, and empower) were used to formulate the research questions and examine/explain the perceptions of spiritual development through the lenses of FCA. As students navigate through different development processes, the Faith Development Theory can provide a lens on how FCA and HEIs can better serve students in exploring, developing, and enhancing their spiritual development (Ramsey, 2015, p. 11).

### **Research Questions**

The principal research questions driving this study are:

1. What are AAFSAs perceptions of FCA?
2. In what ways does participation in FCA facilitate spiritual development?
3. What factors influence participation in FCA?
4. How is FCA being utilized as a coping mechanism in AAFSAs?

### **Study Design**

The researcher will use a survey research design. The intention is that quantitative methods will result in outcomes and data (numerical) that can be generalized across the groups and organizations of interest, as well as future situations with likened variables (Creswell, Shope, Plano, & Green, 2006; McCrae, 2018). The survey design will describe of themes, attitudes, and opinions of the population through studying a sample of that



population (Creswell, 2003, p. 153). The survey design draws a broad sample to facilitate generalizability for DI Kentucky AAFSAs.

Embedded within the survey are qualitative inquiries to acquire additional information from the participating DI Kentucky AAFSAs regarding their perceptions and experiences of FCA. The aim is that the inquiries will collect rich data and facilitate a vaster understanding of the participant's experiences (Tucker, 2016, p. 27). Since the purpose of this study was to obtain a more in-depth understanding of AAFSAs perceptions of FCA and their spiritual development, this methodology provides the best epistemological process for examining this study's distinct purpose (Cadungug, 2016, pp. 12-13).

This study is an adaption of survey research done by Pubols (2018) on student-athletes participating in Athletes in Action. By amending the survey, the researcher will apply it to better understanding of how faith development is impacted by participation in FCA, what are AAFSAs perceptions of FCA, and what factors influence participation in FCA. The survey will satisfactorily gather the relevant research to cover both quantitative and—to an extent possible on such an instrument—qualitative responses (Pubols, 2018, p. 118).

### **Terminology and Definitions**

Below are several common terms that will be referred to throughout this research and are pertinent for understanding this research:

*Athletic identity:* Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) defined athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (p.237). As evidenced in the name “student-athlete,” they navigate multiple identity roles as they develop as young

adults. As athletes navigate this role conflict, if they do not undergo identity foreclosure, they can settle into a hierarchy composed of multiple identities (Whipple, 2009).

AAFSAs (African American football student-athletes): For this study, I will use this to refer to African American males who participate in NCAA Division I collegiate football in Kentucky (see definitions of NCAA and Division I (DI) institutions). In some cases, Black is also used to identify racial ethnicity.

Christian Spiritual development: Christian spiritual development involves personal development and, meaning-making fixated on the life of Jesus Christ, a process of internalizing values, perspectives, and responses from God (Anthony, 2001; Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020). The goal and purpose of Christian spiritual development is to become more aware of who one is, whom one is created to be, and how one should live as one draws into a deeper relationship with God.

Christianity or Christian: The religion of Christianity is an elaborate cultural system that has dominated world societies for centuries (Sage, Eitzen, & Beal, 2019, p. 359). The basic tenets that Christians typically follow are monotheism, belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the Holy Bible. The Bible includes important scriptures that outline Jesus's teachings, the lives and teachings of prophets and disciples, and offer directives for how Christians should live (Onion, Sullivan, & Mullen, 2019).

Christlikeness: The pursuit of emulating the character of Jesus Christ. It is understood never to be fully attainable, but this is this goal of Christians. As one better emulates Christlikeness, they further exhibit spiritual development.

Division I (DI) institutions: These are typically the largest and most well-known higher education institutions. While heavily research-focused, they also have elaborate athletic

programs. These institutions typically have at least 14 sports and have the highest amount of money and scholarships to provide students (Collins, 2019).

*Faith*: An activity in which “all human beings compose and dwell in some conviction of what is ultimately true, real, dependable” and thereby stake their lives on that composition of reality (Parks, 2000, p. 21). Fowler says that faith encompasses three areas: patterned knowing (belief), patterned valuing (devotion), and patterned constructions of meaning (narrative or study) (Fowler, 1987, p. 56). Parks also argues that faith is more than a set of religious beliefs, but also practical action (2000). For this study, faith is limited to Christianity.

*Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)*: Education that occurs following secondary school and is administered at a college or university that confers degrees.

*Holistic Development*: Holistic learning attempts to “provide a broader vision of education and human development” within the educational setting (Miller, 1999, p. 46). Holistic development concerns being educated in multiple ways and enhancing oneself by participating in various experiences that would develop a person spiritually, mentally, physically, and psychologically (Flowers, 2020, p. 5).

*Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)*: Institutions primarily composed of Caucasian American students. All DI HEIs in Kentucky are PWIs.

*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)*: The NCAA is the largest and most prominent intercollegiate athletics governing body. Nearly every U.S. institution (Approximately 1300+ institutions) is affiliated with the NCAA. Institutions are split into divisions (Division I, II, and III). The most well-known and prominent research institutions also have robust athletic programs, such as Ohio State, Clemson, Duke, etc.

*Spiritual development*: Epting defines development as the act or process of someone growing and maturing within a specific area (2013, p. 8). Spiritual development is the progression of growth and maturity facilitated by the interaction between faith and Christian spirituality.

*Sport Ministry Organizations (SMOs)*: SMOs are para-church organizations, which Blakeney-Glazer defines as “working alongside traditional churches rather than as a replacement for church experience” (p. 11). SMOs use the platform of sport to share the message of Jesus with non-Christians and spiritually develop Christians.

*Student-athlete*: Student-athletes are college students who participate in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which they are enrolled (Epting, 2013, p.9). The term “student-athlete” implies multiple identities, as these individuals are responsible for fulfilling academic responsibilities, maintaining NCAA eligibility standards, and competing at a high level.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a preliminary look into the importance of athletics at HEIs. As sport can develop athletes in various ways, an often-overlooked portion is spiritual development. Research gaps highlight the need to assess Christian spiritual development in AAFSAs, as they face multiple identities and many additional challenges. The discussion also presented the importance of sport ministry organizations (SMOs), like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and their potential to facilitate spiritual development and assist with various challenges AAFSAs face within DI PWIs. The chapter concluded by discussing terms relevant to the research, the questions under investigation, and a brief study design. By identifying the problem, research purposes, and how it will be

facilitated, this chapter creates the framework for exploring the literature that draws the connectedness of spirituality in higher education, athletics, African American student-athletes, and SMOs.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, an increased focus on spirituality in higher education institutions has inspired more scholarship examining student-athletes spiritual development. Since student-athletes are a unique population, their spiritual development often looks different than typical college students. For many African American college students, the role of religion and spirituality is vital, yet sparse research exists on the importance of spirituality in the lives of African American student-athletes.

Sport ministry organizations exist in these higher education spaces to target the spiritual development of student-athletes and can be utilized as a tool for Christian spiritual development. What is lacking in the literature is empirical data to verify the effectiveness of sport ministry organization's role in the spiritual development of student-athletes, especially in such a unique subgroup (AAFSAs). Faith Development Theories function as the guide in explaining the spiritual development process of AAFSAs.

### **Religion in Higher Education**

Shortly after European settlers came to the United States, they began to create HEIs. The first colonial college, founded in 1636, was Harvard College [now Harvard University]. Other colonial colleges include the College of William and Mary, Yale University, Princeton University, Columbia University, Brown University, Rutgers University, and Dartmouth College. These institutions were founded on religious roots; they were to train young men going into ministry. The central role among early colleges and universities was to create luminary young men who would be useful to society through character development (Jenney, 2010; Pearce, 2020). During this era, Puritans viewed a college education as “part of a large, important social, religious, and political

vision” (Thelin, 2004, p. 23). But centuries later, pivotal changes led to the secularization of many HEIs.

During the period between the Civil War and World War I, important changes took place in the American college curriculum: the introduction of student course electives, the development of specialized courses (especially in the sciences), and the growth of new disciplines (especially in the humanities) (Roberts & Turner, 2000). Furthermore, higher education leadership began to change structurally, with traditional clergy and professional educators being replaced by businessmen (Chu, 1989; Ramsey, 2015). In the mid-nineteenth century, higher education expanded to include subjects such as agriculture and engineering due to the Morrill Act of 1862 ("History of Higher Education in the U.S.", n.d.). This Act granted “land to each state to be sold so that the proceeds could be invested to find a public college” ("History of Higher Education in the U.S.", n.d.). In the twentieth century, higher education evolved into large, complex state-wide systems of public colleges and universities ("History of Higher Education in the U.S.", n.d.). HEIs shifted their focus to scholarship and research, away from religion (Winstead, 2020, p. 21). The passage of the GI bill also brought about innovative changes in the way HEIs admitted students. Increased applications lead to changes in curriculum through needing to ensure that programs would pass students through more rapidly (Clarke, 2010; Thelin, 2004).

Additionally, space considerations needed to be made for larger numbers of students (Clarke, 2010; Thelin, 2004). Although religion was once the driving force of higher education, religion was pushed to the very margins of the academic enterprise (Mahoney, Schmalzbauer, & Youn, 2001; Winstead, 2020). Roberts and Turner argue

that these changes promoted the “secularization” of the previously "sacred" college (Roberts & Turner, 2000). Although unintentional, legislation also moved HEIs further away from religious roots. Those significant changes and legislation are the small, incremental shifts that separated a once close-knit relationship between religion and HEIs.

Although for decades many HEIs were portrayed as the chief exemplars of secularization, Schmalzbauer and Mahoney argue that “the sacred” did not necessarily disappear completely HEIs (2018, p. 1). Religious frameworks and concepts “coexisted with the secular” and continued to influence American intellectual life (p. 1). The teaching and the practice of religion persisted in a wide variety of institutions, waxing and waning over time (p. 1). Over the past century, it has become a secondary focus for many HEIs (Winstead, 2020, p. 22). Religiousness is most perceptible in church-related institutions, divinity schools, and campus ministries. However, religious activity at HEIs has increased rather remarkably over the past three decades.

A serious interest in religion and spirituality reemerged in the late 1980s (Winstead, 2020, p. 191). The “comeback” of religion on campus has been exhibited in several ways. At the institutional level, individual campuses opened many religion-oriented centers and institutes, faculty mentoring programs, and new mission statements (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018, p. 2). Additionally, diverse networks of faculty and administrators have focused on strengthening the academic study of religion, while others have emphasized the integration of faith and learning. In addition to opportunities to participate on campus, students are engaging in discussion (both in and out the classroom) and evaluation of religious and philosophical topics (Winstead, 2020, p. 9).



Aside from faculty and administrators, another group of educators has worked to revitalize church-related colleges and universities: student affairs. With the growth and importance of student affairs offices, they have realized that the same opportunity to attain spiritual development should be given just like all other areas of development.

Finally, voluntary religious expression is thriving and is increasingly visible. At both public and private institutions, diverse expressions of student religiosity have turned the campus union into a lively religious marketplace (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018, p. 135). Many religions, cults, and beliefs are represented, designed to promote community on campus (Winstead, 2020, p. 9).

Specifically, membership in evangelical parachurch groups (i.e., campus ministries) has risen dramatically, while student religious life is remarkably diverse (Winstead, 2020, p. 11). By the 1990s, religious and spiritual issues reemerged in HEIs through participation and advanced learning and scholarship (p. 23). These issues led to increased religious activity on campus that reflected the current society. Voluntary religious activities transformed consideration of church-college relations, and scholars looking to integrate their faith into their work began to pervade HEIs once again (Mahoney, Schmalzbauer, & Youn, 2001; Winstead, 2020). Pearce remarks that HEIs within the United States of America “has always had a relationship with religion, more specifically with Christianity” (2020, p. 12). Yet, as previously mentioned, as HEIs began to both modernize and secularize, the “forces of Christianity had to work increasingly hard to maintain their place on campus” (Pearce, 2020, p. 12).

## Spirituality in Higher Education

It is crucial to begin the discussion of spirituality by delineating it from religion. This is not to say that the two do not coincide, but it is important to understand why the focus of this study is rooted in spirituality. Rather than view religion and spirituality as an either/or, it is more beneficial to see their relationship from a both/and perspective. Religion provides both external motivation and authentication that fosters the inner search for spiritual development (Gardener, 2019; Stamm, 2006). *Religion* is characteristically demonstrated in communities, transmits external goals of social identity, health, and wellness in addition to the sacred pursuits of a given faith. Religion also validates one's spiritual development through participation in respective rituals (Gardener, 2019; Stamm, 2006). In a study by Bryant, she portrays religion as being "typically associated with commitment to a supernatural power that is expressed through ritual and celebration both individually and within the context of a faith community" (2007, p. 835). *Spirituality* is asserted to be more evocative of the functional, intrinsic dimensions of religion, but religion represents the more substantive, extrinsic dimensions (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Pargament 1999; Raikes, 2010). Hart (2003) expressed religion as "an institutionalized approach to spiritual growth formed around doctrines, rituals, and standards of behavior" (p. 173). Thus, the two meanings attributed to spirituality and religion evidently must overlap. *Spirituality*, as outlined by Astin, is "the values we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and the world around us." (2004, p. 1)

It is the “pursuit toward interconnectedness with self, others, community, and a higher power” (Raikes, 2010, p. 17). Personal faith or spirituality is a person’s discovery of their meaning and purpose in life (Ramsey, 2015, p. 36). Parks’ definition of faith falls in line with spirituality, where one endeavors to make sense of the self-regarding and with the external world (2000). Spirituality is a form of personal commitment to inward development, thus affecting a person entirely (Gardener, 2019; Stamm, 2006). Zinnbauer et al. outlines spirituality as “personal or experiential terms, such as belief in God or a higher power, or having a relationship with God or a higher power” (1997, p. 561). Hart also connects spirituality to a personal and relational connection to the Divine (2003).

Spiritual development is the actions that benefit spirituality, addressing the inward growth as students grapple with perplexing inquiries of who they are, what do they value deeply, what is their life purpose/mission, whom they want to become, and how they want to contribute to the world (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 3).

While higher education’s roots stems from a religious viewpoint, the recent awakening at HEIs has focused on the spiritual. The primary inquiry of the past four decades is how students adopt and integrate spiritual development into the context of their academic learning and their lives as a whole (Dungy, 2003, p. 355). In recent years, Bacon points out that the argument for incorporating issues of spirituality at HEIs has become more pressing (2008, p. 1).

As students continue to practice faith and explore spiritual development, research in this area continues to surge and press towards including spirituality as part of the experience in higher education (Astin, 2004; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bacon, 2008; Buley-Meissner, Thompson, & Tan, 2000; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2000; Sceggel,

2018; Schwartz, 2001; UCLA, 2006). Research by Dalton et al. on the contemporary forms and patterns of college student spirituality concludes that it is critical for higher education professionals to “recognize the changing forms of college student spirituality today and to deepen their resources, understanding, and commitment to spiritual growth as an important aspect of their mission to promote students' holistic development" (2006, p. 16). More and more educational professionals report that students want to include spirituality as part of their experience at postsecondary schools (Bacon, 2008, p. 1).

Alexander Astin, one of the leading researchers in spirituality and spiritual development in higher education, showed that engagement with religious institutions and practices among college students has decreased, while a search for spiritual meaning has increased (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). A yearning to engage in the spiritual quest and resolve the inquires stated above (whom they are, what do they value deeply, etc.) grows significantly during the college years (2011). Astin, Astin, & Lindholm (2011) explored spiritual development in three segments:

- Spiritual practices: Routines, habits, or rituals an individual engages in, such as church, attending a faith community group, prayer, etc.
- Spiritual tolerances: Knowledge and understanding of other faith communities and acceptance of them.
- Spiritual self-awareness: One’s understanding of their identity, and spiritual strengths and weaknesses.

Jenney’s research findings are indicative of spirituality having a substantial positive impact in shaping students’ life direction, defining goals, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life (2010, p. 289). Their spiritual development was observed the

frequency of importance of looking for opportunities to grow through practices like prayer, meditation, and religious singing (p. 289).

It is important to note that the theoretical framework in this study (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) are grounded in this concept of spirituality, rather than religion (Clarke, 2010, p. 55).

### **Christian Spiritual Development**

Christian spiritual development involves personal development and meaning-making fixated on the life of Jesus Christ, a process of internalizing values, perspectives, and responses from God (Anthony, 2001; Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020). The underpinning aiding in this development is faith, which is the essence of the Christian life and is “an effective power directed toward the future. It springs from a direct, personal encounter with the living God” (Lane, 1987, p. 329).

Scorgie et al. (2011) framed Christian spiritual development in terms of “the domain of lived Christian experience. It is about living all of life – not just some esoteric portion of it – before God” (p. 27). The goal and purpose of Christian spiritual development is to become more aware of who one is, who one is created to be, and how one should live as one draws into a deeper relationship with God. Spiritual progress is revealed towards maturity in at least three areas (relationships with God, self, and others) and encompasses one’s intellect, beliefs, values, emotions, will, and behavior. (Ma, 2003, p. 328). Moreover, Christian spiritual development can be cultivated by the implementation of spiritual disciplines (prayer, bible reading, fasting, meditation, journaling, etc.).

The sacred text that Christians utilize (the Bible) demonstrates the utilization of physical activity/athletic references such as in Hebrews 12:1 ESV “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside *every weight* (italics added for emphasis), and sin which clings so closely, and let us *run* with *endurance* (italics added for emphasis) the race that is set before us,” and 1 Corinthians 9:24 NIV “Do you not know that in a *race* (italics added for emphasis) all *the runners run* (italics added for emphasis), but only one gets the *prize* (italics added for emphasis)? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”

Sport is considered part of God’s created order and people who pursue sport are regarded as being made in the image of God (Tucker, 2011, 2016). Therefore, the sporting gift in itself is viewed as a segment of image-bearing. Hence athletes are stewards to glorify and seek to please God (Czech et al., 2004; Daniels & Weir, 2004; Tucker, 2016). Contextually speaking, the faith of a Christian athlete is fuel for a purpose-driven life (Perttula, 2018, p. 10).

Christian spiritual development is also reflected in the understanding that worship (attributing glory to God) is displayed through an athlete’s effort and demeanor in play (Ellis & Weir, 2020, p. 677). Ellis (as cited in Ellis & Weir, 2020, p. 677) paints worship as an “exuberant celebration of our embodiedness and a recognition that as creatures of God we are stretching and straining ourselves to accomplish that for which we were made—and giving pleasure to God in so doing” (2014). Christian spiritual development is founded on altruism, asserting freedom through service to something beyond oneself, not absolute individualism (Mosley et al., 2015; Nesti, 2007). Sport is

used as an opportunity to devote service to God, teammates, coaches, and even opponents.

For higher education professionals, it is imperative to continue to gain knowledge and understanding of how faith interacts with athletics on the grandest stage (Epting, 2013, p. 120). Epting furthers this argument from a Christian viewpoint by stating that “as a student-athlete, the role that Christian faith plays in the student’s success should not be overlooked as it is part of holistic learning” (Epting, 2013, p. 3). Through better understanding Christian spiritual development among traditional-aged student-athletes, all those involved in collegiate athletics can gain greater insight into the issues and opportunities of balancing college sports for student-athletes that identify with the Christian faith (p. 121).

While acknowledging a connectedness between the two constructs of religion and spirituality, this research focuses primarily on Christian spiritual development, as it encompasses a personal and transformative relationship with God, especially amongst college students, since “College is a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual beliefs and values” (Capeheart-Meningall, 2005, p. 31). Christianity is the driving belief system (religion), while spirituality is the lived experience and meaning-making that is an “all-encompassing way of life” (Gardner, 2019, p. 6). As Christianity is the principal religion, the researcher argues that this study is best situated in Christian spiritual development to understand how student-athletes develop as a person and make meaning through this religion.

## **Spirituality in Collegiate Athletics**

Clarke maintains that student-athletes are only a single example of a subpopulation of college students whose spiritual development occurs differently than other students (Clarke, 2010, p. 122). Student-athletes have the added stresses of athletic practices, games (and winning those games), academics, and the expectation of representing their institution positively (Ramsey, 2015, p. 123). Student-athletes, like all students, undergo extreme searches for identity development, which plays a role in the individual's search for authenticity (Clarke, 2010, p. 121). As evidenced in the name "student-athlete," they navigate multiple identity roles as they develop as young adults. Identity development closely aligns with how an individual uncovers a personalized sense of meaning and purpose in life. Meaning and purpose tend to be centered on focus outside of oneself, leading to examining spiritual beliefs and values.

Dillon and Tait's (2000) study was the first to investigate the relationship between spirituality and being in a positive state of flow. The researchers framed spirituality as "experiencing the presence of a power, a force, an energy, or a God close to you" (2000, pp. 92-93). The study's sample size consisted of sixty-two Division III college students (athletes and some non-athletes). For data collection purposes, the researchers developed two Likert scale tests: the Zone Test (ZT) and the Spirituality in Sports Tests (SIST). Since they concentrated on the use of spirituality in sports and did not examine the validity of that use, a scientific approach was deemed appropriate. With this designation, athletes were asked to indicate the level they use or look to this kind of experience in different situations they would likely encounter as a member of a team sport. The



researcher's hypothesis that "being more spiritual in sports is related to being in the zone more often," was found to be statistically significant (Dillon & Tait, 2000, p. 96).

Ridnour and Hammermeister (2008) investigated the role of spiritual well-being and its impact on sport performance. The purpose of their study was to fill the gap in the spirituality and sport psychology literature by examining if "spiritually well" athletes exhibit a better athletic coping skills profile compared with their "less spiritually well" peers (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008, p. 83). The study's sample size consisted of 142 NCAA Division I athletes. Participants completed three questionnaires: a demographic questionnaire, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI). The overall measure of the perception of the spiritual quality of life acted as the operational definition of "spiritual well-being" for their investigation (Ridnour & Hammermeister, 2008, p. 83).

Research by Clarke examined spirituality that was self-reported by collegiate student-athletes participating in individual and team sports. The research design was quantitative, using an explanatory research approach. The participants consisted of student-athletes from an NCAA Division I institution. A survey was used to identify student-athlete's levels of spirituality. The survey was Astin's (2004) College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV). Conceptually, this study was grounded in the works of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000). Clarke conceptually defined *spirituality* as "one's search for and understanding of one's meaning and purpose in life" (Astin, 2004; Clarke, 2010). Spirituality was operationalized by measuring scores for each subscale, as measured in the CSBV survey (Clarke, 2010, pp. 59, 74). Student-athletes in the study reported greater mean scores in half of the subscales measured by the CSBV vs. Astin's

(2007) original sample population of college students nationwide (Clarke, 2010, pp. x-xi).

Epting's research worked to classify faith development in student-athletes, focusing on football players at a Division I institution. Epting's study entailed a qualitative research method approach using in-depth semi-structured interviews. While Clarke's conceptualization of spirituality was more broadly focused, Epting concentrated on Christian faith development. Epting created the Student-Athlete Christian Faith Interview Guide (SACFIG), as an adaptation from Newman's First Year Student Faith Interview Guide (1998) to measure development. Epting used a phenomenological approach to discover the meaning or essence of a Christian faith experience within intercollegiate athletics. The four themes identified through the interview process were: (a) Christian Faith Experiences; (b) Relationships; (c) Football Environmental Characteristics; and (d) Christian Faith Changes and Beliefs (Epting, 2013, p. 62). A place that cultivated spiritual development and relationship building was the sport ministry organization, FCA (p. 117).

Blakeney-Glazer's research exclusively focused on Christian athletes and how they were able to use their embodied athletic experiences (like athletic pleasure and athletic pain) and the structures of sport (like gender distinctions, hierarchies of authority, explicit rules, and dualistic understandings) to affirm beliefs and identities as members of the Christian community (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. iii). Blakeney-Glazer used a cultural studies approach to examine "what people do and what people say to investigate what relationships and what knowledge motivates these actions and words" (p. 26). A multi-sited ethnography guided her understanding of the complexity and variety of Christian

athletes within SMOs. Her principal questions were, “How is Christian athletic identity forged? How is it maintained? And to what effects?” (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. 9). Blakeney-Glazer acknowledges that SMOs are “addressing the everyday concerns of Christian athletes as they attempt to combine Christian and sporting identities.” SMOs shape Christlikeness, aiding athletes in the ability to play through exhaustion, remain composed under pressure, deal with loss and injuries, and cultivate a perspective where their self-worth is not determined by their athletic performance (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. 139).

The literature assumes a historical, affirmative relationship between athletic involvement and spiritual development (Banwell & Kerr, 2016; Gardner, 2019; Krattenmaker, 2010; Pfitzner, 2009; Watson, 2007). Yet, past research does not give ample attention to the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African American male college athletes (Cuyjet, 2006; Waller, 2015; Watson, 2006). Research does not account for the prospective impact engagement in an SMO like FCA could contribute to AAFSAs.

### **African American Male Collegiate Students**

Many decades ago, the United States institutionalized “separate and unequal” educational practices and procedures, thus furthering inequitable outcomes and marginalization of people of color and women (Stephens, 2019). Though colleges had a formal policy of racial inclusion, it was a covert practice to exclude African Americans (Thelin, 2011). After World War II (1945-1980), higher education underwent fundamental changes, which helped to create the modern system exhibited today. During this period, governmental involvement in higher education policy and practice was

amplified, evidenced by the instigation of the Truman and Danforth reports, the Civil Rights Movement, and *Brown v. Board of Education* (Stephens, 2019). This expansion or inclusion in college enrollment unintentionally contributed to the secularization of HEIs as well (2019).

In the United States, it is generally believed that a college degree affords students with social and cultural capital that can be applied to better work opportunities and increased skills necessary to navigate and progress in life (Stephens, 2019, p. 1). HEIs acted as a mechanism for shaping economic opportunity and prosperity (Douglass, 2007). HEIs were fundamental for the upward mobility of African Americans with newly gained freedoms and rights. Nevertheless, there are degrees of residue from higher education's historical foundation that still permeates America's contemporary higher education landscape through systemic and structural barriers (Espinosa et al., 2019; Stephens, 2019).

Currently, African American males make up a larger share of the undergraduate student population than twenty years ago (Espinosa et al., 2019). While that is promising, research indicates that African American males may face many challenges even before college. These challenges could be racism, crime, and a lack of educational role models. They often have greater daily obstacles than many White students (Cuyjet, 2006; Rice, 2012). These challenges are carried into their collegiate journey and experienced at HEIs. Undergraduate students face the challenges of racial issues, retention difficulties, tense campus climates, and a lack of financial resources (Avent Harris & Wong, 2018; Hunn, 2014; Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). African American students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs exhibited lower first-year persistence rates and

greater drop-out rates than any other racial or ethnic group, indicating the existence of constrained opportunities for African American students (Espinosa et al., 2019).

HEIs have developed many programs to help alleviate some of these concerns and challenges and assist African American males to persist through college and eventually graduate (Cuyjet, 2006; Rice, 2012). These programs foster mentoring, tutoring, and faculty-student relationships (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Although these programs on college campuses have been developed to help African American males find a place in the institution and develop in academics, social life, and career preparation, several fail to help African American males understand their purpose in life. As the researcher discussed before, meaning and purpose in life tend to be centered on a focus outside of oneself, leading to examining spiritual beliefs and values. Spirituality plays a key role in understanding and facilitating identity development.

### **Spiritual Development of African American Collegiate Students**

Despite much work on the experiences of African American male college students, modest investigation explore spiritual identities among African American males in college (Dancy, 2010). However, spiritual identity is an important consideration as both African American men and women are found to filter decisions through strong spiritual and religious influences (Shipp, 2017).

Historically, religious faith has been an important part of the African American community. Religion and spirituality serve as major guiding sources in the lives of African Americans (Love, 2010; Salsman & Carlson, 2005). Research findings insinuate that African Americans rely on religion and spirituality as a source of hope, liberation, and material/emotional support (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Moore-Thomas & Day-

Vines, 2008; Newlin et al., 2002; Spencer, Fegley, & Harpalani, 2003; Watt, 2003). Specifically, Christianity has played an immense role in African American history (Masci, 2018). Masci illuminates that while most Africans brought to the New World in slavery were not Christians when they arrived, many of them and their descendants embraced Christianity, finding comfort in the Biblical message of spiritual equality and deliverance (Masci, 2018). Christianity was a resource in providing enslaved Africans a sense of solidarity, social cohesion, and social bonds (Frazier, 1966; Love, 2010). Through memories of African practices, enslaved Africans instituted their unique form of expressing their Christian faith to endure the hardships of slavery and oppression (Love, 2010; Pinn & Pinn, 2002).

Today, religious, spiritual, and communal values are reflected in the context of many African Americans' daily activities and lives (Taylor & Chatters, 2010). Aspects of communalism and collectivism can be noticed in the fact that religious participation has been linked to civic participation, volunteerism, philanthropic giving, and other forms of altruistic behavior among African Americans (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Mattis, Fontenot, Hatcher-Kay, Grayman, & Beale, 2004; Mattis, 2000; Taylor & Chatters, 2010).

For African American students, existent research confirms that they are more likely than other students to believe in God, pray, and attend religious services frequently (Bartlett, 2005; Sanchez & Gilbert, 2016). Moreover, they are more likely than White students to indicate that both religion and spirituality are imperative and are less likely to indicate that "only spirituality" or "neither" is important (Taylor & Chatters, 2010). African American college students also tend to use religion and spiritual practices as

coping mechanisms more often than their White peers (Baldwin, Chambliss, & Towler, 2003; Herndon, 2003; Jackson, 1998). In a study of religious participation and spirituality, Constantine et al. uncovered that African American college students viewed their church or spiritual communities as primary places for psychological support (2002, p. 611).

The role of religion and spirituality in the life of African American students can be attributed to the role of the Black Church (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). In post-Civil War America, Masci reports that “a growing Black church played a vital role in strengthening African American communities through providing support and resources to the civil rights movement” (Masci, 2018). The organized church is a profound instrument available to African Americans for handling and coping with life’s issues (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Knox, 1985). Church members, as well as nonmembers, tended to accept the spirituality embodied in the church and use the church to defy their own helpless and depressive attitudes and oppressive practices (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Knox, 1985). Church involvement and participation, religious affiliation, and the moral compass of a religious background have been viewed as instrumental to the persistence of African American students (Shipp, 2017; Fagan, 2010). In a phenomenological study of African American undergraduate students, participants valued the Black Church as an integral part of their lives (Avent Harris & Wong, 2018). For many, the church family members helped influence how they constructed their identities (Avent Harris & Wong, 2018). The Black Church is an integral part of African Americans' spiritual, social, and political lives (Blank, Mahmood, Fox, & Guterbock, 2002).

African American males and other students in college often struggle to understand who they truly are. Identity plays a key role in the collegiate journey for African American male students. Spirituality and religious engagement have been shown to play an essential role in helping with identity development, especially considering the intersectionality of multiple identities, chiefly racial identity (Rice, 2012; Stewart, 2008, 2010; Watt, 2003). How students develop identity is closely related to their spirituality and purpose in life (Fowler, 1995; Parks, 2000). Chae, Kelly, Brown, and Bolden's study applying the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) examined the relationship between ethnic identity and spiritual development among four ethnic groups. The study revealed that it is evident that for many ethnic minority groups, their ethnic heritage and tradition are deeply intertwined with their spiritual belief system (2004, p. 5). Herndon (2003) used a grounded theory methodological approach to observe African American male college students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Herndon claimed that spirituality encourages resistance, brings about a sense of purpose, and is used (i.e., religious institutions) to support African American men. Spiritual support aided in the success of African American male college students (Herndon, 2003).

Work by Constantine revealed that religion and spirituality served as critical buffers against the challenges many participants encountered while pursuing their career goals and aspirations on a PWI (Constantine et al., 2002). Mainly, engaging in spiritual disciplines alleviated some of the related stressors (Constantine et al., 2002). As African American male college students explore various worldviews, spirituality remains a means of support, identity, and coping when confronted with academic and non-academic challenges (Shipp, 2017; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010).



## **Spiritual Development of Collegiate Football Student-Athletes**

U.S. HEIs were established with heterosexual, White male hegemonic values as the general model of the institutional standards for all students (Pescador, 2019, p. 15). Organized athletics followed suit under such ideological principles, especially within college football leadership (coaches, staff, and administrators). Historians Donald Spivey and Thomas Jones uncovered "a pattern of discrimination typical of that could be found in practically every secondary school, college, university, and professional athletic team throughout the United States" (Spivey & Jones, 1975, p. 944). Nevertheless, racial hierarchies are continually challenged and modified by athletics. Pescador writes that "while not exempted from their own racial stratification and connections with Jim Crow laws, college sports have traditionally been at the forefront in the struggle for desegregation and equality along ethnic and racial lines" (2019, p. 2).

African American male athletes played a fundamental role in contesting and reshaping the broader social struggle of African Americans in the twentieth century (Demas, 2008, p. 6). African American male athletes challenged the status quo to enter HEIs in the late nineteenth century. Geographically, the West and Midwest paved the way with a late nineteenth century-twentieth century entrance for African American athletes (late nineteenth century-twentieth century). In contrast, in the South, no African American males competed before World War II (Demas, 2008, p. 12). State laws (Jim Crow laws) dominated the educational landscape, prohibiting African American students from enrolling in classes, let alone extracurricular activities (p. 12). Even so, these African American male athletes' resiliency and persistence were inspiring. But as African American males began to gain wider access to PWIs and their athletic programs, Myles (2005) notes,

“Much of the talent recruited in sports, such as football, basketball, and track and field, were recruited from Black communities. The integration of these Black students into predominantly White institutions showed the commitment that athletic departments were making to recruiting the best talent in the world and winning” (p. 22).

As stated in the introduction, the number of AAMSAs at NCAA Division I PWIs has steadily increased over time. With a majority of coaches being White, there may be a disconnect between the athlete and coach. However, coaches have found ways to relate to these players and unite them to the team despite the potential disconnect. One of them being Christianity. This phenomenon is rooted in the muscular Christianity movement and confirms that there is a safe space for religion on campus in all athletics, principally football (Pearce, 2020).

Christianity presents an opportunity to bridge the cultural gap between a White coach and a group of young Black players (Pearce, 2020). Pearce explains that “Christianity may serve as one of the only points of cultural union between the majority of the stakeholders in and around a football program” (Pearce, 2020, p. 65). This is especially true for Kentucky HEIs located in what many deem the “Bible belt” of the United States, which is described as southern states where religion and spirituality are believed to be vital life components (Epting, 2013; Tweedie, 1978). It is not uncommon for southern coaches to conduct themselves as a faith model, and although religious activities are not mandatory, spiritual growth is encouraged by many of these coaches (p. 86). Ewert records that Tommy Tuberville (a well-known college football coach who coached in the SEC for 8+ years) believed that Christianity aided in his understanding of players and that using FCA and Jesus Christ was an avenue where growth could be cultivated in players (Ewert, 2007).

Tuberville continually sustained an environment that utilized Christianity as its foundation, as he and many other coaches enabled traditional moral codes set forth by Evangelical Christianity to mutate the administrative elements of their program (Pearce, 2020).

Christianity also serves as a proven recruiting method. Pearce writes that “by setting up God as their offensive coordinator, these coaches are able to connect with players and their families” (2020, p. 80). In fact, recently one of Alabama’s highly touted players committed to Alabama because of coach Nick Saban’s faith (Pearce, 2020).

Southern football teams are very diverse, and members will undoubtedly work and socialize across racial boundaries and foster a setting where personalization can occur (Hirko, 2009). Both theory and research suggest that when team members and coaches focus on accomplishing the same task, there are significant opportunities to reduce stereotypes and learn from others of different backgrounds (Hirko, 2009). If Christianity is embedded in the program or a coach’s teaching pedagogy, then a common goal could be using the game of football to foster spiritual growth, thus unifying the team across racial boundaries. In essence, athletes can personalize their teammates, viewing them as individuals with a common faith and not solely through a racial lens. A dualistic identification can occur where the student-athlete maintains attachment to their racial group (subgroup) while simultaneously and increasingly identifying with a superordinate group, the “Christian brotherhood.” As these athletes are involved at southern institutions, they will inevitably be exposed to Christianity in some form, whether it be through coaches, other athletes, churches, or campus ministry.

With African American males being highly represented on intercollegiate football teams, colleges and universities must continue to seek avenues to foster success for AAFSAs, and the FCA program could help achieve this goal.

### **Sport Ministry Organizations**

Today, over ninety sports ministry organizations (SMOs) exist in the United States, working with nearly every imaginable sport, from football, basketball, soccer and even surfing. SMOs primary mission is parallel to the Christian church: evangelism (sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to non-believers). SMOs recognize that athletes have tremendous influence. If they capitalize on that influence successfully, it can serve as an effective means of evangelism. While evangelism is the central mission of SMOs, Blakeney-Glazer explains that SMOs most evident functions are fostering communities built on affirming believers' sense of Christian belonging. SMOs facilitate a community of believers who work hard to reconcile their desires to be athletes and be close to God. They address the everyday concerns of Christian athletes as they attempt to combine Christian and athletic identities (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, pp. 2, 9-10). Blakeney-Glazer argues that "Sports ministry organizations produce knowledge about what it means to be a Christian athlete" (p. 10).

Austin (2010) has argued that participation in sports can provide a context for Christian spiritual formation. This positional basis is a theological conviction of the practical nature of the Christian faith, with principles to both sport and life (Perttula, 2018, p. 18-19). SMOs employ biblical principles to elevate the moral and spiritual standards of sports and secular culture, challenge athletes to cultivate a greater faith, and demonstrate faith in daily life. Shin says that the "21st Century Sports Ministry

Movement has sought to make this a pedagogical shift through the teaching of ‘life-skills’ through sport, based upon the ‘experiential learning method’” (Shin, 2010, para. 8). Character formation evolves from learning the developed materials and curricula that participants experience and can practically apply to sport (Shin, 2010; Tucker, 2016)

SMOs are locations where Christian athletes can reflect and contemplate their religious beliefs and practices (Blazer, 2015; Lease, 2015). SMOs act as parachurch organizations, meaning they work alongside the Christian church rather than as a replacement for the church.

SMOs are effective at HEIs because student-athletes’ lives in sport often present obstacles to their involvement in ministry events that are a great fit for the general student population (Lipe, 2015). SMOs fully embrace the sports culture, using it as a means to get to know individuals where they are, develop relationships, and create growth while fitting the student-athlete’s schedule.

### **Muscular Christianity**

In the nineteenth century, the changing social conditions in Western Europe generated a vast population movement through which individuals and families migrated from the countryside to the urban areas (Pescador, 2019, p. 28). Young adults found employment and better socioeconomic conditions. This demographic phenomenon raised concern among religious leaders and city authorities, as the number of boys and young adults in question were not considered to be “raised properly in urban areas” (Pescador, 2019, p. 28).

In response, Muscular Christianity arose as a Christian commitment to restoring health and manliness. It originated during the Victorian era in England in the 1850s,

developing out of the writings of Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley (McKay & McKay, 2018). Both men believed that Christian men were becoming too soft and effeminate. They created protagonists in their books who exemplified an ideal counterbalance — “young men who managed to combine the virtue and ethics of gentlemanly Christians, with masculine athleticism, camaraderie, and honor” (McKay & McKay, 2018).

This broader, ideological movement in the mid-nineteenth century eventually made its way to North American society. It first appeared in private schools and spread through the preaching of prominent Evangelical Protestants, such as Dwight L. Moody (“Muscular Christianity, the YMCA and Basketball”, 2017). It was believed that a great deal of human misery resulted from poor health. People would be happier and more productive if they engaged in sport to promote physical fitness.

Muscular Christianity advocated physical exercise for young children in the school system (Sage, Eitzen, & Beal, 2019, p. 40). Muscular Christianity became a widely popular ideology for physicians, reformers, school authorities, teachers, and politicians in the United States during the growth of industrialization and urbanization (Pescador, 2019, p. 28). In the United States, Muscular Christians added an additional stipulation; one cannot be a follower of Jesus and ignore or mistreat their body because physical health could help live out the good news of Jesus Christ (McKay & McKay, 2018). Physical activity/sport could be an effective means of building the stamina necessary to perform service for others, creating better moral strength/character, and serving as a platform to evangelize to the unchurched (McKay & McKay, 2018). American Muscular Christianity’s objective was to bring more men into organized

religion and to extend the influence of manly, vigorous Christianity throughout society (Martin, 1996). Where Victorian authors indirectly utilized athletics to strengthen working-class British men's health and piety, American Muscular Christians entirely embraced sports as their primary Evangelical method (Pearce, 2020, p. 42).

The Muscular Christianity doctrine redefined the role of HEIs regarding physical exercise and organized sports in the United States. According to its principles, the consistent channeling of young boys into sports under institutional supervision was viewed not only as an ideal antidote against urban dangers, but also a key to their successful transition into manhood and citizenship (Pescador, 2019, p. 28). In the mid-nineteenth century, Thomas Higginson believed that American colleges and universities, which were very much religiously affiliated, must be ascribed to a form of medieval sanctity that championed having a strong soul (Pearce, 2020, p. 15). He continually referenced Victorian authors and theologians, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, calling for sporting clubs and physical education within American colleges and universities, employing a religious philosophy to help cement his argument (Pearce, 2020, p. 16). Muscular Christianity allowed Christianity to begin developing a safe and continuous space within collegiate athletics since the middle of the 1800s (Pearce, 2020, p. 16). Muscular Christians desired to see a generation of “Gentleman Barbarians” — men who connected the traits of essential masculinity with Christian character; they possessed both physical power and the desire and capacity to control/direct that power for good (McKay & McKay, 2018). Sports facilitated this process by acquainting men with a sense of honor and camaraderie, rewarding drive and pain tolerance, and developing experience in wielding-controlled aggression (McKay & McKay, 2018).

As college football evolved in the late 1860s and early 1870s, trailblazers like athlete-coach Amos Alonzo Stagg conveyed this Muscular Christian ideology. He recognized the important role sports could play in developing men of strong Christian character and reaching the world with the Gospel. After being hired to coach football and lead the athletic program at the University of Chicago in 1892, Stagg declared he “could influence others to Christian ideals more effectively on the field than in the pulpit” (Murray, 2019). More recently, Pearce examined the presence of Muscular Christianity within the college football coaching ranks. He argues that football coaches are the heirs to this historical movement of Muscular Christianity, utilizing it to ground their coaching philosophy and practice (2020, p. iii). Thus, the muscular Christianity movement in football has created a safe space for religion on campus in all athletics (p. 11). The fact that collegiate athletics exists mainly outside the academic sphere and is visible to those external to the institution allows “Evangelical Christianity to get quite comfy within the academy” (p. 15).

Recognizing that sport carries a great deal of cultural significance in the United States and the world, Evangelical Christians have formed organizations that combine sport and Christianity for evangelism since the 1950s (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. 10). The essence of the Muscular Christianity movement in Evangelical Protestantism manifests itself through such programs (“Muscular Christianity, the YMCA and Basketball”, 2017). Ultimately, all sport ministry organizations (SMOs) like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Athletes in Action, and Pro Athletes Outreach owe their roots to Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley’s vision and inspiration to utilize sports to promote religious virtues (Gardner, 2019; Krattenmaker, 2010; Watson, 2007). Rather



than preach a separatist gospel that required a departure from American culture and life, American Muscular Christians worked to create Evangelical spaces through a symbiotic relationship between religion and sport that was meant to help provide character-building opportunities on and off the field (Pearce, 2020, p. 50).

Nonetheless, there is no denying that the ideology of American Muscular Christianity originated from a White, middle-class conception of masculinity (Hoffman, 2010; Ladd & Mathisen, 1999; Lease, 2015). It functioned as a way for this group to separate and define themselves from women, immigrants, and African Americans through building physical strength, athleticism, and spirituality (p. 5-6).

However, though not perfect, FCA attempted to utilize sports as a popular venue for promoting the image of a pluralistic and inclusive United States during the civil rights movement (Putz, in press, p. 5). FCA preached its message of colorblind racial inclusion even as it extended its reach into the South in the 1950s and early 1960s, a complicated proposition in the era of massive resistance from White segregationists (Putz, in press p. 6). But because White-led SMOs were embedded within the sports arena—with access, resources, and cultural influence—"they were strategically positioned to speak for Christian athletes and to filter the views of their members through a White evangelical perspective" (pp. 25-26). A twenty-first-century version of Muscular Christianity is seen though through the inclusion and socialization of women and ethnic minorities. Additionally, there is less emphasis on the strenuous life of sport correlated with aggression and imperialism ("Muscular Christianity, the YMCA and Basketball", 2017).

## **Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)**

Don McClanen founded FCA in 1954. Since that time, FCA has been challenging coaches and athletes on the professional, college, high school, junior high, and youth levels to “use the powerful platform of sport to reach every coach and every athlete with the transforming power of Jesus Christ” (Fellowship of Christian Athletes, 2020). FCA focuses on serving local communities and around the globe through engaging, equipping, and empowering coaches and athletes to unite, inspire and change the world through the good news of Jesus Christ (Fellowship of Christian Athletes, 2020). The “E3” method (engage, equip, and empower) entails engaging relationally by connecting with individuals, building genuine trust, and sharing life together (see figure 1.1). Equipping means providing training, events, resources, and ongoing support to help athletes grow and apply their faith to all parts of their life. Empowering means enabling faithful leaders who desire to use their time, talents, and treasures to help other coaches and athletes grow in their faith and share it with others.

Since its origin, FCA has served hundreds of HEIs. FCA's methods and values clarify that spirituality is a crucial aspect of student-athletes' lives and that the spiritual quest is integral to the developmental process (Parks, 2000; Ramsey, 2015). Research done by Flowers and Ramsey at Division I institutions indicates FCA's potential to facilitate the development of the holistic student-athlete, emphasizing their spiritual development (Flowers, 2020; Ramsey, 2015).

The south, and particularly Kentucky, has a strong background in FCA. In the southern culture, there is a more considerable inclination for the Christian faith to be a part of football programs and coaches' philosophy/pedagogy (Pearce, 2020; Epting,

2013; Tweedie, 1978). At the University of Alabama, FCA is considered “part of the rich tradition of football and the athletic department at Alabama itself” (Dzikus, Hardin, & Waller, 2012, p. 274). Furthermore, Auburn University has coordinated a chaplain training and internship program, one of the first in the nation (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010, pp. 1-2).

### *Chaplaincy*

An increasing number of athletic departments at HEIs utilize the services of sport chaplains across sport areas (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010, p.1). Characteristically, they are connected with FCA, one of the major providers of sport chaplains and staff members to serve athletic teams at HEIs. These roles are not funded by public HEIs, due to the separation of church and state. While chaplains may serve other athletic teams, most chaplains primarily serve in intercollegiate football programs to provide spiritual motivation, encouragement, and wisdom for student-athletes (Williams, 2007). They are trained to meet and answer the spiritual needs of collegiate student-athletes (Raikes, 2010, p. 169). Ramsey says that “when student athletes arrive on campus, they are often assigned a coordinator to assist with their academic achievement (academic coordinator), life skills development (social, emotional, mental coordinator) and athletic participation (defensive and offensive coordinator)” (Ramsey, 2015, p. 8). While athletes are assisted in developing as a student and an athlete, what is often overlooked in the assignment of “coordinators” is someone to assist them in spiritual development. Sport chaplains act as these “coordinators.”

Generally, sport chaplains are responsible for the spiritual care of a team (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010, p. 1). A sport chaplain provides counseling and spiritual care for

first the student-athletes and then the broader sports community, including coaches and staff members of a team (Lipe, 2006; Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010). They are invested in the spiritual development of these individuals, providing an “open office” where individuals can come with questions or personal concerns. Sport Chaplain’s goals are to help individuals encompass and mature in Christlikeness in all aspects of life, fostering a “biblical application in the sport experience for faith and life.” (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010, pp. 1-2). The most vital element of sport chaplaincy is relationship building, nurturing, and maturing an ongoing basis of trust (Mims, 2016) Mims says sport chaplains “are trained to develop relationships that strengthen the athlete’s God-given gifts to become a better athlete, enhance their individual competition and help develop overall good character as a person” (Mims, 2016, p. 17). Mims also speaks to several other roles a sport chaplain may comprise:

- Praying for and encouraging athletes, coaches, their families, and support staff
- Being available and equipped to assist in crisis situations
- Alerting the coach, administration and/or tour staff to critical issues that affect a team/program
- Providing training and resources for character development and life management skills
- Coordinating and leading chapel services and any other special ministry/outreach events

With a demanding sport like football and the added pressures of a DI institution, it is critical to have someone to provide holistic care and spiritual guidance for student-athletes and coaches who are in the spotlight and subject to public scrutiny. Each

Kentucky DI institution has a football chaplain to contribute to the spiritual development of their football programs, with the exception of Morehead State University which has Athletes in Action (Appendix C). An important note is that at these HEIs, some chaplains serve in dual roles as the chaplain *and* FCA staff member. They serve dual responsibilities of leading weekly meetings FCA for all student-athletes and other gatherings and meeting the individual needs of football student-athletes and coaches.

### **FCA as a Tool**

Ramsey formulates there is a belief that FCA is effective, yet there is minimal research validating this belief (2015, p. 49). FCA can be a vital resource that collegiate athletic departments can provide to assist student-athletes in their spiritual and personal development. It is more than a system of evangelism but rather a tool that can be used to ingrain practical applications of Christian values and biblical teachings into the lives of athletes (Blazer, 2019). Figure 2.1 depicts a conceptual framework of perceived outcomes of FCA.

### *Identity Formation*

For many of these traditional-aged college athletes, identity formation happens more than perhaps all the other years of life combined (Bomar, 2010). Students begin to seek answers to questions like: “(1) Who am I? (2) What do I value? (3) How am I unique? (4) How do I fit into society?” Dr. Pubols remarks, “sport is very easy linked to identities” (personal communication, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021). For athletes, identity is an essential consideration as they are likely to face many challenges in addressing it (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 37). Their identity is molded more complexly due to the varying nature of their social environments (Raikes, 2010, p. 39)

Cieslak defines *Athletic Identity* as the level of importance, strength, and exclusivity attached to the athlete's athletic role and influenced by their environment (Cieslak, 2004, p.15). Various studies explored athletic identity and demonstrated that an over-commitment to an athletic role restricts these students' active participation in academic, vocational, and social achievement domains (Oregon, 2010; Ryska, 2002). Should an athlete continue to live with athletic identity as the primary identity, they have failed to thoughtfully investigate other available roles and have made a premature, serious commitment to a socially prescribed role, which is *Identity Foreclosure* (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

HEIs have applied research on athletic identity and the identity formation of college students to support the academic advising, mental health counseling, and career services provided to its students (Washington, 2016; Torres, Jones, & Renn 2009). Yet, nominal research explores how the Christian faith can affect athletic identity and identity formation. Sceggel's findings demonstrate that a student-athlete growing in their faith may be better equipped to navigate the tension of being a student and an athlete, thus signifying spiritual development and identity formation (2018, p. 18). In Fowler's third, fourth, and fifth stages of faith development, the author pointed to developing one's identity as a critical factor in faith growth (Sceggel, 2018, p. 72).

While no research primarily focuses on if SMOs have the potential for changes to a student-athlete's identity, results indicate that SMOs can help student-athletes understand their athletic identity and the ability to leave identity foreclosure through spiritual development. Blakeney-Glazer recognized that sports ministries are "addressing the everyday concerns of Christian athletes as they attempt to combine Christian and

sporting identities” (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, p. 139). She also attests that SMOs cultivate a perspective where their self-worth is not determined by their athletic performance (2008, p. 139). Flower’s work at a DI institution on FCA's impact on spiritual development unveiled differences in how student-athletes perceive their athletic identity (2020). As demonstrated by the participants, they realized that there was more than just their sport; they were not defined by exclusively being an athlete. Athletics is what they do, not who they are (Flowers, 2020, p. 20).

Minority student-athletes face additional difficulties when their identity development needs are considered (Raikes, 2010, p. 59). AAFSAs are not just struggling with the double-consciousness (dual identities of student and athlete); there are intersections of numerous other identities (race, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.) that also informs their self-view. Student-athletes make meaning, define, and own their identity through their surroundings, conversations, and experiences.

Campus involvement is commended because it supports the psychosocial development of students, particularly as it pertains to interpersonal relationships and identity development (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). FCA recognizes the “daily grind of practice and competition, this is when their identity and worldview is being challenged the most” (Globe, 2016). As mentioned at the beginning of this section, most of Bomar’s identity questions that students pose and seek answers to can be addressed through a quest for spirituality (Bomar, 2010; Setran & Kiesling, 2013). SMO’s work tirelessly to assist student-athletes in better balancing the identity formation process through teachings that engrain:

- Not viewing sports as one's foremost priority but as an opportunity to worship God
- To reframe their motivations for competing such as recognition, success, or fear to be motivated by what God says about them
- Place their identity as a Christ-follower first, thus impacting how one competes and does everything else in life like school, work, etc.

### *Coping*

*Coping* is defined as the thoughts and behaviors (conscious and/or voluntary) mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations (Algorani & Gupta, 2021). For athletes, faith is often utilized as a resource and source of strength during difficult or challenging times, and emotions faced inside and outside of competition (Cadungug, 2016; Raikes, 2010; Ramsey, 2015; Sternberg, 2003; Storch et al., 2001). Individuals seeking to grow spiritually are more likely to employ their faith when faced with stress and less likely to use negative coping strategies (Knabb and Grigorian-Routon, 2014; Sceggel, 2018). Positive religious coping methods mirror a confident relationship with God, a belief that there is greater meaning found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others (Pargament et al., 2001; Thompson, 2006). Additionally, Mattis et al. purport that the process of believing in and relying on God may decrease an individual sense of burden in life (2000).

Blakeney-Glazer says that growth through SMOs aid athletes in the ability to play through exhaustion, remain composed under pressure, and deal with loss and injuries (2008, p. 139). Stevenson studied the ability of student-athletes in AIA to cope with the demands and expectations of the dominant culture of elite, competitive sport. Amid their



problems, they turned to faith (1997, p. 250). Faith created a more positive outlook toward their sporting practices, finding a reason for competing, a source of happiness, and "playing for God/competing for Christ" (p. 250). They found their faith as a way of coping with "both the good times and the bad, the winning and the losing, making the team and being cut; all of these events, they now argued, were simply parts of God's overall plan for their lives" (p. 250).

Should an incident occur where the athlete is no longer to participate in their sport permanently or temporarily (due to life circumstances), the hope is they would turn to an identity rooted in faith. Adverse circumstances prove to be instances where coping mechanisms might be commissioned. Accounts presented by participants in Sceggel's research contained stirring stories of how their faith proved to be what they leaned on during family members' death and season-ending injuries (2018, p. 60). A relevant example of another circumstance was the emergence (and continuation) of the COVID-19 pandemic. Flowers's research transpired during the start of COVID-19, when many of the subject's sports seasons/practices were canceled. Yet, one of the participants referenced that because of the foundation of faith that they developed, they viewed the time as a chance to grow and rely on their faith in Christ, committing to using the extra time they had to make their faith stronger (2020, p. 16).

Research findings indicate that African Americans males report greater use of religious coping (Anshel, Kang, & Miesner, 2010; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Racial differences on the use of religious coping is not surprising because as previously indicated, religion plays a strong role in the African American community. The use of religion for African Americans often serves as a coping mechanism to deal with

institutional racism and disadvantaged positions in social structures (Jang & Johnson, 2004; Thompson, 2006). As college students explore various worldviews, spirituality remains a means of support, identity, and coping when confronted with academic and non-academic challenges (Shipp, 2017; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). According to Dancy (2010), African American undergraduate students often rely on spiritual beliefs to cope with the stress of life on and off-campus. Additionally, Stewart (2010) found that African American students viewed themselves through a spiritual lens that allowed them to better understand and interpret their multiple identities and deal with various circumstances. Watt (2003) conducted a qualitative study to discover the role that spirituality played in the lives of African American college women and found that “spirituality included a search for meaning that shapes their identities, which in turn helps them to better cope with the negative messages they receive from society” (p. 29). While trying to navigate the college environment, African American students resort to religious and spiritual practices to cope with the stress and challenges of college life (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Black athletes regularly employ their spiritual resources to help them cope with and thrive in their environments on PWIs (Galli & Reel, 2012; Seitz, Sagas, & Connaughton, 2014; Walker, 2019)

FCA resources are designed to facilitate the capability to mentally and emotionally cope with factors like fear, anxiety, anger, pressure, guilt, worry, self-doubt, and negative thoughts. One key coping tool imparted to student-athletes is prayer (communication with) to God. Research endorses that sport participants tend to use prayer at times specifically as a coping mechanism (Huffman, 2017; Anshel, Kang, & Miesner, 2010; Czech et al., 2004; Czech & Bullet, 2007; Gould et al., 1993; Park, 2000).

The ministry nurtures a worldview that “moments of struggle or pain may appear to be bad, but for the believer, they are mechanisms to tune into God’s purposes and glimpse a greater meaning to reality” (Blazer, 2019, p. 638).

While FCA staff members and/or chaplains are certainly not trained psychologists, they can provide helpful insights into regulating the mental state of student-athletes while also pointing them to the appropriate resources when needed. While the FCA environment is not necessarily a “church,” it follows a similar suit in that it provides mentorship, spiritual development, community (of similar identities), and resources/support from staff members and/or chaplains. For many of these athletes who may not have the ability to participate in church, FCA may serve as their “church.”

#### *Christian Spiritual Development (Christlikeness)*

Spiritual development is the first and foremost goal of SMOs. FCA promotes Christian values and teachings through the platform and perspective of athletics. FCA offers an assortment of teachings, training, and materials to progress and promote spiritual growth. Athletes at any stage of faith are encouraged to grow and provided the necessary tools and mentorship.

Athletes are instructed to recognize that they are living out their faith in a public arena as they compete, and that the effectiveness of their testimony is proportionate to the way they play (Daniels & Weir, 2005). Athletes should seek “the opportunities to represent Christ in word and deed” (Daniels & Weir 2005, para. 10).

To honor Christ and live for God, athletes learn that worship is not to be regarded as an event in church but encompasses all facets of life, including athletics (Daniels & Weir, 2005; Tucker, 2011). The biblical reference often used to authenticate devoting

one's life and body to worship is Romans 12:1, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him" Romans 12:1 NLT. The objective is to give one's very best and to couple it with Christlike character.

Blakeney-Glazer's ethnographic study shadowed a team of AIA women's basketball players on a national tour. She says that sports ministries shape Christlikeness (following the teachings of Jesus Christ) and embody changes that manifest both in words and in action (2008, p.139). One of the participants narrated this as an internal change to move towards Christlikeness by being more conscious of and eventually eliminating vulgar language, particularly while playing (p. 138). The participant's increased attention to sacred texts (the Bible) and Godly practices (p. 138) brought about the change. The participant became fully integrated with the practice of Christlikeness when their actions became habit rather than obligatory (p. 138). The participants in Ramsey's study all alluded to enhanced spirituality in terms of their relationship to Christ and in their understanding of how this applies to their lives. There was a greater awareness of deciphering Christian principles from a practical perspective (2015, p. 90).

### *Relationships*

Collegiate ministries can certainly benefit from fostering meaningful and helpful relationships and assist students in staying engaged in the Christian community during their college years (Winstead, 2020, p. 5). Research continues to support the proposition that student peer relationships have a profound and lasting impact on students' lives during college and impact their psychosocial development (Jenney, 2010, p. 320).

Many college ministry strategies aim at creating a community for college students. While this is a solid strategy for the typical student who longs to belong somewhere, it is not the case with a student-athlete. They already have enough teammates, friends, activities, and priorities they can handle within their busy schedules (Globe, 2016). SMOs engage student-athletes by entering into their community and capitalizing on being an expansion of the community that student-athletes presently have (Globe, 2016). FCA creates an environment where peers can gather and invest in one another to grow spiritually. Furthermore, FCA hosts spring break trips, summer mission trips, retreats, and training, all to help student-athletes engage in community with teammates, other sports, individuals at other HEIs, and FCA staff.

According to Flowers, relationships were significant, as every participant mentioned how FCA brought important, meaningful relationships (2020, p. 21). Additionally, two athletes stressed the importance of not just any community but a community that shared a similar lifestyle (being an athlete). Student-athletes were more likely to attend because the people around them could relate to their struggles of balancing athletics, school, identities, relationships, and faith (p. 21). Relationships were a critical theme that proved to be influential in the lives of student-athletes, most of which was facilitated through SMOs (Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020; Ramsey, 2015). The directors, staff, and/or team chaplains of the SMOs correspondingly enable relationships with the athletes. Since the team chaplain is very visible and accessible, there are endless possibilities for student-athletes to establish a sense of trust and accountability that can foster a strong mentoring relationship for student-athletes (Ramsey, 2015, p. 4).

Winstead illustrates that some of the most persuasive factors affecting the decisions made by college students are peer pressure (2020, p. 5). College student-athletes are influenced not only by their environment but also by their interactions with the many people around them (Bruening, Borland, & Burton, 2008; Raikes, 2010). Consequently, students need strong Christian relationships at HEIs to support them in dealing with temptations and pressures. Support of fellow Christians is expressly significant if a Christian athlete is in a sport that is in the media's center of attention (and DI football certainly falls in that category). If they do not have people on their team with whom they can share their faith, they need this support from outside. (Kretschmann & Benz, 2012, p. 512)

Aside from peer-to-peer relationships, it is the influential others (faculty, campus staff, coaches, teammates, family, mentors, etc.) who assist with and help define and form the student-athletes' identity (Raikes, 2010, p. 58). Raikes says that "the circle of influence that surrounds the student-athlete is not limited to coaches and teammates but includes relationships outside the sport arena as well" (2010, p. 55).

As previously mentioned, African American student-athletes face strenuous identity issues. They are especially influenced by their environment and these influential others (Raikes, 2010, pp. 59-60). For AAFSAs and all athletes of color, it is critical to surround and encourage these students in various types of developmental relationships (pp. 59-61). African American student-athletes may struggle to establish strong social networks that moderate negative stress events during their collegiate tenure without mentoring relationships (Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018; Spitzer, 2000). The presence of these relationships is one vital factor that fuels academic, social, and athletic success as

well as the retention of Black student-athletes (Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018, p. 560). A mentoring relationship can provide healthy emotional support that focuses on developing a positive self-image (Howard-Hamilton, 1993). FCA chaplains/staff provide mentoring relationships to not only help these student athletes grow spiritually, but to address any other concerns and needs they may have. These relationships are extremely helpful due to their ability to connect with the students since many staff and chaplains were former athletes and/or coaches. Kindred FCA chaplains/staff relationships can prove to be even more effective. Through the assistance and guidance of these influencers, student-athletes can learn how to balance the numerous demands and expectations of school, sports, and social and personal development daily (Etzel et al., 2006; Raikes, 2010). Furthermore, other athletes or teammates participating in FCA can serve in a mentorship relationship for AAFSAs.

### *Evangelism*

Tucker conveys that evangelism is “the proclamation of the Good News” (Tucker, 2011, p. 69). The good news (also known as the gospel) is based upon the Biblical message concerning salvation through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, which has brought a restored relationship between humanity and God (Green, 1990; Tucker, 2011). Sport serves a two-fold function within the goal of extending God’s kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel and seeking to glorify God through conduct. Tucker posits that sport serves as a powerful metaphor for presenting many Biblical truths (2011, p. 74).

Daniels and Weir argued that “the mission of the Christian in the world of sport is summed up by the three words pray, play and say” (2008, para. 7). Briefly, praying is

communicating with God, playing is competing in a way that is pleasing to God and setting an example to others through conduct, and saying is making an effort to share the good news. It supersedes being solely a theological framework but practically challenges Christian athletes to utilize their sporting platform to intentionally serve the Lord and seek opportunities to share the gospel with other sportspeople (Tucker, 2011, p. 92).

FCA desires to develop followers of Christ who empower others to know and grow in Christ and lead others to do the same (see Figure 1.1).



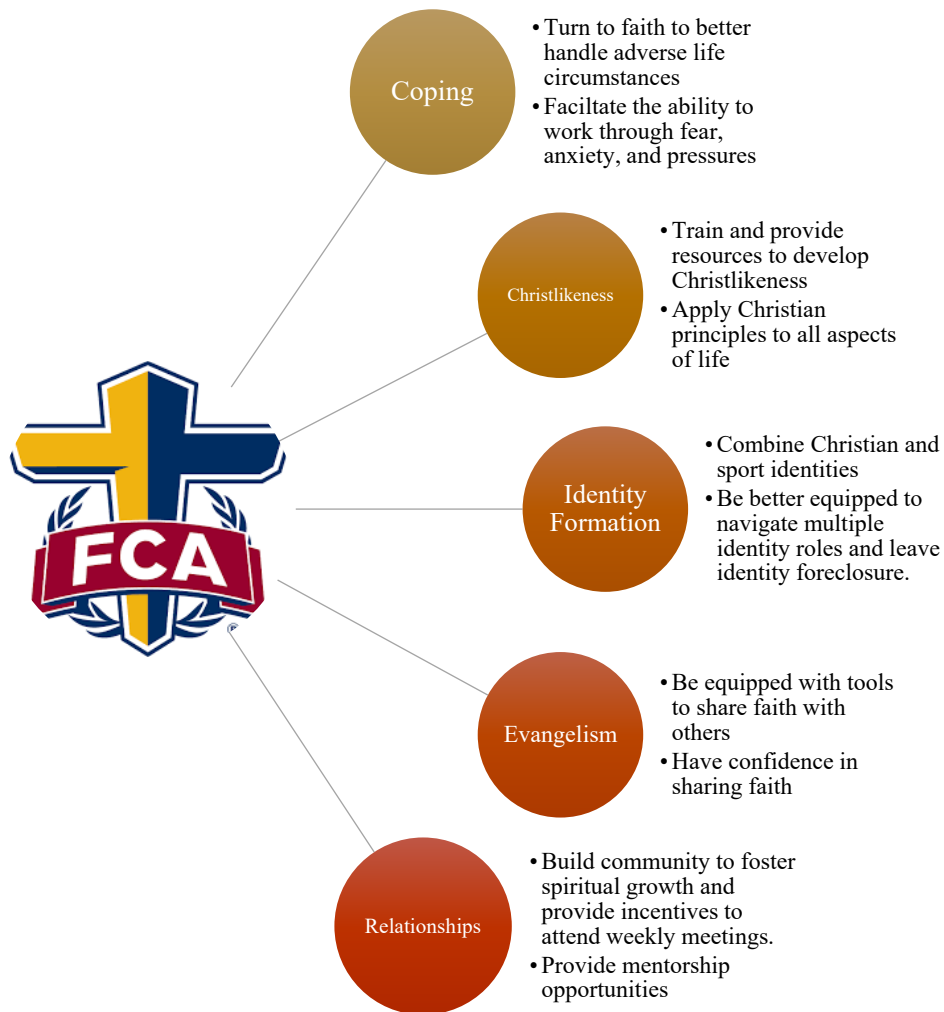


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework of perceived outcomes of FCA.

### Faith Development Theory

In thinking back to the definitions of spirituality, it was noted that faith falls in line with spirituality. It is important to note that Fowler’s and Parks’ theories are grounded in this concept of spirituality rather than religion (Clarke, 2010, p. 55). Capeheart-Meningall says that “College is a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual beliefs and values” (2005, p. 31). Student development theories support that typically, the search for meaning occurs normally around this time of life, in traditional-age college students (Renn & Reason, 2012; Evans,

Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Jablonski, 2001; Parks, 2011). These theories explore how students shape their search for meaning in life.

### **Fowler**

In 1981, Fowler crafted a faith development guide. Fowler's work on faith development builds upon the work of Piaget's scholarship on cognitive development (1970), Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1976), and Selman's writing on the development of interpersonal perspective taking (1981). Fowler says that "from Kohlberg and Piaget I gradually both adopted—and adapted—the constructive—developmental account of stage-like transformations in the forms of cognition and of moral reasoning" (Fowler, 2001, p. 160). Epting depicts Fowler's understanding of faith as:

Patterned knowing (which we sometimes call belief), patterned valuing (which we sometimes call commitment or devotion), and patterned constructions (of meaning, usually in the form of an underlying narrative helps to make sense of our everyday life and provide meaning with which to live) (Epting, 2013, p. 15).

Through that conceptualization of faith, an individual constructs meaning-making.

Fowler described seven stages that people go through when growing spiritually. Fowler provides an example of someone who becomes a Christian at a very early age, but as they move forward in their faith journey, their faith will need to deepen and expand several times for actual faith development to occur (Flowers, 2020, p. 9). Parks remarks that Fowler articulates faith as "intuiting life as a whole – a wholeness that is felt as a sense of relatedness among self, others, and a center of power and value that some would name God" (Parks, 2000, p. 21). Stages of faith can be used to measure and explain such

growth. The stages most appropriate for this study's participants fall within stages three and four.

### *Faith stages*

Stage three describes a *Synthetic-conventional faith* that focuses on development in the context of arising adolescence and young adulthood. An individual has influences from school, work, media, and family/friends to influence faith to conformity (Gathman & Nesson, 1997, p. 410). Faith is believed to be inherited from these influences without completely grasping one's own identity (Fowler, 1981). This inherited faith may arise from a cultural or family affiliation to the faith, so if the faith is not embraced, neither is the culture in which one was raised (Sceggel, 2018, p. 41). Epting says that:

In this stage, the individual begins to desire an interpersonal relationship with a higher being. The individual also looks to share the relationship with others as there is comfort in others believing the same thing and having others to experience those things at the same time (2013, p. 20).

Leaving the environment (from home to an HEI) is often the catalyst to begin a critical examination of the next faith stage (Clarke, 2010; Fowler, 1981).

In stage four (*Individuative-reflective faith*), the individual takes personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings (Fowler Faith Stages, 2012). This stage is closely related to college students, as the new environment "allows one to take control of their faith, freely question the faith of their parents or community, and choose how to move forward, instead of having the path dictated to them as likely occurred" (Sceggel, 2018, p. 35). It is the interruption of reliance on external sources of authority and the relocation of power within the self (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). The external influence is

lessening and, at times, being severed, which allows the individual to be more introspective and begin developing a personalized faith and identity (Epting, 2013, p. 21). The individual begins to form a new identity, exhibited through the person's lifestyle, selected associates, and experiences (p. 21).

Stage five (*Conjunctive faith*) is where a person begins to reflect critically on their personal faith. They can critically reflect on “contradictions in what they espouse and how they live life” (Epting, 2013, p. 22). An individual has developed, and open-mindedness is for momentous encounters with different traditions, with the expectation that truth has and will disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct their own faith (Epting, 2013; Fowler, 1981).

Fowler notes that regarding faith development:

Remember that the structuring operations underlying faith are at best only half of the story of a person's development in faith. The other half has to do with the contents of faith—the symbols, narratives, practices, and communities—and the emotional and imaginal responses to life conditions and experiences that exert powerful existential shaping influences on persons' patterns of interpretation, habit, mind, and action. Any good faith biography has to embrace both of these important halves of the story (Fowler, 2001, p. 164).

Fowler (2001) identified three primary relationships in our lives: self, others, and the creator. Faith Development Theory does not primarily focus on one of these relationships but instead endeavors to include all three as these relationships together can indicate overall development in a faith context. Fowler, Streib, and Keller (2004) explained that “faith development theory suggests the implications of faith, and our

relationships to life and its Source, for ethics, for law, and for ordering the purposes of humankind...by giving ways of understanding faith dimensions and traditions” (p. 412). Sceggel says that “Fowler’s work has been widely cited as since this faith development guide was created in 1981, allowing for years of testing of theories and measurement tools” (Sceggel, 2018, p. 41).

Fowler’s work leads to a better understanding of the faith development in athletes and looks at how they mold their identities. However, Sceggel notes that theory does not go without reproach. The absence of noted disconnect from traditional theological concepts including, “faith as giving certainty to existence, faith in the power of God, faith as leading to salvation, and faith as assurance of an experience with a heavenly realm” (Loder and Fowler, 1982; Sceggel, 2018). Many spiritual truths in Fowler’s theory were excluded (Loder and Fowler, 1982; Sceggel, 2018). However, Fowler’s intent was not to explain faith from a theological perspective but instead to “outline psychological prerequisites of faith development whatever the content” (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992, p. 75). Christian faith development is not systematic but a process of internalizing values, perspectives, and responses from God, therefore supporting Fowler’s Faith Development Theory for this study (Anthony, 2001; Epting 2013).

### **Parks**

As an extension of Fowler’s work, Parks (2000) investigates how college-aged students develop spiritually concerning their search for meaning and purpose in life. The importance of Parks’ work is that she inserts another stage of faith development in between Fowler’s stages of adolescence and adulthood (stages four and five), which is essentially a traditional college student (Epting, 2013, p. 23). This stage of life is where

students are very impressionable and critical to developing their identity (Epting, 2013; Washington, 2016). Parks contended that the college setting provides an optimum environment for young adults to explore faith-based beliefs. Parks (2000) expresses faith as “meaning-making in its most comprehensive dimensions” and how humans “compose and dwell in some conviction of what is ultimately true, real, dependable” (p. 21). It is the composing a sense of the ultimate character of reality and then staking one’s life on that sense of things (Epting, 2013; Parks, 2000). There is critical awareness and the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world, and God (Parks, 2000, p. 5).

Faith is expressed as individuals search to draw connections, patterns, order, and significance through life experiences, relationships, and events (Epting, 2013; Parks, 2000). Faith is not solely internalized, but it guides personal and corporate behavior related to meaning, trust, and hope (Parks, 2000). As expressed through Christian faith, the Bible articulates, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17 NIV).

Higher education is unique in that it provides a complex environment for growth through diversity and autonomy, all the while, a myriad of challenges. A student’s faith is on display as they face these many challenges, crises, and accomplishments throughout their time at HEIs. This process provides opportunities for meaning-making and individual growth through contemplation and understanding (Epting, 2013). As young adults develop in their faith, Parks (1986) indicated that models and mentors are necessary for growth to be effectively facilitated. Her findings shed light on the importance of relationships like mentoring and campus involvement within the context of

the college experience (Epting, 2013, p. 23). As previously mentioned, programming like FCA emphasizes relationship building that leads to spiritual growth and initial discussions of identity formation.

Scholars studying spiritual development are often within the setting of traditional students in higher education. However, little research looks into how spirituality impacts the collegiate experience amongst student-athletes. In the nominal amount of research, several significant studies are particularly relevant to this study that also applied Fowler's and Parks' framework to the context of faith development in college students (Clarke, 2010; Epting, 2013; Flowers, 2020; Ramsey, 2015; Sceggel, 2018).

Sceggel investigated student experiences of faith development in intercollegiate athletic participation. The research setting was a faith-based, NCAA Division III institution. Interviews revealed themes including individual relationships that student-athletes have developed which deeply influence their own faith, specific hardship experiences that led to the deepening of faith, the identity formation process for student-athletes that led to faith development, and the institutional prioritization and integration of faith on campus which positively impacted the faith development of student-athletes (Flowers, 2020; Sceggel, 2018). These findings demonstrate that a student-athlete who is growing in their faith may be better equipped to navigate the tension of being a student and an athlete, thus signifying spiritual development and identity formation (Sceggel, 2018, p. 18).

In line with Sceggel, Epting's research identified faith development in student-athletes, focusing on football players at a Division I HEI (Flowers, 2020). Epting's study also entailed a qualitative research method approach using in-depth semi-structured

interviews. The themes identified through the interview process were: (a) Christian Faith Experiences; (b) Relationships; and (c) Football Environmental Characteristics (Epting, 2013, p. 62). Within the theme of Christian faith experiences, the participants shared several characteristics associated with this theme that included: (1) a greater dependence on prayer; (2) a more mature relationship with Christ; and (3) a change in one's Christian outlook, indicative of spiritual development for these student-athletes (Epting, 2013, p. 62). Furthermore, the participants expressed the need to have relationships that reinforced their Christian faith development, especially if they did not have many teammates who could facilitate that for them (Epting, 2013, p. 102). A place that cultivated spiritual development and relationship building was FCA meetings (p. 117).

Ramsey considered deeply how the FCA organization and the FCA team chaplain (spiritual coordinator) who works with student-athletes could:

- Help student-athletes with the constant battle they face in balancing their roles [identity] (Ramsey, 2015, p. iii).
- Help to facilitate the development of the whole student-athlete [holistic development] with emphasis on their spiritual development (Ramsey, 2015, p. iii).

Her study of the FCA chaplaincy program was at large, Division I university in the SEC. The participants noted that the program assisted with spiritual needs, enhanced spirituality, personal development, relationship building, and athletic and academic performance. The FCA chaplaincy focused on FCA staff members, athletic administration, and a few current student-athletes (none of which were female), and all participants were exclusive to football.



The researcher previously utilized Fowler's (1981) and Park's Faith Development Theories (2000), focusing on the student-athletes' perceptions of FCA and the perceived impact participation has on their identity as an athlete and their spiritual development at a large, Division I university in the SEC. Four student-athletes participated in semi-structured interviews. The findings uncovered that FCA has the potential to help student-athletes create relationships/community and develop a spiritual foundation.

This current research is an expansion of the scholarship of Ramsey and Flowers. The Faith Development Theories serve as the appropriate framework based on Fowler's and Park's understanding of faith, seeing it as inseparable from human existence, how individuals make meaning, are spiritual beings, and pointed to a higher power, that being God (Fowler; 2000; Gardner, 2019; Parks, 2000). As individuals go through these stages, they are working through spiritual development. The Faith Development Theories are most closely related to the researcher's description of spirituality (Raikes, 2010, p. 31). Furthermore, Fowler's and Park's Faith Development Theories characterize the most thorough investigations into how individuals develop their religious and spiritual attitudes and beliefs (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 63).

It is believed that by applying their Faith Development Theories, the researcher will have a solid understanding of how African American student-athletes manage the ongoing conflict between role identities and how spiritual development is facilitated through FCA from a quantitative survey research design.

### **Summary**

The researcher provided a synthesis of the historical context of religion and spirituality in higher education. The focus of spiritual development in this study was

described from the perspective of Christianity. Spiritual development was discussed in an expansive view of general college students and collegiate student-athletes, and a more focused view of this development in African Americans. American Muscular Christian was explained due to its role in the development of sport ministry organizations, specifically FCA. A further description of FCA was discussed, as well as its usefulness in engraining Christian values and principles. The chapter concludes with a review of Fowler's and Parks' Faith Development Theories and the justification for its function in explaining the spiritual development among African American football student-athletes.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Approach and Design**

The researcher utilized a basic exploratory survey research design. The intention was that quantitative methods would result in outcomes and data (numerical) that can be generalized across the groups and organizations of interest, as well as future situations with likened variables (Creswell, Shope, Plano, & Green, 2006; McCrae, 2018). The survey design will contribute a description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of the population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2003, p. 153). The survey design draws a broad sample that would facilitate generalizability for AAFSAs at DI Kentucky HEIs.

Embedded within the survey were qualitative inquiries to acquire additional information from the participating AAFSAs regarding their perceptions and experiences of FCA. The inquiries collected rich data and facilitated a vaster understanding of participants' experiences (Tucker, 2016, p. 27). The qualitative data were intended to personalize and enrich the study, complementing the multiple forms of quantitative data gathered in this study. The quantitative data is the "what", while the qualitative inquiries provide the "why" and "how." The quantitative and qualitative design postulates elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarification of the results and expands on the breadth and range of inquiry (Green et al. 1989, p. 259). Bryman signifies the use of qualitative data to illustrate quantitative findings, as putting "meat on the bones" of often "dry" quantitative findings (Bryman, 2006).

The study was non-experimental. There were no attempts to change behavior or conditions, and the researcher measured data and variables as they were (McCrae, 2018,

pp. 13-14). Non-experimental research is conducted to explore the attributes of a phenomenon or the possible relationships between variables which apply to the desired research (McCrae, 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Since the purpose of this study was to describe AAFSAs' perceptions of FCA and if it impacts their spiritual development, this methodological approach provides the best epistemological process toward examining this study's distinct purpose (Cadungug, 2016, pp. 12-13).

Contrasting from other studies on spirituality and collegiate athletes with a single methodological focus, this coalesced approach study can provide deeper insights into the impact of FCA on collegiate athletes.

### **Research Questions**

The principal research questions driving this study were:

1. What are AAFSAs perceptions of FCA?
2. In what ways does participation in FCA facilitate spiritual development?
3. What factors influence participation in FCA?
4. How is FCA being utilized as a coping mechanism in AAFSAs?

### **Measurement Instrument**

The survey was an adaption of research done by Pubols on student-athletes participating in an Athletes in Action sports camp. The purpose of his study was to observe, measure, and evaluate the level of learning acquired by camp participants to better understand the perceptions of learned principles and to establish a model for future studies, through an evaluative survey (Pubols, 2018, p. ii). While Pubols measured a specific aspect of an SMO, the researcher desired to measure the impact of an SMO as a whole. Upon reception of allowance to use the survey (see Appendix A), the researcher adapted Pubols' tool to cultivate an understanding of how faith development is impacted by participation in

FCA, student-athletes' perceptions of FCA, and what factors influence participation in FCA. Adding qualitative inquiries to the survey magnified emergent themes, meanings, meaning units, or theories to develop experiences and meaning attached to an individual or group. These responses generated the real essence of the participant's lived experiences (Ramsey, 2015, p. 50).

The foundation of the survey was centered on FCA's "E3" method (Figure 1.1), FCA's primary guidance for the spiritual development of student-athletes.

The survey consisted of the following sections:

- Influencing factors in participation
- Perceptions of FCA
- FCA's role in coping
- FCA spiritual development
- Demographics

4-point Likert-rating questions (strongly agree, agree, etc.) were designed to provide closed-ended responses with the elimination of a neutral option. Bradley et al. provide a demonstration for constructing measures from survey responses, citing that the inclusion of a neutral middle category distorts the data to the point where it is not possible to construct meaningful measures (Bradley et al., 2015, p. 8). Embedded within the survey were qualitative inquiries (open-ended responses) to acquire information from the participating student-athletes regarding their perceptions and experiences of FCA, specifically related to racial identity (i.e.: *In what ways does FCA serve your needs as an African American football student-athlete?*). The survey matrix in Appendix B thoroughly describes each survey question and its correspondence to the research questions and FCA's "E3" method.

The researcher employed an expert team of researchers with familiarity in researching the spiritual development of student-athletes (Appendix D). The team helped the researcher better formulate questions and work to mitigate any biases. The team scrutinized the survey questions to ensure they were comprehensible to the participant, enabling the successful collection of data. The expert team offered suggestions to consider upon authenticating the instrument's consistency. Their recommendations were related to:

- Question development such as the wording of the question and reducing double-barreled questions
- Aligning questions in context with the study (like specific questions linked to perceptions related to racial identity).

The final version of the survey is in the appendix below (Appendix E)

### **Setting and Subjects**

As with many Division I institutions, football is the primary means of creating recognition and displaying prestige. Division I is the premier level of college football, meaning they typically have the most notoriety, superlative athletes, competitive teams, capital, and revenue. This study aims to look at DI Kentucky HEIs.

There are eight DI institutions in Kentucky. Two of these programs do not support sponsor football. Three of these HEIs are in the FBS, and another three are in the FCS<sup>1</sup>.

As articulated by Epting, the nature of the region posits that faith and religious traditions are assumed to be present (2013, p. 42). These DI Kentucky HEIs are located in what

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<sup>1</sup> FBS denotes football bowl division, where teams compete in bowl games for the postseason. FCS denotes football championship series where teams compete in a playoff bracket at the end of the season. In each instance, teams must qualify for postseason play.

many term the “Bible belt” of the United States, which is described as southern states where religion and spirituality are believed to be vital life components (Epting, 2013; Tweedie, 1978). One of these HEIs does not have an FCA program and was not included in the study. However, this HEI still works with a different sport ministry organization, Athletes in Action. Greater information regarding these HEIs is highlighted in Appendix C.

In order for the researcher to acquire information about the target population, stated prerequisites for participants were put in place:

- Be a member of this organization (FCA) for at least 1 semester
- Be a current student (undergraduate or graduate) or 2021 graduate
- Be 18-25 years old
- Identify as Black or of African descent
- Be a member of a DI Kentucky varsity football program

### **Sampling**

In this study, multiple sampling methods were combined to obtain participants. Foremost, the selection criteria of participants (as stated above) was purposive, allowing the researcher to discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). These participants were believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, pp. 72-73). The researcher also had to utilize convenience sampling, as not every participant could or was willing participate. Lastly, the researcher utilized snowball sampling, where participants who participated were asked to recruit teammates to join the study. The sample size is significant for getting accurate, statistically significant results and running a study

successfully. There are approximately 105 student-athletes on a Division I collegiate football roster. Based on our demographics in Table 1.1, about 47% of athletes are African American. A reasonable estimation of these players that participate in FCA is about 10%. Thus, the desired sample size of 25 AAFSAs (about 4-6 per school) is appropriate. Table 4.1 describes the demographics of the participants.

### **Procedures**

Once the Institutional Review Board approved the project, the researcher contacted FCA staff members and/or chaplains at the HEIs, to gain access to AAFSAs. They were contacted via email and sent a description of the research study, the selection criteria, and the survey link. The FCA staff members and/or chaplains were asked to serve as campus representatives and distribute the electronic survey invitation to the AAFSAs. Through connecting with some FCA staff members and/or chaplains, they were able to share contact information for FCA staff members and/or chaplains at other institutions. To further expedite the process and follow-up, the researcher also contacted and gave information about the study to participants via social media.

The finalized survey was designed by the researcher and hosted by Qualtrics, an experience management software company that permits researchers to collect and analyze data for research purposes (Perttula, 2018, p. 37). The Qualtrics platform aided in protecting participants' privacy through their latest encryptions, ciphers, and industry best standards for safeguarding user privacy (Perttula, 2018, p. 37). The prospective participants were first provided with a brief description of the research. On the survey cover page, participants were informed that survey participation was completely voluntary, there was no anticipated risk, and they were free to withdraw from the study at



any time, without any negative effects on their academic or athletic status (p. 37). The participant either consented yes or no to proceed with the survey.

To safeguard the risks of breach of confidentiality or invasion of privacy, the participants were not asked to share their names, nor were their names required.

However, participants were also noted that if they wanted to be considered for a drawing for one of five Amazon gift cards, they would be asked to provide an email at the end of the survey. The email addresses were collected via Google Forms in a separate link. This way, the email addresses would not be linked to the survey responses. The emails and all survey data were securely stored with a password-protected computer, and emails were discarded shortly following data collection. Only the researcher had access to the emails.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The researcher employed quantitative survey methods, with qualitative inquiries inserted within the survey. Mertens and Hesse-Biber argue that the credibility of evidence can be enhanced by using multiple philosophical and methodological frameworks (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2013, p. 5). Combining methods allowed for a more varied collection of data that strengthened the validity of conclusions (Peters, 2021; Butin, 2010). Additionally, Bryman notes that qualitative research can provide contextual understanding coupled with either generalizable, externally valid findings or broad relationships among variables uncovered through a survey (2006). Bryman proposes that employing multiple methods enhances the integrity of findings. Yet, there are still challenges to ensuring validity and credibility (2006).

Validity is an essential concept in each research domain and is satisfied if what the researcher intends to measure is actually what is being measured (Cadungug, 2016; Yin, 2011). The concluding results of a study should parallel the methods used to observe

the target phenomenon, and with greater equivalency, there is greater validity (Cadungug, 2016; Yin, 2011). Reliability refers to the degree to which data collection techniques are replicable (Cadungug, 2016; Yin, 2011). To ensure the achievement of validity and reliability in this study, the researcher implemented several phases.

The researcher certified that the survey covered a range of meanings (content validity). The survey questions covered the full range of dimensions related to the concept of spiritual development. The survey captured elements related to FCA's ability to implement their "E3" method (engage, equip, and empower) through creating a religious community, developing life applications of religion, and growing the participant's level of Christian faith (construct validity). The survey consists of influencing factors in participation, perceptions of FCA, and spiritual development.

The survey went through several revisions with the researcher's advisor. Following that, an expert panel (appendix D) was recruited to provide feedback to the researcher on any areas of ambiguity and their recommendations for improvements were implemented (Tucker, 2011, pp. 130-131). Their input helped finalize the survey's final draft in preparation for distribution. Weight, Navarro, Smith-Ryan, and Huffman used this expert review strategy by obtaining a panel of eleven individuals deemed experts in the area to warrant the validity of their instrument overall (Weight et al., 2014, p. 44). Through this process, the questions and content of the respective instrument were refined, enhancing the overall quality of the proposed study (Cadungug, 2016; Turner, 2010). The qualitative inquiries were reviewed by discussing emergent theory and coding of themes with the dissertation committee (Collins, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). The dissertation committee cross-checked the data collection methods, analysis, and data results (Collins, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher obtained a descriptive analysis via Qualtrics on quantitative measures (means, standard deviations, and percentages). Those quantitative measures resulting from participant data were reported. The themes from qualitative inquiries were uncovered through open axial coding. Open coding comprises labeling, defining, and formulating categories for similar answers based on their properties (Peters, 2021; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). Dyson and Genishi further define coding as how the researchers aim to “figure out the conceptual importance of the human actions and reactions that have been inscribed in the data set” (2005, p. 84). The coded data were compared to identify similarities and differences to create themes (Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018, pp. 565-566). The themes support generating the real essence of the participants’ lived experiences (Ramsey, 2015, p. 50).

## **Researcher Positionality**

As the primary investigator, the researcher must acknowledge who they are and their place within the study context. Dyson and Genishi assert that “who we each are also figures into how we collect, analyze, and interpret data” (2005, p. 58). Creswell interjects that a researcher must be “sensitive to personal biography and how it shapes the study” (2003, p. 182).

However, personal bias and opinion must be transparent by rationally identifying and confronting personal views, being committed to open-mindedness, remaining skeptical, and thinking critically about research data (Machi & McEvoy, 2012; Walker, 2019). The researcher recognizes his own Christian beliefs present a potential bias when discussing and analyzing spiritual values and development. Furthermore, the researcher

identifies as an African American male. Athletics is an important part of the researcher's life, as they were a former collegiate student-athlete. The researcher's participation in intercollegiate athletics and SMOs influences the desire to complete such research. The researcher has demonstrated regular involvement in FCA as a participant and volunteer at one of the institutions within this study. The researcher's background gives a potential connection between the study participants. The researcher acknowledges that his tacit knowledge like perceptions, apprehensions, and feelings were vital indicators that guided the research process (Guba, 1981; Tucker, 2016).

Although the researcher's positionality presents a potential limitation for this study, the researcher will apply reflexivity. Reflexivity is when the researcher is explicitly self-aware of his or her position and how it may influence his or her research, and through application, it can help overcome biases (Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Walker, 2019).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher described the research approach designed to facilitate understanding of the research questions. A quantitative survey research design was utilized and embedded within the survey were qualitative inquiries to acquire additional information from participants. The researcher discussed the adaption of Pubols measurement tool of the study and justified the research design through explaining the setting/subjects, sampling methods, procedures, and data analysis strategies. Methods for ensuring validity and reliability were conferred. The chapter concluded with the researcher describing their positionality within the framework of this study.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 22 AAFSAs from five DI Kentucky HEIs. These participants answered a set of demographic questions: year in school, age, current institution, length of time participating in FCA, and length of time participating in football. The mean age was calculated by adding the participant's ages and dividing by the total number of participants for each school. The mean length of time participating in FCA and participating in football was calculated by adding each participant's answers and dividing by the number of participants from that institution.

The University of Kentucky reported the most participants (6). The University of Kentucky had the highest mean age of participants (22.33 years old), with no participants identifying as an underclassman. The University of Kentucky also reported the highest mean length of time participating in FCA (5 semesters). Eastern Kentucky and Murray State University recorded the lowest mean ages for participants (20.4 years old and 19.66 years old), with six of the participants from these institutions being underclassmen. Both schools also recorded the lowest mean lengths of time participating football, meaning these students may have more opportunities to participate in FCA as their collegiate careers continue.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

| Institution                        | Year in School<br>( <i>n</i> )  | Mean Age                  | Mean length of time participating in FCA | Mean length of time participating in football |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>University of Kentucky</b>      | Senior: <b>2</b><br>5 <sup>th</sup> year senior: <b>3</b><br>2021 graduate: <b>1</b><br><b>Total: 6</b>                                       | <b>22.33</b><br>years old | <b>5</b> semesters                       | <b>3.5</b> seasons                            |
| <b>University of Louisville</b>    | Sophomore: <b>2</b><br>Senior: <b>1</b><br>6 <sup>th</sup> year senior: <b>1</b><br><b>Total: 4</b>   | <b>21.25</b><br>years old | <b>4</b> semesters                       | <b>2.5</b> seasons                            |
| <b>Eastern Kentucky University</b> | Freshman: <b>2</b><br>Sophomore<br>Junior: <b>2</b><br>Senior<br>5 <sup>th</sup> year senior: <b>1</b><br>Graduate student<br><b>Total: 5</b> | <b>20.4</b> years old     | <b>2.8</b> semesters                     | <b>1.8</b> seasons                            |
| <b>Western Kentucky University</b> | 6 <sup>th</sup> year senior: <b>1</b><br>Graduate students: <b>2</b><br><b>Total: 4<sup>2</sup></b>   | <b>23</b> years old       | <b>4</b> semesters                       | <b>4.6</b> seasons                            |
| <b>Murray State University</b>     | Freshman: <b>1</b><br>Sophomore: <b>1</b><br>Graduate student: <b>1</b><br><b>Total: 3</b>  | <b>19.66</b><br>years old | <b>3</b> semesters                       | <b>1.3</b> seasons                            |

## Research Question Results

### RQ1: What are AAFSAs perceptions of FCA?

Survey questions aligned with FCA's "E3" method of engage, equip, and empower (Appendix B). Engaging is connecting relationally with individuals through

<sup>2</sup> One participant halfway completed the survey

building genuine trust and sharing life together. Several questions addressed FCA’s ability to engage by asking about the environment, shown in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 RQ1 survey questions and data

| Question  | Answer Selection<br>% (N) |               |                |                 |
|---|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
|   | Strongly Disagree         | Disagree      | Agree          | Strongly Agree  |
| <i>Q7: As an African American male, I feel welcomed at FCA by other participants (Please give a brief description with your answer)</i>                 | <b>10% (2)</b>            | <b>5% (1)</b> | <b>33% (7)</b> | <b>52% (11)</b> |
| <i>Q6: FCA has helped me connect with teammates and/or other student-athletes</i>   | <b>5% (1)</b>             | <b>9% (2)</b> | <b>41% (9)</b> | <b>45% (10)</b> |
| <i>Q8: As an African American male, I felt/feel welcomed at FCA by the FCA staff and/or chaplain (Please give a brief description with your answer)</i> | <b>9% (2)</b>             | -             | <b>18% (4)</b> | <b>73% (16)</b> |
| <i>Q9: I have developed a relationship with the FCA staff and/or chaplain</i>   | <b>5% (1)</b>             | -             | -              | <b>95% (21)</b> |
| <i>Q10: I trust the FCA staff and/or chaplain</i>   | -                         | -             | <b>27% (6)</b> | <b>73% (16)</b> |
| <i>Q13: The FCA staff and/or chaplain are available for support for things I need</i>   | -                         | <b>5% (1)</b> | <b>32% (7)</b> | <b>64% (14)</b> |
| <i>Q15: FCA has provided ongoing support in navigating my faith as an African American</i>  | <b>5% (1)</b>             | <b>9% (2)</b> | <b>41% (9)</b> | <b>45% (10)</b> |

Participants predominantly indicated that they feel welcomed at FCA by others and have generated connections with others, with slight disagreements. Likewise,

participants illustrated that FCA has helped them connect with teammates and/or other student-athletes, through 86% responding with agree or strongly agree (*Q6*). One of the three people who disagreed was a freshman and only had one semester of involvement. It may be possible if they have not had the opportunity to formulate and build relationships to establish a comfort level of being at FCA.

Participants indicated they feel welcomed by the FCA staff member and/or chaplain and have established a level of trust and comfort with the FCA staff member and/or chaplain (*Q8* and *Q9*). Participant responses signified that they strongly trust the FCA staff member and/or chaplain. Peculiarly, one participant who indicated they did not feel welcomed by the FCA staff member and/or chaplain still indicated agreement that the FCA staff member and/or chaplain is trustworthy and that they have been able to form a relationship with them. Additionally, the survey addressed the support offered by the FCA staff member and/or chaplain (*Q13*). Participants strongly agreed 64% of the time and agreed 32% that the chaplain was available for any kind of support.

Aside from providing support, participants were asked to think about the ways that the FCA staff member and/or chaplain lived out an organic relationship with them outside of the context of FCA meetings (*Q14*).



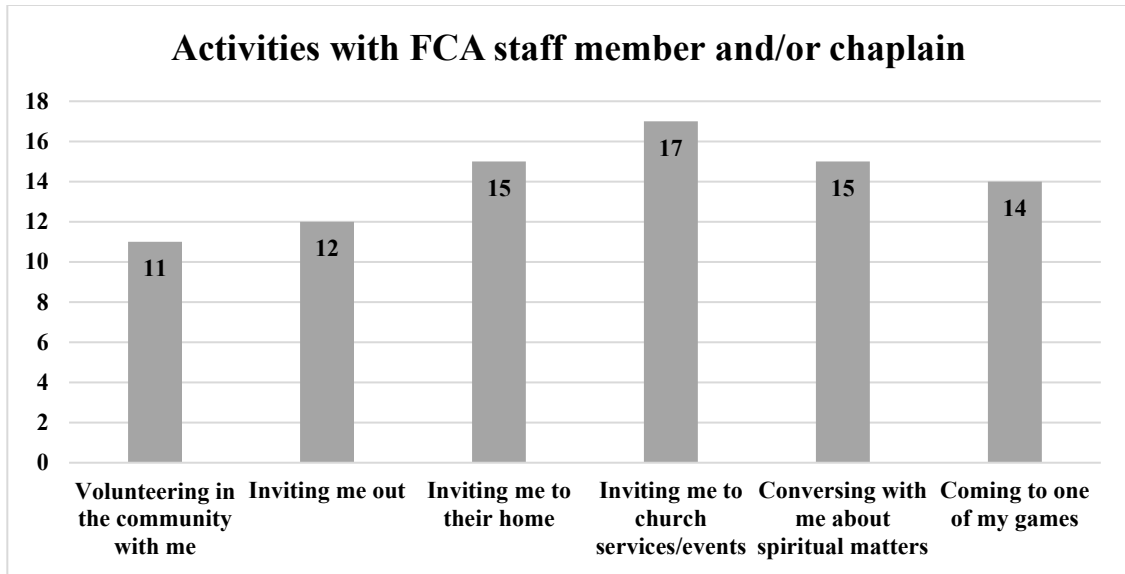


Figure 4.1 Activities with FCA staff member and/or chaplain

The most prevalent way the FCA staff member and/or chaplain did so was by inviting them to church or other services/events outside of the FCA meetings. Spending time outside of these meetings may explain why participants indicated a strong level of trust and ability to formulate a relationship with the FCA staff member and/or chaplain. Additionally, time spent outside of normal meetings displays authenticity and desire to form a relationship with AAFSAs.

Several survey questions addressed FCA's support, specific to African American identity. One question was *Q15: FCA has provided ongoing support in navigating my faith as an African American*. To provide rich, perceptual data to accompany this question, participants were asked an open-ended question: *In what ways does FCA serve your needs as an African American Football student-athlete?* Rich data was yielded from this question, ensuing in emergent themes from the participant responses.

*Belonging/community*

FCA provided a community and a space where athletes experience belonging. Additionally, it is another space where participants can meet with other student-athletes in and outside of their sport who are also striving to grow in the Christian faith. It is a place where they feel like they can receive support as a Christian athlete.

Participants said:

“FCA Is a place amongst other athletes where we pursue God.”

“Providing a team of like minded individuals who can support me if I am in need.”

“It kind of gives me a sense of belonging and another group to relate to.”

“Help me feel a little welcomed.”

“It provides a different community of believers outside my sport.”

As noted in the literature, SMOs are effective at HEIs because student-athletes' lives in sport often present obstacles to their involvement in ministry events that are a great fit for the general population (Lipe, 2015). SMOs fully embrace the sports culture, using it to get to know individuals where they are, develop relationships, and create growth while fitting the student-athletes' schedule. Participants emphasized this by saying FCA was:

“Giving me an outlet to speak with other believers that play sports, having a staff that cares for my well-being, provides mentorship and guidance through the Bible”

“It was a positive way to escape the workload of being a athlete. FCA provides a moment to realize how cool we all different grinds in our sport but interact as one under prayer and faith.”

### *Developing faith*

Through FCA, participants acknowledged they had opportunities to grow in Christian spiritual development through a deepening faith in God. Participants stated: “FCA helps keep my faith in God strong.”

“It helped open me up more about my religion and I knew I wasn’t alone so I didn’t feel uncomfortable.”

“Serves my needs as a Christian athlete.”

“By teaching me to put my faith in God.”

As one participant mentioned, it helped them seek more of what it means to have a relationship with God:

“For me it helped me seek faith in myself and God, before FCA I didn’t really go to church or even read strictures (scriptures). FCA has helped me participate in that.”

As these AAFSAs must balance many priorities like academics, athletics, and social life, FCA provides the space to seek community still and develop spiritually. A participant specified that:

“I believe FCA helps my needs through reaching out and helping me navigate my spiritual life with my rigorous schedule.”

One participant specifically referenced their racial identity in FCA serving their needs:

“They come and talk to me about situations relating to me as a black person and support everything I do.”

The researcher aspired to see specific ways that racial identity might impact the participants’ perceptions of FCA. The participants were prompted to answer: *How does your identity as an African American inform your perceptions on FCA? [open ended response]*

This question yielded limited but nonetheless pertinent insights. This may be due to the other survey questions indirectly addressing the concept of African American identity. Several participants even indicated they did not understand the question. Two participants indicated their identity as an African American in no way informed their perceptions. Nonetheless, two responses are of particular significance:

“Allows me to see people that are like me involved with their community spiritually.”

“It makes me value it more than ever, I’ve experienced first hand how this organization cares for their athletes and staff. I trust in them completely.”

For these participants, seeing other people that looked like them made an impact on them. Seeing that FCA cared specifically about their racial identity and meeting their needs based upon that was noteworthy as well. Other responses were not in line with the question but listed that more African Americans should attend FCA, and that a welcoming, inclusive space should be fostered.

*“More like me”*

While many participants indicated that FCA is already doing a good job of meeting their needs as AAFSAs, many participants expressed a genuine desire to see more of both participants that looked like them as well as an FCA staff member and/or chaplain that reflected their racial identity. Participants communicated that:

“They can invite more African American and reach out to them”

“I think by having more people that look like me involved both athletes and chaplains”

“Implementing ways to navigate struggles you may face as an African American

“Maybe add in more talks with other African American leaders who can share their testimony”

“To see people who are Christians and look like me doing good”

“Not entirely sure, I’d love to see more black FCA staff.”

“By having an African American leader”

AAFSAs perceptions of FCA were largely positive. Their perceptions relied upon their ability to feel welcomed and included by other student-athletes, especially by the FCA staff member and/or chaplain. Participants widely agreed that FCA produced opportunities to grow in Christian spiritual development through a deepening faith in God. Though inclusive and welcoming, participants observed shortcomings in African American student-athlete involvement and representation of FCA staff members and/or chaplains.

**RQ2: In what ways does participation in FCA facilitate spiritual development?**

This research question is associated with the second and third terms in FCA's “E3” method, equip and empower (Appendix B). Equipping means providing training, events, resources, and ongoing support to help athletes grow and apply their faith to all parts of their life. Empower means enabling faithful leaders who desire to use their time, talents, and treasures to help other coaches and athletes grow in their faith and share it with others.

Table 4.3 RQ2 survey questions and data

| Question   | Answer Selection<br>% (n) |          |                 |                 |
|--|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree         | Disagree | Agree           | Strongly Agree  |
| <i>Q16: FCA has helped me to grow in my understanding of the Bible.</i>  | -                         | -        | <b>59% (13)</b> | <b>41% (9)</b>  |
| <i>Q17: FCA has equipped me to integrate my faith into my sport.</i>   | -                         | -        | <b>41% (9)</b>  | <b>59% (13)</b> |
| <i>Q18: FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help my teammates grow in their faith</i> | <b>5% (2)</b>             | -        | <b>45% (10)</b> | <b>50% (11)</b> |
| <i>Q19: FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help others grow in their faith</i>       | <b>5% (1)</b>             | -        | <b>55% (12)</b> | <b>41% (9)</b>  |
| <i>Q20: FCA has encouraged me to share faith with my teammates</i>   | -                         | -        | <b>50% (11)</b> | <b>50% (11)</b> |
| <i>Q21: FCA has encouraged me to share faith with others</i>   | <b>5% (1)</b>             | -        | <b>45% (10)</b> | <b>50% (11)</b> |
| <i>Q22: Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with my teammates</i>                                 | <b>14% (3)</b>            | -        | <b>27% (6)</b>  | <b>59% (13)</b> |
| <i>Q23: Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with others</i>                                       | <b>9% (2)</b>             |          | <b>27% (6)</b>  | <b>64% (14)</b> |

FCA's primary form of equipping comes from facilitating biblical teachings. The Bible includes important scriptures that outline Jesus's teachings, the lives and teachings of prophets and disciples, and offer directives for how Christians should live (Onion,

Sullivan, & Mullen, 2019). FCA utilizes the Bible as the primary means for a Christian to develop spiritually. Through employing teaching and applications in the Bible, FCA believes the athlete then maybe be able to integrate their faith into how they partake in sport. Every single participant agreed, with 41% of those responses being strongly agree that they grew in understanding the Bible (*Q16*).

As a form of spiritual development, AAFSAs were encouraged to combine their Christian and sport identities and leave identity foreclosure (not having a fixed athletic identity). Participants were asked the extent FCA helped them integrate and sport (*Q17*). Correspondingly, every single participant agreed, with 59% of those responses being strongly agree.

*Q18 and Q19* pertain to FCA's ability to empower participants to use their time, talents, and treasures to share their faith and help teammates and other individuals grow in their faith. The data inclines towards AAFSAs feeling more empowered and encouraged to help teammates grow in their faith and share their faith with teammates vs. doing so with others. Additionally, they were asked to gauge their level of confidence FCA postulates to be able to share their faith with teammates and other individuals. For all, there are strong indications that through FCA, participants are encouraged to share their faith with others and empower to do so. FCA facilitates the confidence to be able to do so. Being able to share faith and encourage grow in both teammates and others are indicators of spiritual development.

*Christian faith status*

Participants were asked to assess their faith status pre-participation in FCA and their beliefs after at least one semester of participation in FCA (Q30 and Q31).

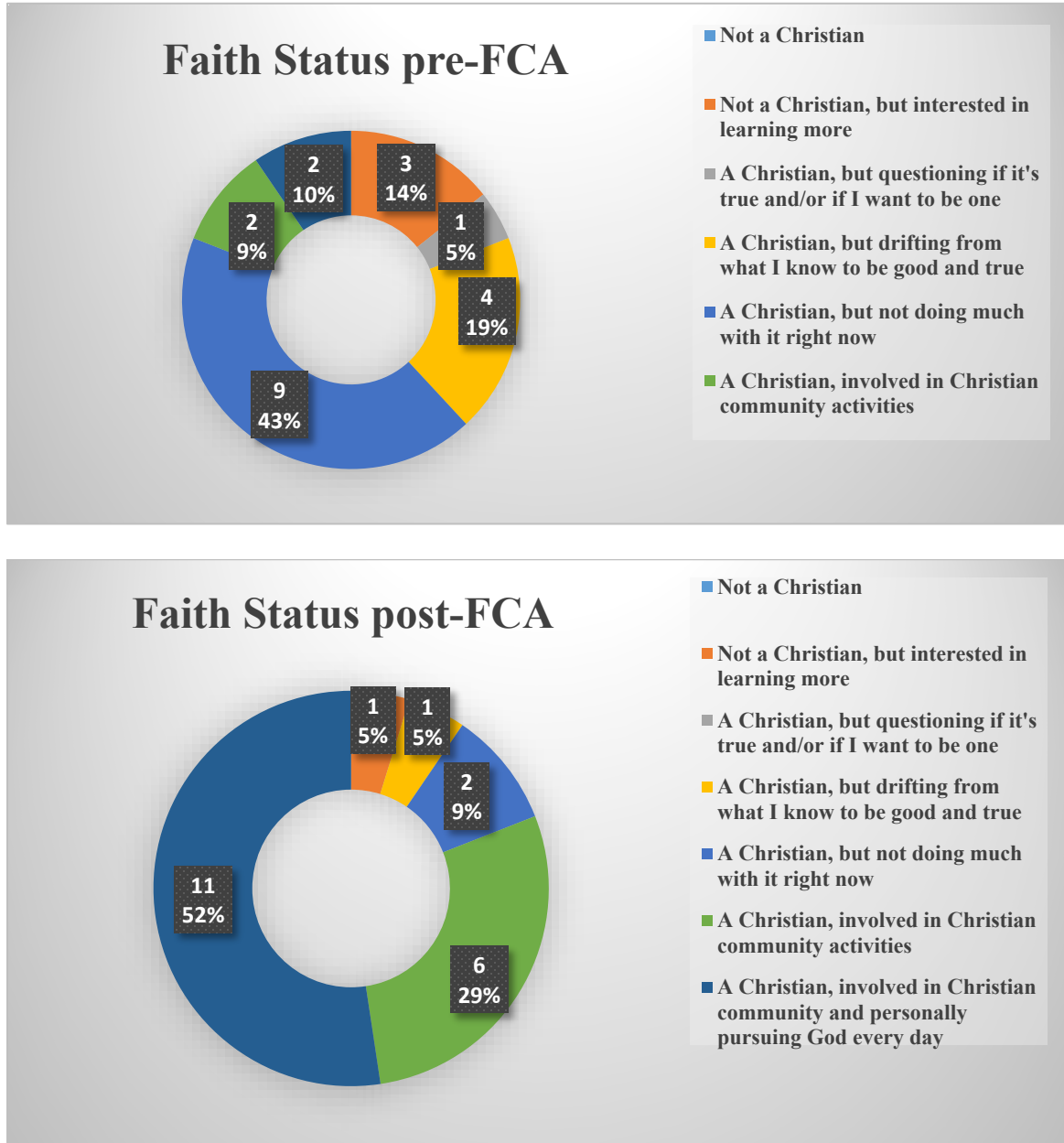


Figure 4.2 Christian faith status

In terms of faith development, the object would be that a person that is not a Christian (lowest level) becomes one, or a person who is at some level of being a



Christian would progress to the point of becoming involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God (highest level).

Most participants indicated that they already were a part of the Christian faith prior to participating in FCA. A large percentage (43%) indicated that currently, they are “A Christian, but not doing much with it right now.” While reaching the non-Christian is an element of FCA, this data reiterates Blakeney-Glazer argument that SMOs most evident functions are affirming believers’ (a professing Christians’) sense of Christian belonging and addressing the everyday concerns of Christian athletes as they attempt to combine Christian and athletic identities (Blakeney-Glazer, 2008, pp. 2, 9-10).

The data represented an expected trend that those who participated in FCA grew spiritually as evidenced in their commitment to the Christian faith. Only one participant indicated a strong Christian faith and commitment to faith (“A Christian, involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God every day”) prior to FCA, which continued as a part of their involvement in FCA. “A Christian, but not doing much with it right now” numbers dropped from nine to two (a 33% decrease), while “A Christian, involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God every day rose from two to eleven (a 43% increase). While a few participants remained at the same level, not a single participant regressed from their faith level. This data is also another marker of spiritual development. The discussion portion in chapter five digs deeper into spiritual development related to the theoretical framework of Faith Development Theories.

Participants were then asked a series of related questions to indicate their beliefs/understanding about certain aspects of faith and sport prior to FCA, and their

beliefs/understanding following at least one semester of participation in FCA. For each question, the researcher gathered means for the responses.

Table 4.4 Faith and sport pre and post FCA

|  | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i>                            | <i>SD</i>    |
|--|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Q32: An athlete can worship God within their sport</i>                            | 21       | Before FCA: 3.57<br>Currently: 3.76 | 0.49<br>0.43 |
| <i>Q33: An athlete can glorify God in losing as in winning</i>                       | 21       | Before FCA: 3.48<br>Currently: 3.70 | 0.59<br>0.46 |
| <i>Q34: An athlete's worth is from their athletic performance</i>                    | 21       | Before FCA: 2.29<br>Currently: 2.00 | 1.16<br>1.15 |
| <i>Q35: Sport is a medium through which one's relationship with God is developed</i> | 21       | Before FCA: 3.19<br>Currently: 3.43 | 0.59<br>0.58 |
| <i>Q36: An athlete grows spiritually by reading the Bible and praying</i>            | 21       | Before FCA: 3.48<br>Currently: 3.71 | 0.59<br>0.45 |
| <i>Q37: An athlete grows spiritually by being involved in Christian community</i>    | 21       | Before FCA: 3.24<br>Currently: 3.67 | 0.87<br>0.64 |
| <i>Q38: An athlete grows spiritually by helping others</i>                           | 21       | Before FCA: 3.29<br>Currently: 3.57 | 0.63<br>0.66 |
| <i>Q39: An athlete grows spiritually through suffering</i>                           | 21       | Before FCA: 3.14<br>Currently: 3.33 | 0.83<br>0.89 |

Several questions posited a notable change in means as seen in Table 4.4:

- Growth through involvement with Christian community (+.43)
- Growth by reading the Bible and praying (+.23)
- Growth by serving others (+.28)
- Seeing sport as a medium through which one's relationship with God is developed (+.24)

Some of the most prevalent changes in means were questions related to sport. Participants viewed sport as an opportunity to worship God and an opportunity to worship by serving others. The lowest means were worshipping God through sport (+.19) and suffering producing spiritual growth (+.14). Nevertheless, the beginning data point for participant's thoughts on worshipping God through sport was very high initially. The data regarding suffering is thought-provoking, though, because many participants indicated that they turn to spiritual practices to cope with different life circumstances.

A particular question with mixed results was that an athlete's worth is found in their performance. There appeared to be some confusion regarding this question among participants (as seen in the standard deviation). The reasoning for variation in the results of this question could be explained by the wording of the question. Even minor wording differences could have substantially affected participants' answers (Pew Research Center, n.d.). Nonetheless, this question is still reported as one of the more significant changes in the mean differences, at .29, meaning that FCA influenced AAFSAs' perceptions of their athletic and spiritual identities.

Lastly, participants were asked directly to provide an open-ended answer on *What has FCA's role been in your spiritual development?* Some of the participant's answers included:

“It has helped me to understand things and get closer to God.”

“Being a home away from home, spiritual food for myself and a way to stay in the faith and continue to pursue God.”

“To push me more towards my spirituality and encourage me to be more engaged in my community.”

“Bible study, learning the word and really comprehending what it's saying.”

“Guidance to a better life and understanding of the Bible”

“It's provided a community.”

“Bible study and fellowship with other Christian Athletes.”

These answers provide complementary insights to the quantitative data. Recurring themes within these answers were that FCA provided AAFSAs greater understanding of the Bible and a community of like-minded individuals, striving to grow spiritually. Overall, these quantitative and qualitative responses reveal a substantial indication of spiritual development through FCA. Faith was not a separate category lived separate from football but rather amalgamated in how an athlete participated and thought about football.

### **RQ3: What factors influence participation in FCA?**

The results indicated a variety of responses between the participants' decision to partake in FCA.

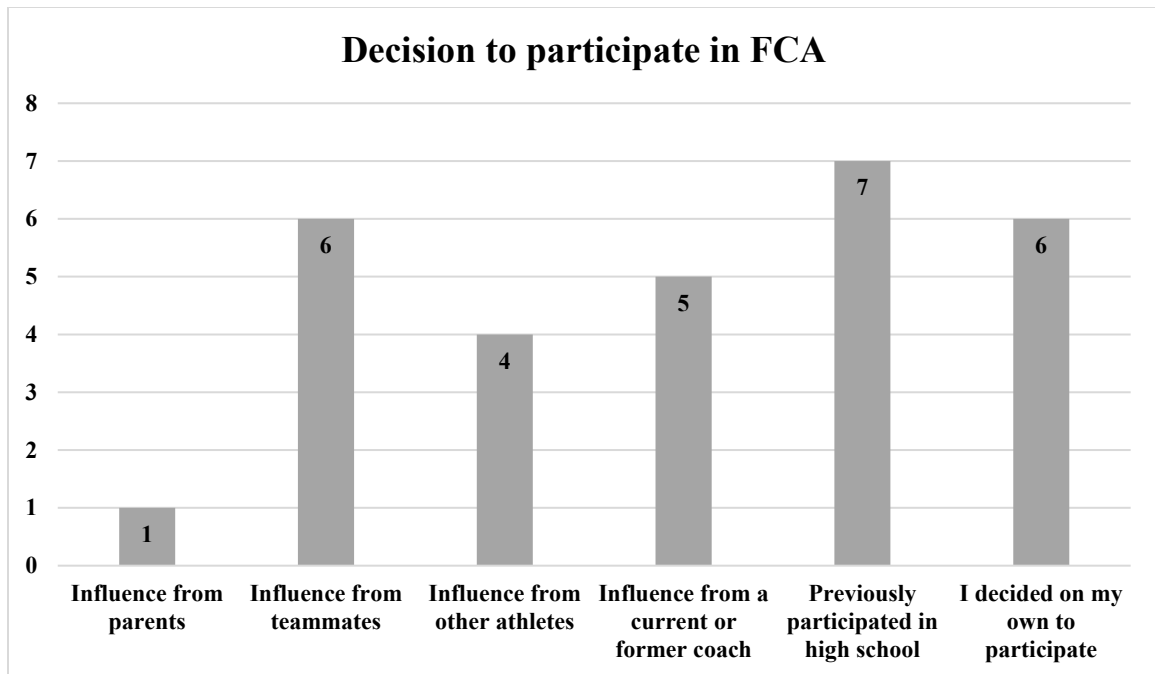


Figure 4.3 Influencing factors

Parental influence was the lowest recorded reasoning. The highest reasonings were a personal decision to participate and influence from previously participating in high school. Other closely related influencing factors were teammates, other athletes, and coaches. The relationship the AAFSAs have with these “influential” others who assist with and help define and form the student-athletes’ identity may have served as an encouragement to pursue an avenue for spiritual development (Raikes, 2010, p. 58).

**RQ4: How is FCA being utilized as a coping mechanism in AAFSAs?**

For athletes, faith is often utilized as a resource and source of strength during difficult or challenging times, and emotions faced inside and outside of competition (Cadungug, 2016; Raikes, 2010; Ramsey, 2015; Sternberg, 2003; Storch et al., 2001). While trying to navigate the college environment, African American students are more likely to resort to religious and spiritual practices to cope with the stress and challenges of college life (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Participants were asked to indicate

if FCA helps them deal with life challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.) and has supported them through those challenges. 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed. Two of the participants that disagreed explained their reasoning as “not applicable” because they did not endure any situations that required coping.

A follow-up question was asked to participants (Q25). One participant disagreed, noting they coped with their family instead. Two of the participants that disagreed with (Q24) also had a response of disagreement with this question. Another participant indicated strong disagreement; however, they answered strongly agree to the (Q24). Moreover, their written response for this question was “during my injury”, so the answer of strong disagreement may have been selected in error.

Table 4.5 FCA in life’s challenges

| Question   | Answer Selection<br>% (n) |          |         |                |
|--|---------------------------|----------|---------|----------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree         | Disagree | Agree   | Strongly Agree |
| <i>Q24: FCA helps me deal with life's challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.)</i>   | -                         | 10% (2)  | 24% (5) | 67% (14)       |
| <i>Q25: FCA supported me during life's challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.)<br/>Please give a brief description with your answer</i> | 5% (1)                    | 14% (3)  | 29% (6) | 52% (11)       |

*An ever-present help*

While the participants indicated high levels of agreement, they also described several instances of FCA’s support such as:

“Had a freak incident this past January and my chaplain reached out and prayed for me through each surgery.”

“I was supposed to miss four games in the season before Covid and ended up missing the whole season due to complications in my surgery. FCA helped me cope with that and gave me tools to move forward and to understand the reasons why it happened.”

“Throughout my toughest year, great messages and truth help keep me strong.”

“Just helps you knowing you have people who care about you and that are praying for my situation.”

“Yes because you have multiple people who are going through the same thing as you as far as being an athlete.”

“I lost my grandad and they was there for me the entire time.”

“Sometimes in life you have ups and downs the leaders are great people talk to and they help you use the Bible to help you through it.”

“If there ever is anything that goes on in my life I know I have a team of Christian people who will be there for me

“My appendectomy”

“They helped me get through the passing of my aunt, who was very dear to my family.”

“Yes they were there when I lost one of my best friends.”

“I was supported through my cancer diagnosis”

FCA was an ever-present help in these AAFSAs time of need, coming alongside them for various life challenges. Additionally, FCA provided an environment of care and concern where these AAFSAs could turn to during adverse circumstances. Not only were the weekly messages in meetings related to faith important for coping, but FCA also showed that they were there to give AAFSAs the assistance they needed to work through those life circumstances.

Next, participants were then asked to rate the extent to which FCA does or does not contribute to their response to dealing with life's challenges through specific practical methods (Appendix C).

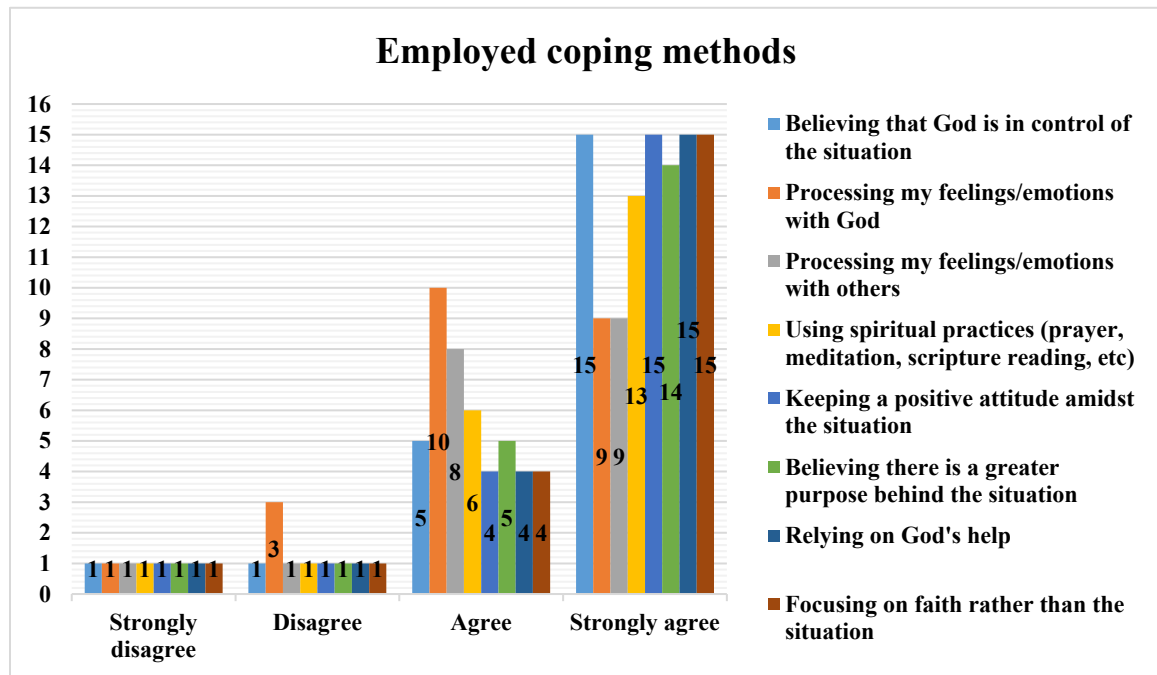


Figure 4.4 Employed coping methods for life’s challenges

These participants used religious faith as a coping mechanism, and FCA facilitated this.

Participants primarily selected strong agreement with:

- Believing that God is in control of the situation
- Believing there is a greater purpose behind the situation
- Relying on God's help
- Keeping a positive attitude amidst the situation
- Focusing on faith rather than the situation

The next most selected answer was turning to spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, scripture reading, etc.). Less frequent methods selected were processing their feelings/emotions with God and processing their feelings/emotions with others.



These positive religious coping methods mirror a confident relationship with God, a belief that there is greater meaning found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with the FCA staff member and/or chaplain or fellow participants (Pargament et al., 2001; Thompson, 2006). The organized church is a profound instrument available to African Americans for handling and coping with life's issues (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Knox, 1985). FCA acted as a parachurch (work alongside the Christian church, rather than as a replacement for church) through providing a similar spiritual structure to support athletes in coping and applying positive religious coping methods.

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the participant demographics. The researcher then provided an in-depth analysis and figures of the survey results based on each research question. Basic descriptive statistics and qualitative responses from the results were presented as evidence. The findings and themes were assessed to reflect the interpretation of the AAFSAs FCA experiences and how they impacted their Christian faith development.

### **Research Purpose**

This study aimed to observe, measure, and evaluate the levels of spiritual development of AAFSAs, as facilitated by FCA at their respective HEIs. Additionally, the study aimed to understand AAFSA's perceptions of FCA and its relevance to their spiritual development. The impact of this research is fivefold:

1. Contributed new knowledge to the field of spiritual development and student-athletes, especially African American student-athletes at Division I PWIs.
2. Uncovered the impact spiritual development has on the collegiate experience of African American student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.
3. Assist institutions in understanding the best way to provide supportive services and resources to encourage spiritual development in African American student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.
4. Provided an evaluative tool for FCA (with access to empirical data) to understand what they are currently doing well and how they can improve in certain areas to further engage and cultivate spiritual development in student-athletes at DI Kentucky HEIs.
5. Extended perceptions and understanding associated with the student-athlete experience and Christian faith development within all HEIs (Epting, 2013, pp. 3-4).

### **Discussion**

The findings allowed the researcher to understand the primary factors that influenced the faith development process based on the survey. The researcher organized

and analyzed the data to facilitate individual textural and structural descriptions, followed by developing meanings and essences of the experience as described below (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103-104).

### **Christian spiritual development**

Parks contended that the college setting provides an optimum environment for young adults to explore faith-based beliefs (2000). For the participants of this study, the researcher examined their exploration through assessing the stages of faith to measure and explain such development.

Participants that indicated after participating in FCA for at least one semester were *A Christian, but questioning if it's true and/or if I want to be one, A Christian, but drifting from what I know to be good and true, A Christian, but not doing much with it right now*, fall into stage three (*Synthetic-conventional faith*) of Fowler's Faith Development Theory (Figure 4.2). Stage three is where an individual has influences from school, work, media, and family/friends to influence faith to conformity (Gathman & Nesson, 1997, p. 410). Faith is believed to be inherited from these influences without completely grasping one's own identity (Fowler, 1981). This inherited faith may arise from a cultural or family affiliation to the faith. Three participants (14%) lie in stage three, demonstrating a newfound identity within their faith but not a level of independence in their faith.

Furthermore, in stage four (*Individuative-reflective faith*), of Fowler's Faith Development Theory, the individual takes personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings (Fowler Faith Stages, 2012). A new environment "allows one to take control of their faith, freely question the faith of their parents or community, and choose how to

move forward, instead of having the path dictated to them as likely occurred” (Sceggel, 2018, p. 35). It is the interruption of reliance on external sources of authority and the relocation of power within the self (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). The external influence is lessening and, at times, being severed, allowing the individual to be more introspective and develop a personalized faith and identity (Epting, 2013, p. 21). Participants who indicated their faith status, after participating in FCA for at least one semester to be *A Christian, involved in Christian community activities* fall in this stage (28.5 %).

Parks Faith Development Theory adds an additional stage between Fowler’s stages four and five. Parks describes faith as not being solely internalized but guiding both personal and corporate behavior as related to meaning, trust, and hope (Parks, 2000). Faith is expressed as an individual searches to draw connections, patterns, order, and significance through life experiences, relationships, and events (Epting, 2013; Parks, 2000). Faith is not solely internalized, but it guides both personal and corporate behavior as related to meaning, trust, and hope (Parks, 2000). Participants who indicated their faith status, after participating in FCA for a semester to be *A Christian, involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God every day* (52.8%) fall in this stage.

Participant’s responses also evidenced this level of spiritual development:

“Helping me stay on track and holding myself accountable while learning more”

“It has helped me to understand things and get closer to God.”

“Being a home away from home, spiritual food for myself and a way to stay in the faith and continue to pursue God”

“Helped me become more involved, vocal and consistent.”

“To push me more towards my spirituality and encourage me to be more engaged in my community.”

“Bible study, learning the word and really comprehending what it’s saying.”

Realizing that their Christian faith was part of their identity, they began to utilize their faith to help navigate their lives both on and off the field (Epting, 2013, p. 112).

Through examining those survey responses, it was apparent that the participants in this stage showed a critical self-awareness, knew what they believed, and were able to make meaning of experiences involving their Christian faith (Epting, 2013, p. 114).

Even for participants who did not change faith stages, there was no reversion in their faith level status post-participation in FCA for at least one semester. For those whose faith level status remained the same, they still made remarks that FCA:

“Kept me interested in the word of the Lord.”

“Is a good reminder of the power of God”

“Taught me no matter most of my fears or outcomes the battle of faith has already been won.”

The quantitative data and the open-ended responses also backed the indication that FCA is achieving the perceived outcomes (Figure 2.1). Combining methods allowed for a more varied collection of data that strengthened the validity of these conclusions (Peters, 2021; Butin, 2010).

- Coping
  - AAFSAs turn to positive religious coping methods to better handle adverse life circumstances. FCA was supportive in times of need.
- Christlikeness
  - Participants elevated their faith status levels and signified growth in their understanding of the bible and a desire to grow in a relationship with God.

- Identity Formation
  - Participants combined Christian and athletic identities to apply faith in the sporting context.
- Evangelism
  - Participants were equipped with tools to share faith with others and indicated confidence in sharing faith.
- Relationships (which will be addressed more in-depth in the next paragraph)
  - FCA helped build a community to foster spiritual growth and provided an environment to grow and develop spiritually.

### **Relationships**

Raikes records that aside from peer-to-peer relationships, it is the influential others (faculty, campus staff, coaches, teammates, family, mentors, etc.) who assist with and help define and form the student-athletes' identity (Raikes, 2010, p. 58). Raikes says that "the circle of influence that surrounds the student-athlete is not limited to coaches and teammates but includes relationships outside the sport arena as well" (2010, p. 55).

As previously mentioned, African American student-athletes face strenuous identity issues. They are especially influenced by their environment and these influential others (Raikes, 2010, pp. 59-60). It is critical for AAFSAs and all athletes of color to surround and encourage these students in various types of developmental relationships (pp. 59-61). African American student-athletes may struggle to establish strong social networks that moderate negative stress events during their collegiate tenure without mentoring relationships (Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018; Spitzer, 2000). The presence of these relationships is one vital factor that fuels academic, social, and athletic success as

well as the retention of Black student-athletes (Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018, p. 560). Collegiate ministries can certainly benefit from fostering meaningful and helpful relationships and assist students in staying engaged in the Christian community during their college years (Winstead, 2020, p. 5). Research continues to support the proposition that student peer relationships have a profound and lasting impact on students' lives during college, and impact their psychosocial development (Jenney, 2010, p. 320).

For these AAFSAs, FCA presented a vital relational community. As previously referenced, the survey asked, *(Q40) What has FCA's role been in your spiritual development?* Help and community were the reoccurring themes in participants' answers. Additionally, the question *(Q37) An athlete grows spiritually by being involved in Christian community* recorded one of the biggest changes in means for participants' thoughts of the importance of Christian community before starting FCA and after at least one semester of participation.

FCA provided an environment for AAFSAs to create meaningful relationships with their teammates and other student-athletes. Some refer to it as biblical community; specifically, a community where the Bible is taught, learned, and applied. FCA created an environment where peers could gather, invest, and help one another develop spiritually. Additionally, two athletes stressed the importance of not just any community but a community that shared a similar lifestyle (being an athlete and pursuing God) (Flowers, 2020). Additionally, Parks (1986; 2011) further articulated that as young adults develop in faith, they need models and mentors for growth to be effectively facilitated. The results indicated AAFSAs developed a strong relationship and trust of FCA staff member and/or chaplain, creating a setting to be poured into spiritually.



Figure 5.1 FCA's role in spiritual development word cloud

### **Representation**

While many participants indicated that FCA is already doing a good job of meeting their needs as AAFSAs, many participants expressed a genuine desire to see more of both participants that looked like them as well as an FCA staff member and/or chaplain that reflected their racial identity. Contrastingly, some participants indicated they do not necessarily care if the FCA staff and/or chaplain looks like them (*Q12*).

“It could help but i don’t think it matters. FCA was diverse”

“It’s not that necessary, I feel all people are equal and care more about what’s on the inside and what they have to offer so that I can learn.”

“If you're a good person, that's all I care about”

“I don’t feel like I have to have someone that looks like me but it’s assuring to know a minority can get up to that position.”

“To me it’s not about color, just as long as the gospel is being spoken and truth is shared, and people have genuine hearts towards one another I’m good.”

While it may seem contradictory, it is not; it uniquely provides indication that for some AAFSAs, Christian identity and athletic identity were more salient than racial identity. A dualistic identification occurred where some AAFSAs maintained an



attachment to their racial group (subgroup) while simultaneously and increasingly identifying with a superordinate group, the “Christian brotherhood.” Nonetheless, many participants agreed that having someone that reflects their racial identity could prove to be beneficial.

“I agree it’s important to show diversity among staff members so that they can potentially appeal more to everyone.”

“Yes, always good to have somebody who looks like you.”

“It’s not extremely important but it should be at least FCA member that represents the minority.”

“Yes because they can relate to us and it would bring more of us in.”

“Any content that helps is good but to have a different perspective adds to it.”

Based on these responses, it is advantageous to have kindred FCA staff members and/or chaplains, leaders, or other representatives someone who looks like these student-athletes can make it easier to relate to and identify with, especially with particular issues that students of color may face that have been amplified over the past two decades. As AAFSAs and other African American athletes face various challenges while navigating a DI PWI, having a person that understands their perspective could bring deeper relationships and added assurance. The National Conference for Community and Justice of the Piedmont Triad (NCCJ) notes that representation in leadership positions is “vital because it send a message to the people being represented that their existence is both acknowledged and valued” (NCCJ, 2020). Merely, this is not to say people need to be recognized by others in order to feel validated, rather “minorities seeing themselves in positions of power plays an immense role in fostering a feeling of belonging and

acceptance” (NCCJ, 2020). More specific practices are discussed in depth in the research applications section below.

### **Positive Spiritual Coping**

As college students explore various worldviews, spirituality remains a means of support, identity, and coping when confronted with academic and non-academic challenges (Shipp, 2017; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Black student-athletes regularly employ their spiritual resources to help them cope with and thrive in their environments on PWIs (Galli & Reel, 2012; Seitz, Sagas, & Connaughton, 2014; Walker, 2019). Data from this research contributes additional findings to verify that African American males report greater use of religious coping (Anshel, Kang, & Miesner, 2010; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that FCA helps them deal with life challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.) and has supported them through those challenges. AAFSAs in this study cited several instances of support for various life circumstances and that FCA served as a critical support system. FCA also contributed several spiritual coping methods AAFSAs could employ for various life circumstances such as:

- Believing that God is in control of the situation
- Believing there is a greater purpose behind the situation
- Relying on God's help
- Keeping a positive attitude amidst the situation
- Focusing on faith rather than the situation

### **Role of the FCA Staff Member and/or Chaplain**

The FCA staff member and/or chaplain is crucial in helping student-athletes feel welcomed and providing opportunities for those who have faith in God to go deeper and

those who do not to discover Christian spirituality. As expected, their approach aligns with FCA's three-step "E" method (engage, equip, and empower).

A supportive, charismatic, sacrificial leader is important in maximizing the impact FCA can have at an institution. This relationship is certainly influential in the spiritual development of the AAFSAs in this study. The FCA staff member and/or chaplain helped AAFSAs encompass and mature in Christian spiritual development in all aspects of life, fostering a "biblical application in the sport experience for faith and life." (Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2010, pp. 1-2). The FCA staff member and/or chaplain demonstrated the most vital elements of sport chaplaincy through relationship building, nurturing, and maturing an ongoing basis of trust (Mims, 2016). Multiple participants expressed a strong trust and formed a relationship with the FCA staff member and/or chaplain. This can be attributed to the FCA staff member and/or chaplain inviting the AAFSAs to "do life" through volunteering together, inviting them to meet in public or their homes, or supporting them through attendance at competitions (Figure 4.1).

### **Research Limitations**

Although the findings of this study provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual development of AAFSAs by FCA, the researcher carefully considered its' limitations. First, the researcher recognizes that their own positionality presents a bias when discussing spiritual development. The researcher identifies with the Christian faith, was a former participant of FCA, a former Division I athlete, and is an African American male. Although the researcher practiced reflexivity, it is impossible to eliminate all biases completely.

The survey yielded a limited number of responses. A major contribution to this problem is garnering access to student-athletes. Because student-athletes are a unique subpopulation of college students, obtaining access to complete research produces challenges. Likely, to gain access to student-athletes, a researcher must go through a “gatekeeper” (coaches or athletic administration). Additionally, depending on the time of an athletic season, it can be even more difficult to reach student-athletes. Without direct access to athletes, the researcher depended on the FCA staff member/chaplain to distribute the survey.

Furthermore, other lurking factors could lead to the spiritual development of athletes. Examples include: involvement in other campus ministries, their own personal development and maturity, influence from church participation, or mentorship outside of the context of FCA (a coach, another student, minister/pastor, or campus ministry staff). The survey did not address other elements that could have contributed to spiritual development such as church involvement, mentorship, etc. Another consideration is student-athletes transferring institutions. With the recent updating of the NCAA’s transfer guidelines, the transfer portal came about in the fall of 2018. Essentially, the policy created a “free agency” of college football, allowing players to transfer institutions fairly easily and without many hindrances (Golembeski, 2021). Participants may have transferred institutions, and some of them could have participated in FCA at that other institution, thus impacting the results.

Geographic location could have played a role in the results. As described previously, in the southern culture there is a larger inclination for Christian faith to be a part of football programs and coaches’ philosophy/pedagogy (Pearce, 2020; Epting,

2013; Tweedie, 1978). There is a wider acceptance of the Christian faith in the southern culture, especially evidence in the fact that many southern institutions listed an FCA staff member or Character development coordinator in their athletic directories. This may not be the case for other Power 5<sup>3</sup> institutions.

## **Research Applications**

### **Higher Education Professionals**

Higher education historically has not done a good job of creating spiritual paths or opportunities for college students to have the option of participation to explore, develop or enhance their personal spirituality and/or faith (Clarke, 2010). However, religious activity at HEIs has increased rather remarkably over the past three decades.

Programming such as campus ministries offers students the chance to develop spirituality, and FCA offers the opportunity for the unique subgroup of college students (student-athletes) to develop purpose and meaning through Christian faith. This study indicates that AAFSAs are developing spiritually in college. Thus, higher education professionals have a duty to aid student-athletes in this developmental process (Clarke, 2010). Sceggel articulates that it is critical to intentionally design each part of the student-athlete experience as the potential to integrate Christian faith into all areas of college life (Sceggel, 2018, p. 10). For higher education professionals, it is imperative to continue to gain knowledge and understanding of how the Christian faith interacts with athletics on the grandest stage (Epting, 2013, p. 120). It is important for them to foster opportunities

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<sup>3</sup> Power 5 denotes NCAA institutions that are a part of the Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, ACC, and SEC athletic conferences. The Pac 12 is West/Northwest, the Big Ten is Midwest/Mideast, and the Big 12 is in the Central/Heartland region

for student-athletes to be able to participate in groups like FCA or even encourage other participation in groups that promote spiritual development.

Higher education professionals can partner with FCA to create opportunities for student-athletes to participate in service-learning initiatives. Student-athletes can participate in a national or international mission trip, coinciding with study abroad where athletes can serve, learn about these respective places, grow spiritually, and receive academic credit. Service-learning initiatives foster connectedness and personal reflection and is proven to increase spiritual development (Astin, 2004; Clarke, 2010). HEIs can give faculty and staff proper training to be able to engage in religious or spiritual discussions without violating students' rights. These discussions can simply be philosophical without imposing personal religious or spiritual beliefs on their students. This can help develop deeper relationships and help faculty and staff point students to resources for their spiritual development.

Furthermore, data revealed that FCA was an ever-present help in AAFSAs time of need, coming alongside them for various life challenges. Additionally, FCA provided an environment of care and concern where these AAFSAs could turn to for adverse circumstances. While trying to navigate the college environment, African American students are more likely to resort to religious and spiritual practices to cope with the stress and challenges of college life (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Higher education professionals must advocate for FCA to be a resource on campus. If not FCA, they should direct African American student-athletes to use faith-based organizations that could positively contribute to how they cope with adverse life challenges.

## **Athletic Programs**

Athletic departments should consider embracing a partnership with SMOs, in an effort to holistically develop student-athletes. Ramsey formulates that there is a belief that FCA is effective, yet there is minimal research that validates this belief (2015, p. 49). Based on the conceptual framework of FCA's perceived outcomes (Figure 2.1), the data suggest that FCA is adequately meeting each portion (coping, Christlikeness, identity formation, evangelism, and relationships). FCA can be a vital resource that collegiate athletic departments can provide to assist student-athletes in their spiritual and personal development. Several southern HEIs list a direct point of contact for FCA or a character development coach as if they were valuable contributors to the function of athletics at the respective institution. If not a partnership with an SMO, athletic programs can bring on directors of character development, which could address the spiritual development needs of student-athletes.

A growing trend in athletics has been the consideration of the mental health of student-athletes. Many athletic programs have begun to hire sports psychologists to address the needs of student-athletes. If this is the case, then a spiritual coordinator should also be hired to address the spiritual needs of student-athletes. Ramsey exclaims that "While athletes are assisted in developing as a student and an athlete, what is often overlooked in the assignment of 'coordinators' is someone to assist them in spiritual development." (2015, p. 8). Athletic programs must understand that student-athletes come from various faith backgrounds and should seek to assist student-athletes develop/cultivate spiritual development as part of holistic development.

While Evangelical Christian sport ministries can certainly serve a role in these departments, it is important to also consider addressing the religious needs of other student-athletes. Athletic departments could do pulse surveys to understand what religions student-athletes participate in and what they would like or need in order to grow in that area. Howard-Hamilton & Sina state that it is imperative that support be provided at all levels of the institution so that African American student-athletes can be intellectually, emotionally, and physically fit (2001, p. 43).

### **Fellowship of Christian Athletes**

As previously noted, the data suggests that FCA is adequately meeting each portion of its perceived outcomes (Figure 2.1) (coping, Christlikeness, identity formation, evangelism, and relationships). Nonetheless, although FCA operates at a very high level and consistently receives high marks and praise from participants and outsiders, there is room for improvement. While it is essential for these AAFSAs to participate in FCA's meetings and training, the goal should also be to connect them to a local church that can help them develop spiritually. FCA should work to establish partnerships with local churches. That way, each group collaborates on the mission of furthering the spiritual development of these individuals collectively. This is especially critical as research indicates that the Black Church is often an integral part of the spiritual, social, and political lives of African Americans (Blank, Mahmood, Fox, & Guterbock, 2002). Connecting AAFSAs to churches may also foster the opportunity to create connections and/or mentorship relationships with other African Americans.

FCA should consider establishing or encouraging FCA staff members and/or chaplains to use culturally relevant teachings. FCA staff members and/or chaplains can



relate resources and teachings to current events and address inequities and injustices from a faith-based lens. As African American student-athletes face a myriad of challenges, it is vital for them to be able to have conversations pertinent to their racial and spiritual identities.

FCA ought to consider recruiting more diverse candidates. This can be achieved by training and equipping diverse current student-athletes that they are already working with, especially those of diverse groups. Additionally, one of FCA's missions is to share faith through coaches. FCA can make more intentional efforts to reach African American coaches and equip and empower them to start and lead bible studies with student-athletes. Moreover, as previously mentioned, it might be beneficial for black student-athletes to be encouraged and equipped to become student leaders or advocates. It might also serve as a great tool to reach student-athletes of color in other sports. If more African American student-athletes are leaders, this could reinforce influences to participate from teammates or from other student-athletes. FCA could also encourage African American student-athlete leaders to start a small group Bible study. Lastly, FCA could invite local African American pastors or community leaders to speak at FCA and formulate relationships with student-athletes. Having them serve as "ambassadors"<sup>4</sup> could provide opportunities for representation.

### **Future Research**

This research has contributed to the body of literature on the Christian spiritual development of African American student-athletes, namely college football players at

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<sup>4</sup> Someone that is not considered an FCA staff member but works alongside FCA in a volunteer/support capacity.

Kentucky Division I PWIs, and has offered insight into how SMOs contribute to their spiritual development. Nonetheless, numerous avenues remain to be explored. This research formulated a clinical evaluative tool that can be helpful in measuring how well FCA is helping AAFSAs develop spiritually, based on their “E3” method. Additionally, it provides insights on how they are specifically meeting the needs of African American student-athletes, as well as understanding how they can help these students-athletes cope. With extensive consideration and thoughtful evaluation of feedback in different forms, modifications to the survey may be completed to retrieve data all student-athletes at various HEIs.

As mentioned in the limitations, geographic location plays a role in the data. As described previously, in the southern culture there is a larger inclination for Christian faith to be a part of football programs and coaches’ philosophy/pedagogy. A parallel study could examine the spiritual development of AAFSA in other geographic locations/athletic conferences and run comparisons of results.

A rich avenue for further investigations should observe other intercollegiate sports, as well as different diverse identities (race, gender, class, etc.). A quantitative study can explore differences in sport variables (revenue-generating sports versus Olympic sports) and the aforementioned identities.

Research should delve further into the experiences within athletic divisions. For example, Division I is comprised of a diverse array of institutions. Thus, future researchers should examine differences in spiritual development among various divisions (I, II, and III) and institution types and sizes.

Further exploration is warranted for looking specifically at chaplaincy programs, whether administered by FCA, church, or other outside organizations. As mentioned in the *chaplaincy* paragraph, an important note is that at HEIs, some chaplains serve in dual roles as the chaplain and FCA staff member. An important note is that at these HEIs, some chaplains serve in dual roles as the chaplain and FCA staff member. They serve dual responsibilities of leading weekly meetings FCA for all student-athletes and other gatherings and meeting the individual needs of football student-athletes and coaches. The nature of how chaplaincy is conducted may be different for football programs, meaning there are most likely many players who receive spiritual guidance/counsel apart from FCA. The researcher can examine football chaplains' ways of operating to determine if there are specific strategies that chaplains use to spiritually develop student-athletes.

Lastly, it would prove valuable to also investigate the support offered by athletics programs or organizations at HEIs that exist to support student-athletes of accentuating non-Christian, Abrahamic faiths (e.g., Islam and Judaism) to corroborate the body of research on religious athletes. This is particularly worth examining since the core of respective religious values are fundamentally similar (Clarke, 2010).

### **Summary**

This chapter began by illuminating the purpose of the research. The researcher discussed several points of consideration emerging from the results. The limitations of this research were described. The researcher then described practical applications for higher education professionals, athletic programs, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes to consider in light of the results. The chapter concluded by offering key recommendations of avenues for further research.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: APPROVAL TO USE PUBOLS SURVEY INSTRUMENT



**Rasheed Flowers** <rasheedflowers42@gmail.com>

Mon, Sep 13, 5:10 PM



to Bill.Pubols ▾

Hello Dr. P,

Good afternoon! I hope all is well with the start of the school year. I've been trucking along, working on this dissertation. I'm just writing to you to make sure it's okay if I can use your survey to help guide my dissertation research? I'll be editing some of the content and utilizing it to ask about perceptions of FCA.

Thanks!

Best,

Rasheed Flowers, B.S., M.S.  
University of Kentucky  
Graduate Assistant  
College of Education  
John 3:16-17



**Bill Pubols**

Tue, Sep 14, 12:56 PM



to me ▾

Good Morning Rasheed!

Absolutely! I am still happy to help out, and I would love to be informed of your progress.

Let me know how things are going, and if there is any way I can help.

Blessings,

Bill Pubols, DMin  
Director | Boise State University  
(208) 871-3856



## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTION MATRIX

*Note:* the colors indicate how each question addresses FCA’s “E3” method

Engage

Equip

Empower

| Research Question A   | Research Question B  | Research Question C                                  | Research Question D  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Q6: FCA has helped me connect with teammates and/or other student-athletes</p> <p>Q7: As an African American male, I felt/feel welcomed at FCA by other participants (Please give a brief description with your answer)</p> <p>Q8: As an African American male, I felt/feel welcomed at FCA by the FCA staff and/or chaplain (Please give a brief description with your answer)</p> <p>Q9: I have developed a relationship with the FCA staff and/or chaplain</p> <p>Q10: I trust the FCA staff and/or chaplain</p> <p>Q11: Is there an FCA staff and/or chaplain at your institution that looks like you? (Please give a brief description with your answer)</p> <p>Q12: It is important to have an FCA staff and/or chaplain that looks like me (Please give a brief description with your answer)</p> <p>Q13: The FCA staff and/or chaplain are available for support for things I need.</p> <p>Q14: The FCA staff and/or chaplain have shared their life with me by: (select all that apply)</p> | <p>Q16: FCA has helped me to grow in my understanding of the Bible.</p> <p>Q17: FCA has equipped me to integrate my faith into my sport.</p> <p>Q18: FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help my teammates grow in their faith</p> <p>Q19: FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help others grow in their faith</p> <p>Q20: FCA has encouraged me to share faith with my teammates</p> <p>Q21: FCA has encouraged me to share faith with others</p> <p>Q22: Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with teammates</p> <p>Q23: Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with others</p> <p>Q30: Which statement best characterizes you before your first</p> | <p>Q5: Why did you decide to participate in FCA?</p> | <p>Q24: FCA helps me deal with life’s challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.)</p> <p>Q25: FCA supported me during life’s challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.) Please give a brief description with your answer</p> <p>Q26: Rate the extent to which FCA does or does not contribute to your response to dealing with life's challenges</p> <p>-Believing that God is in control of the situation</p> <p>-Processing my feelings/emotions with God</p> <p>- Processing my feelings/emotions with others</p> <p>- Using spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, scripture reading, etc.)</p> <p>-Believing there is a greater purpose behind the situation</p> <p>-Relying on God's help</p> |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Q15: FCA has provided support in navigating my faith as an African American.</p> <p>Q27: In what ways does FCA serve your needs as an African American Football student-athlete? [open ended response]</p> <p>Q28: In what ways can FCA better serve your needs as an African American Football student-athlete? [open ended response]</p> <p>Q41: How does your identity as an African American inform your perceptions on FCA? [open ended response]</p> | <p>semester of involvement with your current FCA? (Check one)</p> <p><b>Q31:</b> Which statement best characterizes you currently? (Check one)</p> <p><b>Q32:</b> An athlete can worship God within their sport<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q33:</b> An athlete can glorify God in losing as in winning.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q34:</b> An athlete's worth is from their athletic performance.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q35:</b> Sport is a medium through which an athlete's relationship with God is developed.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q36:</b> An athlete grows spiritually by reading the Bible and praying.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q37:</b> An athlete grows spiritually by being involved in Christian community.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q38:</b> An athlete grows spiritually by helping others.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> |  | <p>-Focusing on faith rather than the situation</p> |
|---|--|--|---|

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
|  | <p><b>Q39:</b> An athlete grows spiritually through suffering.<br/>Before FCA:<br/>Currently:</p> <p><b>Q40:</b><br/>What has FCA's role been in your spiritual development? [open ended]</p> |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|



## APPENDIX C: PROFILE OF KENTUCKY HEIS

| Team  | School                      | City                      | Conference                 | Foot-<br>ball |                    |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Kentucky Wildcats                             | University of Kentucky      | Lexington                 | SEC                        | FBS           |                    |
| Louisville Cardinals                          | University of Louisville    | Louisville                | ACC                        | FBS           |                    |
| Western Kentucky Hilltoppers and Lady Toppers | Western Kentucky University | Bowling Green             | C-USA                      | FBS           |                    |
| Eastern Kentucky Colonels and Lady Colonels   | Eastern Kentucky University | Richmond                  | Atlantic Sun               | FCS           |                    |
| Morehead State Eagles                         | <b><i>NO FCA</i></b>        | Morehead State University | Morehead                   | Ohio Valley   | FCS <sup>[c]</sup> |
| Murray State Racers <sup>[d]</sup>            | Murray State University     | Murray                    | Ohio Valley <sup>[e]</sup> | FCS           |                    |

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_college\\_athletic\\_programs\\_in\\_Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_college_athletic_programs_in_Kentucky)

**APPENDIX D: EXPERT PANEL FOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

|                           |   |   |  |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Name</b>               | Dr. Shannon Sampson                                       | Dr. Tim Sceggel   | Dr. Steven Waller  | Dr. Bill Pubols   | Dr. Kelly Bradley   |
| <b>Position</b>           | <i>Assistant Professor and Evaluation Center Director</i> | <i>Chair for Health, Wellness, and Coaching department, Director of Athletics</i> | <i>Professor and Associate Department Head Recreation and Sport Management</i> | <i>Executive Director of the Biblical Studies Center and Director of Athletes in Action</i> | <i>Department Chair for Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation and Professor</i> |
| <b>Institution</b>        | University of Kentucky                                    | Covenant College  | University of Tennessee  | Boise State University  | University of Kentucky  |
| <b>Research Expertise</b> | Program evaluation, Measurement, and Survey research      | Qualitative research  | Qualitative research   | Quantitative research   | Quantitative evaluation and measurement, and Survey Research                        |

## APPENDIX E: SURVEY TOOL



Dear Participant:

My name is Rasheed Flowers, M.S., and I am doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation at the University of Kentucky. I am asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). I hope to learn about student-athlete's perceptions of FCA, and the impact it has on the spiritual development of student-athletes. In order to qualify to participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be a member of this organization (FCA) for at least 1 semester
- Be a current student (undergraduate or graduate) or a 2021 graduate
- Be 18-25 years old
- Identify as Black or of African descent
- Be a member of a DI Kentucky varsity football program

Your response to the survey will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. Identifiable information such as your email may be removed from the information collected in this study. After removal, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent. We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have Terms of Service and Privacy policies outside of the control of the University of Kentucky. If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study. Additionally, you can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will be deleted from the study database be removed. To encourage participants to complete the study, participants will be put into a drawing for 1 of 5, \$30 Amazon gift cards. The odds of winning are based upon the total number of participants that complete the study. We hope to enroll 300 participants in this study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study, see the contact info below.

Sincerely,

Rasheed Flowers

The University of Kentucky Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation

Rasheed.flowers@uky.edu

708-980-6179

IRB Approval 11/24/2021

If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8 am and 5 pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-94 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428

Q2. I have read the research description and information above:

- Yes
- No

Q3. I meet the stated criteria above

- Yes
- No

Q4. Do you consent to participate in this study?

- Yes
- No

Q5. Why did you decide to participate in FCA at your current institution?

- Influence from parents
- Influence from teammates
- Influence from other athletes
- Influence from a current or former coach
- Previously participated in high school
- I decided on my own to participate
- Other:

Q6. FCA has helped me connect with teammates and/or other student-athletes

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q7. As an African American male, I felt/feel welcomed at FCA by other participants (Please give a brief description with your answer)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q8. As an African American male, I felt/feel welcomed at FCA by the FCA staff and/or chaplain (Please give a brief description with your answer)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q9. I have developed a relationship with the FCA staff and/or chaplain

- Disagree
- Agree

Q10. I trust the FCA staff and/or chaplain

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q11. Is there an FCA staff and/or chaplain at your institution that looks like you? (Please give a brief description with your answer)

- No
- Yes

Q12. It is important to have an FCA staff and/or chaplain that looks like me (Please give a brief description with your answer)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q13. The FCA staff and/or chaplain are available for support for things I need

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q14. The FCA staff and/or chaplain have shared their life with me by:

- Volunteering in the community with me
- Inviting me out
- Inviting me to their home
- Inviting me to church services/events
- Conversing with me about spiritual matters
- Coming to one of my games
- Other:

Q15. FCA has provided ongoing support in navigating my faith as an African American

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q16. FCA has helped me to grow in my understanding of the Bible

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q17. FCA has equipped me to integrate my faith into my sport

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree



Q18. FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help my teammates grow in their faith

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q19. FCA has empowered me to use my time, talents, and treasures to help others grow in their faith

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q20. FCA has encouraged me to share faith with my teammates

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q21. FCA has encouraged me to share faith with my others

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q22. Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with my teammates

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q23. Because of FCA, I feel confident to share my faith with others

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q24. FCA helps me deal with life's challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q25. FCA supported me during life's challenges (injuries, loss, tragedy, etc.) Please give a brief description with your answer

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q26. Rate the extent to which FCA does or does not contribute to your response to dealing with life's challenges

|  | Click to write Column 1 |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Strongly disagree       | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
| Believing that God is in control of the situation                      | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Processing my feelings/emotions with God                               | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Processing my feelings/emotions with others                            | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Using spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, scripture reading, etc) | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Keeping a positive attitude amidst the situation                       | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Believing there is a greater purpose behind the situation              | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Relying on God's help  | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Focusing on faith rather than the situation                            | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q27. In what ways does FCA serve your needs as an African American football student-athlete?

Q28. In what ways can FCA better serve your needs as an as an African American football student-athlete?

Q29. Please think about your experiences and understanding before attending FCA at your current institution, then think about your current experiences and understanding as you answer the following questions:

Q30. Which statement best characterizes you before your first semester of involvement with your current FCA?

- Not a Christian
- Not a Christian, but interested in learning more
- A Christian, but questioning if it's true and/or if I want to be one
- A Christian, but drifting from what I know to be good and true
- A Christian, but not doing much with it right now
- A Christian, involved in Christian community activities
- A Christian, involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God every day

Q31. Which statement best characterizes you currently?

- Not a Christian
- Not a Christian, but interested in learning more
- A Christian, but questioning if it's true and/or if I want to be one
- A Christian, but drifting from what I know to be good and true
- A Christian, but not doing much with it right now
- A Christian, involved in Christian community activities
- A Christian, involved in Christian community and personally pursuing God every day

Q32. An athlete can worship God within their sport

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q33. An athlete can glorify God in losing as in winning

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q34. An athlete's worth is from their athletic performance

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q35. Sport is a medium through which one's relationship with God is developed

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q36. An athlete grows spiritually by reading the Bible and praying

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q37. An athlete grows spiritually by being involved in Christian community

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q38. An athlete grows spiritually by helping others

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q39. An athlete grows spiritually through suffering

|            | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before FCA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Currently  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q40. What has FCA's role been in your spiritual development?

Q41. How does your identity as an African American inform your perceptions on FCA?

**Q42. What is your year in school?**

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- 5th year Senior
- 6th year Senior
- Graduate student

**Q43. What is your age?**

Q44. What is your current institution?

Q45. How long have you participated in FCA at your institution?

Q46. How long have you participated in football at your institution?

Q47. Please follow this link to enter your email to be entered for consideration for the raffle. If you do not want to be part of that raffle, you do not need to answer this.

<https://forms.gle/GRrNC5tLuZHYGxK16>

## APPENDIX F: SURVEY COVER LETTER



### *The Impact of Fellowship of Christian Athletes Among African American Collegiate Football Players in Kentucky*

Dear Participant:

My name is Rasheed Flowers, M.S., and I am doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation at the University of Kentucky. I am asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). I hope to learn about student-athlete's perceptions of FCA, and the impact it has on the spiritual development of student-athletes. In order to qualify to participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be a member of this organization (FCA) for at least 1 semester
- Be a current student (undergraduate or graduate) or a 2021 graduate
- Be 18-25 years old
- Identify as black or of African descent
- Be a member of a Kentucky varsity football program.

You will be asked to speak about your experiences as a collegiate athlete, about your faith and spiritual development, and about your involvement in FCA. This will be a survey lasting about 20-30 minutes. Your responses will be recorded via an online survey system, via Qualtrics.

There are no known risks associated with this study. There could be potential psychological harm if you recall or share an instance of a potentially triggering life incident.

Your response to the survey will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. Identifiable information such as your email may be removed from the information collected in this study. After removal, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent. We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have Terms of Service and Privacy policies outside of the control of the University of Kentucky.

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study. Additionally, you can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will be deleted from the study database be removed.

To encourage participants to complete the study, participants will be put into a drawing for one of 5, \$30 Amazon gift cards. The odds of winning are based upon the total number of participants that complete the study. We hope to enroll 300 participants in this study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project.

If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study, see the contact info below.

Sincerely,

Rasheed Flowers

The University of Kentucky

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Frederick Douglass High School -- Lexington, KY  
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- Lyman T. Johnson Torch Bearer Award - UK College of Education (2019)
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