American society is going through a radical change in terms of its racial and ethnic demographics (Bond & Haynes, 2014); this change referred to as the “diversification of America” or the “browning of America” (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002, p. 19). While America was experiencing an increased proportion of racial and ethnic minorities in the workforce, a great many of those workers were people of Asian descent, and they were regarded as one of the most successful and affluent racial minorities in American society (Wu, 1997). Despite their wide range of occupations in American society, people of Asian descent remain, due to their minority status, underrepresented in some sectors of the American economy (e.g., law, teaching, administration, social services, private enterprise; Cheng, 1997). For instance, a new report issued by Leadership Education for Asian Pacific (LEAP, 2013) indicates that while Asians constitute 6 percent of the United States (U.S.) population, they hold only 2.6 percent of the total number of seats on Fortune 500 Boards. Furthermore, the boards of 77.2 percent of Fortune 500 companies still lack representation by people of Asian descent.

Sport, and particularly American college sport, is no exception to this trend. The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport (Lapchick & Baker, 2016) indicated that of the athletic directors at Divisions I, II, and III in the 2014-2015 school year, Asians accounted for 0.9 percent, 1 percent, and 0.2 percent, respectively. In terms of the associate athletics director position, Asians held—for the same levels and same timeframe—1.0 percent, 0.6 percent, and zero percent of this position. And at the same levels and timeframe, Asians held 0.8 percent, 1.0 percent, and 0.7 percent of head coaching positions for men’s teams.

Despite the lack of Asian representation in professional positions in American college sport, there is a dearth of research examining the experiences for people of Asian descent in professional positions in college sport. Research on the experiences for people of color in college sport has mainly focused on African Americans (Anderson, 1993; Anshel, 1990; Cunningham, 2010; Cunningham, Bruening, & Straub, 2006; Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Spivey, 1983) and African American females (Borland & Bruening, 2010; McDowell, 2008). Rarely are Asian professionals’ voices or experiences heard and, in fact, important issues they face have been obscured in American college sport. As to this invisibility of people of Asian descent in American college sport, Coakley (2004) argued that research that pays attention to the experiences of Asians in sport would bring continued and critical awareness. Such awareness could lead to the elimination of forms of racial and ethnic exclusion in sport. In light of this, it is necessary to explore the experiences of Asian professionals in college sport in American society.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the role that race and ethnicity plays in the experiences for people of Asian descent in professional positions in American college sport. Specifically, this study sought to understand the following:

RQ 1: What are the reasons for the underrepresentation of people of Asian descent in professional positions?
RQ 2: How do race and racism play a role in the underrepresentation for people of Asian descent in professional positions?
RQ 3: What are the strategies employed for obtaining and maintaining a professional position for people of Asian descent in American college sport?

When conducting research on race in sport, a researcher must have a certain way of knowing (i.e., epistemology). To this point, Singer (2005) argued that race-based epistemologies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) in particular is useful to better understand the experiences of people of color in sport. Hylton (2010) asserted that CRT is a theoretical framework to challenge race-based inequalities and racism in sport. However, based on CRT, some Asian scholars argue for a need to have a new critical race view for Asian Americans in American society, which is an Asian Critical (AsianCrit) framework (Chang, 1993; Liu, 2009). Museus (2014) asserted that “this AsianCrit perspective can provide a useful tool for understanding and analyzing the conditions and experiences of Asian American people and
This research used a basic interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). One-on-one interviews including telephone and Skype lasted approximately 30-60 minutes each. A research email invitation was sent to people of Asian descent in college sport. In order to reach out to the potential participants, the researcher utilized two methods. First, the researcher used the personal names and their institutions from Lapchick and colleagues’ (2013) racial and gender report card. Once they were identified, the researcher sent out research email invitations to introduce them to the research. Data collection was through semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews (Patton, 2002), characterized by open-ended questions. The participants of the study consisted of six (N=6) professionals of Asian descent that are currently working or have worked in American college sport and all of them self-identified as Asians or Asian Americans. Data Analysis was conducted by open, axial, and selective coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To increase credibility and dependability, the researcher utilized member checks and the knowledge and expertise from individuals in the qualitative research area.

For the first research question, the findings revealed that the participants felt that there were three reasons for the underrepresentation of people of Asian descent in professional positions in American college sport: (a) Asian cultural value on education over sport/athletic participation, (b) incongruousness of the term “Asians” with sport in the U.S., and (c) language barriers. For the second question, the participants felt that people of Asian descent were excluded from American college sport due to race-based view of foreigner. Lastly, for the third question, the participants suggested commonly accepted job practice (e.g., persistence, building a network) for obtaining and maintaining professional positions in American college sport. The findings provide people of Asian descent in society, specifically in American college sport, with an opportunity to ponder about what the current state they face as racial minorities. In addition, this study contributes to the sport management literature and diversity issues in sport by validating historically marginalized voices and experiences of people of Asian descent in American college sport.