

NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE  
COLLEGIATE ATHLETE EXPERIENCES IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Billy J. Hawkins)

ABSTRACT

The study sought to understand the experiences of African American female athletes and identity formation in the context of a predominantly white institution (PWI). Employing critical race theory and Black feminist thought the researcher attempted to determine how African American female athletes formulate their identity in college; the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity; and the impact of race, gender, and sport on the formation of identity. Black female collegiate athletes who self identified as African American attending a PWI in the southeastern region of the United States were selected for the sample population. A quantitative instrument was administered to obtain demographic data, perceptions of: athletic opportunities, athletic support, and discrimination, and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, which was the principal construct used for the selection of participants interviewed. Data collection occurred during the fall semester of 2007 and the spring semester of 2008. The study was conducted in an attempt to add to the dearth of research on African American female athletes in the intercollegiate environment. Findings from this research revealed the experiences and interactions of the African American female athlete: a) to be isolated and alienated; b) outside of the sport context to have a significant impact on identity; c) to be highly racialized.

INDEX WORDS: African American, Athletes, Experience, Females, Identity,  
Intercollegiate, NCAA.

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, James D. and Constance E. Carter, Jr., for their love and unconditional support. You are my role models, my best friends, and my voice of reason. I aspire to display your love, your laughter, your passion for people and the continual fight for social justice.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my foremothers in heaven: my great-grandmother Dora Johnson, my great-grandmother Emma Reynolds, my great-grandmother Rosella Carter, and my granny JoAnn Strickland. May your faith, spirit, and strength live through me.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:2-4 King James Version).

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Won't nobody try to reach her mind  
She's been degraded  
Exploited  
Not celebrated  
Saturated with self hatred  
Lift her, lift her, lift her  
Let her be elevated.  
- Jill Scott, The Thickness (2001)*

The Black female athlete in America has undergone a transformation. Since her entrance into the world of sport, she has found success in the midst of racism and sexism. In a broader social context, Jill Scott (2001), R&B songstress and Hip-Hop lyricist, explicates the experiences of the Black female, irrespective of athletic participation; for the Black female athletes' connection with the collective forever unites her to the Black female experience. Patricia Hill Collins, noted Black feminist, and author of *Black Feminist Thought* highlights the role of music in the Black community as a location for knowledge and consciousness. Specifically, the Blues as more than mere entertainment, but an artistic expression "solidifying community and commenting on the social fabric of working-class Black life in America" (Collins, 2000, p. 105). As such, Black female athletes and Black females have endured varying levels of oppression, based on skin tone and gender. Black female athletes encounter external stereotypes and internal obstacles in the form of racism and sexism, each of which weigh heavy on their psychology. Elevating the experiences of social injustices and understanding how Black female collegiate athletes conceptualize their external and internal obstacles has been a topic of interest.

Female athletes at Rutgers University recently were challenged with a racist and sexist social obstacle, when radio talk show host Don Imus comments on the 2007 NCAA women's basketball championship game and its athletes included a description of the Rutgers female

athletes as “nappy headed hoes” (MSNBC, 2007). Imus’s statements resonated across the country and provoked emotions among many – especially within the sporting and Black communities. His comments would later bring together groups of individuals such as Oprah Winfrey, famed talk show host, Russell Simmons, Hip-Hop business mogul, and Jason Whitlock, sport journalist, to the discuss implications of Imus’ statements and the impact of his comments on the perception of all Black females in America. Imus’s comments and Winfrey, Simmons and Whitlock’s discussion on the matter revealed the negative stereotypes, which are historically associated with Black females since the peculiar institution of slavery. The historic experience of Black females during the institution of slavery are rarely discussed, and are clouded by the historic caricatures of women, and not the brutal realities of mental, physical, and sexual violence (hooks, 1981). These acts, as Scott (2001) conveys, allowed for the Black female to continue to be *Degraded/ Exploited/ Not celebrated* and *Saturated with self hatred* for her race and gender was deemed subordinate and thus she was marginalized in America (hooks, 1981, Giddings, 1984).

Howard-Hamilton (2003) states that historic subordination holds true even in the present day educational institutions, and that Black women in the academy are at a greater risk of experiencing acts of racial and gender projection due to their visibility. Black women are permeating the institutions of higher education pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in growing numbers. The U.S. Department of Education reports the increase in which 54.3% of Black women enrolled in undergraduate programs in 1976 compared to 64.3% enrollment in 2004 (Department of Labor, 2008). It is important to note that the increase of Black females extends to include the Black female athlete. Therefore, Black females have moved from the

fringes of the larger society into the center of the arenas of sport performance and sport competition.

Smith (2000) states that the historical “acceptance of the physicality of the African American women [was] for economic gain by the dominant culture, but not for sport, self-development, education opportunity, or recreation, [which] put many women in a double bind” (p. 180). Smith’s sentiments are supported by Slowe’s (1937) historic notion about the experiences of Black women in institutions of higher education in that “Black women come to college with several problems: a) inexperience in civic life affairs; b) a conservative background which fosters traditional attitudes toward women; and c) a debilitating psychological approach to life (Slowe, 1937, pp. 276-279). Collins (1986, 2000) maintains the theoretical ideals of Black feminist thought and its impact on Black women in all spaces, as the theoretical frames pervades ethnic, class, and generational lines. Collins (2000) states “U.S. Black women intellectuals have long explored this private, hidden space of Black women’s consciousness, the “inside” ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in many cases, transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. How have African American women as a group found the strength to oppose our objectification as “de mule uh de world”? (p. 98). The complexities and intersectionalities of the African American female collegiate athlete are no exception to these areas of oppression. Thus, the presentation of my generational lens by way of Black female Hip-hop artist musical prose will preface each chapter, and poeticize the experience of the African American female athlete.

Again, the words of Jill Scott (2001) transcend the realms of music when one considers the state of Black females in America. Her words represent the lack of expectations and lack of intellectual stimulation of young black females, and thus these young women are developing

based on the desires and expectations of the greater society; expectations that are sometimes constructed through explicit or discouraging images within the media. These images include girls dancing scantily clad in music videos, Black women depicted as angry and unapproachable, and the hypersexualization of Black females in sport. These images seep through the walls of academe and pervade the minds of young Black females as they strive to develop their own self-image.

For the Black female athlete, the intersections of racism, sexism, and athletic identity complicates the search for self. Better understanding of the nature of these intersections is by way of the historical evolution of Blacks participation in sport.

#### The History of Blacks in Sport in the US

The introduction of Blacks to sport in the, U.S. emerged out of racial inequality and the institution of slavery (Wiggins, 2003; Wiggins, 1993; Ashe, 1988a). Enslaved by the White man, the role of Blacks in America was one of servitude, laborer, concubine, and entertainer. White overseers would train Black men for competition and entertainment. White slave owners used slaves as jockeys for horse racing (Young, 1963; Sage, 1990, Ashe, 1988a) and would pit slave versus slave in boxing matches and place wagers (Young, 1963; Edwards, 1969; Sage, 1990). Thus, Black sport participation was two fold: 1) mere entertainment to edify the boredom the White colonizers, and 2) a distracting agent to dissuade Blacks from running away from the plantation (Wiggins, 2003; Sage, 1990).

The institutional arrangements of slavery and the ideology of White supremacy relegated Blacks to the status of inferior human beings. The message that would spread throughout society was that Blacks were physically superior, and intellectually and morally inferior to the White race (Edwards, 1969; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996; Harris, 2001; Hawkins, 2001). Thus, Blacks



affinity for athletic participation was motivated by their “prescribed” status within the fabric of America.

Following the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation<sup>1</sup>, and the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment<sup>2</sup>, Blacks would continue to participate in sports. Track and field, boxing, basketball, and baseball were sports of interest to Blacks. The development of their own sporting leagues such as the Negro Baseball League (Ashe, 1988a; Lomax, 2003; McKissack & McKissack, 1994) emerged as well. Starting in 1800, Black athletic heroes emerged, and were elevated to celebrity in the Black community and mainstreamed to national fame throughout White America. Athletes such as Jack Johnson (boxing), Joe Louis (boxing), Jackie Robinson (baseball), Jesse Owens (track and field), and the Harlem Globetrotters (HGT) (basketball) displayed talents on a national and international level (Young, 1963; Ashe, 1988b). The most notable of all these athletes was Jackie Robinson.

Jackie Robinson attained a great level of respect as the first African American to integrate professional baseball on April 18, 1946, and thus professional sports (Ashe, 1988c). The national basketball league followed professional baseball in 1950 by integrating with Harlem Globetrotter star, Nat “Sweetwater” Clifton (George, 1992; HGT, 2005). Thus, integration of sports would provide the opportunity for Blacks and Whites to showcase that they “can co-exist if we do not let our racism command us” (HGT, 2005). Robinson and Clifton’s integration of the sport of basketball provided evidence that integration was possible in the larger context.

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<sup>1</sup> The Emancipation Proclamation was an executive order by United States President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. This order declared freedom of all slaves in the Confederate States of America that had not already returned to Union control. (<http://www.nps.gov/ncro/anti/emancipation.html>)

<sup>2</sup> The abolishment of slavery. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment stated “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (<http://www.nps.gov/archive/malu/documents/amend13.htm>).

In 1954, the landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Brown) overturned the 1896 decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*'s legalized "separate but equal" segregation. The Brown decision declared, "segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal" (Brown, 2006). The result of the Civil Rights movement and specifically *Brown v Board of Education*, granted Black men access to education and sport participation at White collegiate institutions. However, Black female athletes had to wait until the passage of the 1972 Title IX amendment (discussed in the *Positionality of the Black female athlete*). Historically Black Colleges and Universities would serve as the primary outlets for athletic performance, as very few Black athletes competed for white schools (Edwards, 1969). And, as Edwards (1969) sardonically states:

So thanks to the impact of a world war, the Supreme Court decision outlawing separate educational facilities in the nation's schools in 1954, and the urge on part of whites once more to exploit blacks economically, Afro-Americans at long last were allowed to venture into big-time college athletics in significant numbers. (p. 7)

### The Collegiate Environment

The collegiate experiences for Black Americans are many times tumultuous. Just off the cusp of legalized, mandated integration, Blacks were not readily accepted in predominantly White institutions (PWI). They were met at the gates with police escorts, White protestors, and threats of death and violence on their quest for equality and academic achievement (Lewis, 1998; HBO, 1999a).

Reversing the influence of racism was slow and challenging. Jesse Owens and the HGT traveled the world, presenting America as the land of democracy and racial freedom. Yet, back on American soil, during the pre-Civil Rights movement and the Brown decision, Black Americans were still experiencing racist treatment daily (Lewis, 1998; HGT, 2005). The daily aggressions experienced in 1950's further stimulated Black activism and the activism of the Black athlete in the 1960's.

Black athletes were willing to take American racism to the forefront of international competition. Thus, in 1967 Dr. Harry Edwards, then professor at San Jose State University, ignited the Olympic Project for Human Rights (Edwards, 1969; HBO, 1999b). Edwards and other Black leaders whom were concerned about the lack of decency towards the Black citizens and the "increasingly difficult conditions for black athletes" (Ashe, 1988c, p. 172) were destined to activate change. For example, there were threats of boycotting the 1968 Olympic Games (Edwards, 1969; Ashe, 1988c). While many Blacks and Black athletes desired social change, there were just as many that were apprehensive due to fear and threats of unemployment, violence, and death (Edwards, 1969; HBO, 1999b).

In 1999, HBO would document the Black athletes' fight for freedom through their active participation and political activism. The film presented the formation of the Olympic Project for Human Rights and the efforts to rectify racial oppression in the United State at the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games. The 1968 Olympics was a significant marker in the Civil Rights movement; and for Black athletes alike. It was on October 16, 1968 that Tommy Smith and John Carlos would take their historic stance atop the podium with gloved fists (Edwards, 1969; Rhoden, 2006; Powell, 2008; HBO, 1999b). The Black Power stance of Tommy Smith, 200m Olympic gold medalist, and John Carlos, 200m bronze medalist, captivated international audiences. The

actions of these two men, and others, sent a message to the world about the oppression Black people in America and their fight for basic human rights (Edwards, 1969; Rhoden, 2006; Powell, 2008; HBO, 1999b).

Conversely, their actions left Americans with negative images of Black people, one of the black militant and the black radical, which added to the historic images of the black brute and coon (Edwards, 1969; Rhoden, 2006; Powell, 2008; HBO, 1999b). Black female athletes' participation in the Games resulted in three gold medals; however, their male counterparts silenced their voice, opinion, and efforts during the project. While black male athletes suffered the brunt of the negative feelings, Black female athletes experienced similar feelings due to the negative tone of the Smith-Carlos Black Power stance, and the chosen platform to expose racial oppression in the United States.

#### The Status of the Black Athlete

As presented, the rise of the Black athlete was the product of the formation of America (Ashe, 1988a). The Black athlete worked hard and stood proud on the podium of victory as an American. The Olympics elevated the respect and celebrity of the Black athlete. On the contrary during the later 60's and early 70's, within the Black community, entertainers and drug dealers experienced this same celebrity status as the athlete. The athlete, entertainer, singer, and drug dealer were all conduits for social mobility; as a way to achieve financial freedom, and the fast track to achieving the American Dream (Hawkins, Milan-Williams, & Carter, 2007).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century Black athletes are prevailing on all levels of sports: interscholastic, intercollegiate, and professional sports. However, intercollegiate participation is most notable for the presentation of the historic mindset of racism and marginalization of Black Americans and

the Black athlete, especially within a PWI. Within the walls of the PWI, the colonization of the Black athlete was evident (Hawkins, 2001).

Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) suggest, “predominant White institutions may reflect the views and policies that are alienating to students from diverse populations,” (p. iv). Torres et al (2003) support the notion that racial oppression and exploitation of Black Americans still exist in PWIs. Hence, the culmination of social, racial, and economic factors still resonate a host of barriers, or obstacles, in the lives of Black Americans, and these factors have trickled over to the world of collegiate athletics and thus the lives of Black athletes, both male and female.

#### The Status of the Female Athlete

The female athlete’s performance in American has often been overlooked in, the mainstream print and media (Smith, 2000). It was not until 1972 that the female athlete gained legal status as a viable participant in the athletic arena, through the passage of Title IX (Hult, 1999; Hall, 1996). Title IX is a federal act that states “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Department of Labor, 2006). This act greatly affected high school and collegiate athletic programs for women by increasing opportunities for women to participate in high school and collegiate-varsity athletic programs. This also included increased opportunities for marginalized groups, such as Black girls and women alike, namely in sports like track and field, tennis, and basketball.

Many argue that access for females in the world of sport was met with apprehension (Hall, 1996; Corbett and Johnson, 2000; Smith, 2000); for the delicacy of women, and the

fragility of their bodies were deemed unable to handle the rigors of training and competition based on the Victorian pretense (Hall, 1996). Betty Friedan (1963) challenged this notion with *The Feminist Mystique*, which redefined womanhood to include: a career, to pursue an education, to have political involvement, and to circumvent the role of woman as more than a sexual being. Accordingly, Friedan (1963) summates the collective Victorian voice by which, “it was woman’s nature to be ruled by man, and her sickness to envy him” (p. 109). Thus, athletic participation could be included on the list of pursuits.

So the nature and experiences that were acceptable for women in the 1960’s was perpetuated not only through theories and culture, but also through the mass media. Friedan’s (1963) seminal work continued to illustrate the depth of this Victorian ideology, and image, and its impact on every facet of American women’s lives:

This image – created by the women’s magazines, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns and books by experts marriage and family, child, psychology, sexual adjustment and by the popularizes of sociology and psychoanalysis – shapes women’s lives today and mirror their dreams....What is missing from the image which shapes the American woman’s pursuit of fulfillment as a wife and mother? What is missing from the image that mirrors and creates the identity of women in America today? (p. 34)

Friedan’s (1963) questions the need for independence and a need to redefine the image of women, while Title IX becomes one method that expanded the image of women. Conversely, the conservative Victorian ideology perpetuated by the system of patriarchy limited the athletic participation of the White female (Hall, 1996); and it placed womanhood in a submissive, passive, delicate role. On the contrary, the Victorian ideology did not affect Black female

participation (as will be discussed in the following section), but it did influence the way in which Black women were *perceived* within the sporting world (Ashe, 1988c; Hall, 1996; Giddings, 1984). The combination of the Civil Rights movement and Title IX created a new opportunity for Black women in athletics.

### Black Female Athletes

Black female athletes have been fixtures in American sports, but they have also been marginalized. Suffering similar experiences, as Black males, the efforts of Black female athletes have been discounted and often forgotten (Wiggins, 2004). The contributions of these women have been many throughout the athletic world; most notably in the realm of track and field with Wilma Rudolph, Wyomia Tyus, Willie White and the likes of the Tuskegee Institute and the women of Tennessee State Tigerbelles (Ashe, 1988c). These women and HBCU teams changed the image of Black females in collegiate athletics, and within international competition. The new image also came with international acclaim and Olympic gold medals (Ashe, 1988c). Althea Gibson, like Rudolph, was a national and international force in tennis and golf. Together they opened doors for future Black female athletes. The historical account of their competitive journey, but their emotional journey and personal experience that shaped them will guide this study and add missing parts to literature on Black female athletes. How would race and gender impact their journey? How would competition mold their strength?

Smith (2000) acknowledges Carole Oglesby assessment on the historic state of the Black female athlete as “fleeting, if ever in the consciousness of the sporting public. Nobody knows her; not publicist, nor researchers, nor entrepreneurs, nor published historians ...the Black sportswoman is unknown and of course unheralded” (p. 181). Smith (2000) concurs and further states that “because of the invisibility in the dominant culture’s mainstream print and visual

media, and discrimination outside and within race, most African American sportswomen are unknown and silenced in society” (p. 181).

This insightful statement substantiates the purpose of this study; to elevate the essence of the Black female athlete, for their story has not been documented to the depths of their male counterparts. Recognizing their historical conditions provokes interest in knowing more about this “invisible” and “silent” populous. Accordingly, how do Black female athletes within a PWI discern the negative stigmas to define themselves for themselves?

### Statement of the Problem

Black females athletes have been marginalized in society, and silenced in the world of the predominantly White collegiate institution. As athletes, Smith (2000) explicates that Black females are also rendered invisible; and as such, there is little known about the experiences that shape the lives of African American female athletes within and outside of collegiate sport. Collins (2000) states that African American “women’s lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African American women with our objectification as the Other” (p. 99). Understanding the sociocultural factors and experiential constructs that contribute to the African American female collegiate athlete experience could provide a comprehensive assessment of the factors that formulate their identity, and sense of self. For Magolda (2001) states that identity, within the context of higher education “closely ties to the relationships one has with others” (p. 18).

Yet, once the athletic association and its personnel is factored into the relationship dynamic, athletes have the potential to become limited, and identity and individualism is often co-opted for the sake of team and university. Thus, human agency is relinquished, and autonomy is often removed. Accordingly, Magolda (2001) states conflict arises as autonomy is one of the



components necessary for “meaning making” and identity (p. 20). It is with this history, and present challenges, that the African American female athlete is forced to determine who she is; and ultimately negotiate how she will cope with societal norms and institutional dynamics.

#### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of the study is to determine how African American female college athletes construct their identity within the context of sport. The migration of African American female athletes from historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) to predominantly White institutions (PWI) would give rise to the notion of the racism and sexism present in White America (Hall, 1996); and how their pervasiveness impacts the identity formation of African American female athletes.

The limited documentation of African American female collegiate athletic experiences have presented a need to explore their personal experiences, and more specifically, to hear the experiences from the mouths of current African American female athletes 36 years post Title IX and 54 years post Brown v Board of education. Have their experiences changed? Are they aware of the historical circumstances that made their pursuit of athletic and academic opportunity possible? Who are the African American female collegiate athletes today? As Smith (2000) states:

It took the combination of the Civil Rights movement and the Women’s movement to stimulate the trend toward the recruitment of African American woman at major college athlete programs” (p. 187). And the reluctance by the institution and its staff was felt by these women, as black female athletes have “experiences multiple and intersecting layers of racial, gender, and economic

oppression” and this has “impacted their personal, social, educational, and sporting experiences. (p. 187)

### Research Objectives

The research questions are:

- 1) How do African American female athletes formulate their identity in college?
- 2) What are the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity?
- 3) What impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?

### Need for the Study

This study intends to address the experiences of African American female collegiate athletes and understand what experiences impact the formation of their identity and their development. Presenting the counterstories of this historically underrepresented population through race, gender, and the context of sport has yet to be addressed extensively, and addressed through the lens of critical race theory and Black feminist thought.

### Delimitations

This study will be delimited to African American female collegiate athletes between the ages of 18 and 23 who attended a large predominantly White institution in the southeast United States. This population was purposefully targeted because it represented an under-researched group and an important demographic. Data collection methods were quantitative and qualitative and were delimited to the use of a self-reporting questionnaire and personal semi-structured interviews.

### Limitations

The research design utilized in the study was limited to volunteering varsity female athletes, whom self-identified as African American; and therefore generalizability of the findings

and conclusions was restricted. Generalizability of the study was also restricted due to the sample size of the research participants. In regards to the treatment group, the individual effects of the sport programs, the coaches, and the academic instructors could not be measured separately.

### Assumptions

It was assumed that the participants would respond honestly to the questionnaires, and the semi-structured interviews, as each are based on the participants' personal perceptions and prior experiences.

### Definition of Terms

The following list of terms will be useful in following this study.

*African American* – “An ethnic group of persons with shared cultural experiences and a social history grounded in both Africa and America, or Americans of African ancestry” (Davis, 1991; Smith, 2000).

*Athletic Identity* – “the degree with which an individual identifies with the athletic role (Brewer, 1993)” (Griffith & Johnson, 2002, p. 226).

*Black* – “a socially constructed category, which is attributed to persons of African decent” (Davis, 1991; Smith, 2000).

*Black Feminist Thought* – ideas and perspectives produced by Blackwomen that clarify a standpoint of and for Blackwomen (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

*Double Consciousness* – “a term developed by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the ability to maintain an awareness of self while maintaining an awareness of how one is perceived by others. More specifically, Du Bois described it as “‘two-ness’ of being an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”

(Du Bois, 2005, p. 7). Double consciousness also refers to the “internal conflict in the African American individual between what was ‘African’ and what was ‘American’” (Bruce, 1992, p. 301).

*Counterspace* – safe environments established “by finding people who look like themselves and establishing a space that is comfortable and hospitable to them (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 23)

*Counterstories* – stories based on experiences that challenge the discourse and beliefs of the dominant group. Thus, these stories contribute to casting doubt on existing ideas or myths held by majority group members (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Bell, 1992).

*Critical Race Theory* – theoretical framework to used to address race, racism, and the law within the institution of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996, Tate, 1997; Bell, 1992; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000)

*Microaggression* – “Conscious, unconscious, verbal, nonverbal, and visual forms of insults directed toward people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000)” (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 23).

*Nigrescence, or nigrescence model* – “a development theory model which describes Black racial identity as five transitory stages for achieving Black identity, beginning with the 1) pre-encounter stage, 2) encounter stage, 3) immersion stage, 4) emersion stage, and ending with the 5) internalization stage” (Cross, 1991).

*Self Concept* – “how an individual evaluates his or her competence and worth (Richards, 1999)” (Griffith & Johnson, 2002, p.226).

*Title IX* – “a federal act that states “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under

any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Department of Labor, 2006).

### *Summary*

Ultimately, my argument of elevating the voice of African American female athletes to the forefront of sport literature was to bring voice to their beautiful journey. The infusion of African American female Hip-Hop artists’ lyrical prose at the fore of each chapter encapsulates its thesis; and exhales a poetic expression of life, culture, and a Black female perspective into the context of sport as “we” search for self. Furthermore, my use of music lyrics will be utilized to situate the African American female collegiate athlete within and among the U. S. social fabric and her intersectionalities through race, gender, and sport participation; and to situate the feelings of my participants’ journey, along with my own journey, of experience, analysis, and consciousness. Chapter I provided an introduction, research questions, and the significance for the study. Chapter II examines the relevant literature to the topic, which includes the historic rise of Black female athletes, black female collegiate athlete experiences, and the layers that contribute to identity development specifically within the collegiate environment. The layers will include race, gender, and athletic identity concepts. This chapter also includes the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and Black feminist thought, which structure this study. Chapter III describes the research methods used with this study. Chapter IV displays the results of this mixed method, or quantitative and qualitative study. Lastly, Chapter V presents the discussions, conclusions, and implications for addressing African American female collegiate athletes and their experiences at predominantly white institutions.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Ooh hey  
I'm trying to decide  
Which way to go  
I think I made a wrong turn back there somewhere  
Didn't cha know, Didn't cha know  
– Erykah Badu, Didn't Cha Know (2000)*

The purpose of this study is to determine how Black female college athletes construct their identity within the context of sport. Erykah Badu's (2000) poetic testimonial in *Didn't Cha Know*, encourages young Black women to educate themselves about their foremothers, to discover their foremothers' history, to examine their foremothers' experiences, and to appreciate their foremothers' tribulations and triumphs. The lyrical utterance of Badu (2000) continues the tradition of the transformative power of music for the Black woman; and present expressions of self-empowerment within the "complicated context of race, class, and gender politics" (Collins, 2000, p. 108). This chapter examines the literature of Black women in sports, more specifically, and presents the following: 1) Black females in the collegiate athletic environment, 2) the historical impact of women in sports, 3) the formation and development of identity within a predominantly White collegiate setting. This chapter will also examine the theoretical frameworks used to structure this study: 1) critical race theory and 2) Black feminist thought. The ultimate goal is to understand how the historic experience and representation of Black women in sport impacts African American female athletes today.

The migration of Black female athletes from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to Predominantly White institutions (PWI) gives rise to the notion of the racism and sexism present in White America (Hall, 1996); and how their pervasiveness impacts the identity formation of Black female athletes. Specifically the research objectives of this study are to

determine: 1) how do Black female athletes formulate their identity in college, 2) what are the factors used to shape Black female athletic identity, and 3) what impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?

Corbett and Johnson (2000) state that “the limited number of studies that have been conducted are tainted in their findings because they do not examine the sporting experience of Black women in its context” (p. 202). The content of this chapter is a review of literature on the subject of Black female athletes and identity development. The theoretical frameworks and representative studies explicate the key concepts pertinent to the research objectives under investigation. Hence, the results from relevant research serve to enhance the discussion of this study by providing a frame for conclusions and recommendations.

### The History of the Black Female Athlete

Black female student athletes’ inception into sport participation began in 1890, and their rise to fame was birthed in the HBCU (Ashe, 1988c; Smith, 2000; Corbett & Johnson, 2000; Cahn, 1990). HBCU’s cultivated the talents of the Black female, until these women were recruited by and/or wanted to attend the PWI. However, the migration of Black females from HBCU’s to PWI presented challenges, as “there was a stigma against women participating in sports; that it was unfeminine, unwomanlike” (Ashe, 1988c, p. 185).

This, unfeminine and unwomanlike ideology added insult to injury. For Black females, their physical prowess carried with it historic images that would pervade the minds of present day society; forcing Black females to fit into one of four characterization of these images: a) the mammy (hooks, 1981; Smith, 1988, Bogle, 1989; Bourne, 1991; Pieterse, 1992; Collins, 2000), 2) the matriarch (hooks, 1981; Collins, 2000), c) the sexual siren (Collins, 2000; Woodward & Mastin, 2005), or d) the welfare mother, or queen (Collins, 2000; Woodward & Mastin, 2005).

The implications of these images are discussed further through the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought.

These images overshadowed the athletic accomplishments of Black females. Althea Gibson and Wilma Rudolph's are two of the most recognized Black females athletes whose competitive efforts are prime examples of athletic accomplishment. However, their personal experiences that contributed to their athletic accomplishment are not well known. Interestingly, researchers have chronicled the evolution of Black female personal development and identity; and the androgynous, feminine and masculine personas, development attributable to the Black family dynamic and social constructs (hooks, 1981). hooks (1995) states that Black females were not raised to be subservient, thus their cultural upbringing spilled over into the world of sport. Black women were not deterred from sport participation like their White female counterparts, but they were celebrated in their communities for their interest and participation in physical activity (hooks, 1995). Black and White men understood the need for Black females to be physically fit. The physical demands on Black females during the 1940, 50's, and 60's as housekeepers, cooks, and caretakers in the homes of Whites warranted physical strength and endurance (HBO, 1999a). Thus, Black women were comfortable in her athletic pursuits.

The athletic accomplishments of Black females were tremendous, but oppression and similar exploitive realities like that of their male counterparts, such as the inferior mentality and Black brute characterization eclipsed any social gain (Hawkins, 2001; Hyatt, 2003). Again, Smith (2000) reminds us that there is an "acceptance of the physicality of the African American women for economic gain by the dominant culture, but not for sport, self-development, education opportunity, or recreation, [which] put many women in a double bind" (p. 180). That bind would carry the ties of racist and sexist innuendoes that endured for the coming generations.



The limited information about the personal experience of Black female collegiate athletes leaves one to speculate how they overcame racism and sexism through the context of sport. Their exemplar conduct might prove essential in determining the role of sport for current Black females in intercollegiate athletics. Smith (2000) concludes that sport has served as “a way out”, as female athletes have a medium to “achieve dignity, respect, social status, and educational opportunity, in society and sport” (p. 189). Examples of excellence were cultivated in Tennessee State University and Tuskegee Institute.

The HBO (1999a) documentary *Dare to compete: The struggle of women in sports* visual medium captured the impact of women such as Wilma Rudolph, Willye White, May Faggs, who dominated the track as members of the 1960s Olympics, along with the women of the renowned Tigerbelles of Tennessee State University, an HBCU (Haley, 2003; Ashe, 1988c; HBO, 1999a). Rudolph stood out and became noted as the world’s fastest woman in the 1960 Rome Olympics where she earned three gold medals (HBO, 1999a). Althea Gibson, another Black female, astonished America when she demonstrated her talents in professional tennis and professional golf. Gibson was the first Black international tennis player, first Black winner of Wimbledon, and the first Black winner of the 1957 United States tennis championships (Gibson, 1958; Cahn, 1990, Smith, 2000; HBO, 1999a). Furthermore, on the golf course Gibson’s presence was yet again phenomenal, as she became the first Black member of the Women Professional Golf Association (LPGA) (Ashe, 1988c; HBO, 1999a). These iconic Black women paved the way for the present day continuation of Black female athletes and Black female collegiate athletes. However, their participation was nurtured in a predominantly Black sociocultural environment; one that was filled with support for their role as athletes. Rudolph and Gibson, along with several other outstanding Black female athletes would serve as precursors. To understand the dynamics

of their role warrants the need to expand the exploration of the Black female athlete and fully explore their realities.

### The Life of the Black Female Athlete

In the collaborative work of Sloan-Green, Oglesby, Alexander, and Franke (1981), *Black Women in Sport*, presented a comprehensive approach to reveal the realities of Black women in sports. This text provides historic accounts of Black women in sports with unabashed stories of the harsh realities, along with stereotypic mythologies that Black women encountered.

Sloan-Green et al (1981) were groundbreaking in their text about Black women as they unveiled the truths of Black females in the context of sport and physical activity. The text brought forth qualitative excerpts and biographical sketches of seventeen women whom made significant contributions to not only the movement of Black women in sport, but also all of American sports. The contributions of Black females spanned from researchers and directors such as Dr. Evie Dennis, an administrator in sport and member of the United States Olympic committee; Dr. Doris Corbett, a researcher of sport sociology and the first coordinator for Women's varsity athletics at Howard University in Washington, D. C.; to the field of competition with Anita DeFrantz, Olympic Rower and advisor for the Olympic Committee; and Marian Washington, team handball Olympian and member of the 1969-1971 United States Women's National basketball team (Sloan-Green et al, 1981). Each of these women along with their cohorts made great strides and have continued to impact the world of sport today.

*Black Women in Sport* provides a window and a voice to the challenges of black females in the 1960's and 1970's, more importantly; it provides visibility to the disparities and their affect on the consciousness of these women. Expressly, Sloan-Green et al's (1981) work

endorses a need for collaborative efforts for Black women to continue to make strides in the world of physical education and sports.

Himes (1986) study speaks of the relationship between Black women and competitive sport through examining race and class differences of American Blacks and the dominant culture. Himes (1986) study gives rise to: 1) the exploitation of female athletes; and 2) the role sport in the wake of slavery and the Civil Rights movement. Her inference to the connection of Black women's historical athletic relationship with Black men, either as coach-athlete, or as an athletic counterpart, is key in situating Black female athletes. This supportive invitation of Black women into the world of sport attributed to the proven success and acceptance of Black men by the greater society. Therefore, if Black men received some level of acceptance in America based on their athletic prowess, then possibly Black women would have similar experiences.

Smith (2000) supported the notion that Black male athletes' encouragement and embrace of Black women as athletes would extend itself into other roles in the world of sport, namely as administrators and educators. So much so, that based on historical and racial oppression, educational institutions imposed a broad definition of administrators; often extending the role of coach eliminating traditional gender role qualification. This extension of gender roles would plant the seed for greater athletic participation for women in sports that were traditionally masculine. Smith (2000) would express this notion in her writings on the *Sociocultural Influences of African American Elite Sportswomen*:

In the Black Community, the woman can be strong and achieving in sport and still not deny her womanness. She may actually gain respect and status as evidenced by the reception of women like Wilma Rudolph, Wyomia Tyus Simburg and other great performers. The Black woman seems to also have more freedom to

mix her involvement in sport and dance without the conflict expressed by many White women athletes. (Hart, 1976, p. 441)

Himes (1986) states that Black females have a historical kinship with basketball, tennis, and track and field. Black women's participation in high school basketball would lead to college, and eventually professional basketball opportunities. The success in basketball would then transfer to the sports of track and field and tennis. By the 1940's, Black women dominated the collegiate realms of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and the international levels in the Olympic Games. In addition, trailblazers such as Willye White and Wilma Rudolph, and the historic Tennessee Tigerbelles, would dominate track and field. In addition, much like track and field, the strides of the American Tennis Association (ATA) are responsible for competitive opportunities for Black women. In the 1950's Althea Gibson, known as the first Black woman to challenge the White women in the elite ranks of tennis, elevated the level of recognition of Black women in tennis.

Despite the success and kinship with these traditionally masculine sports, Black females still had to prove their womanhood. The notion of sport participation for Black females magnified their lack of feminine quality, and substantiated the dominant culture's view of Black females. Additionally, participation in sport added fuel to the ever burning fire that Black females were amazons, brutes, and ugly; but the Black community viewed sport participation otherwise, and as the gateway into economic freedom, and for women, "a means of attaining the middle-class ideal of feminine beauty" (Himes, 1986, p. 11).

Due to the social class of Black females, gender or the expression of femininity was not favored in their lives. Himes (1986) expressed "for Black women, participation in the labor force, community activities and political movements symbolized a woman's deep concern and

commitment to her family rather than an unwillingness or inability to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother” (p. 12). Sports participation was just an extension of this notion, yet gender norms would challenge the rise of Black female’s acceptability in the eyes of White America.

Cahn’s (1990) explored the depth of this treatment through her focus on Black females in the sport of track and field and basketball. Similar to Himes, Cahn (1990) highlighted women’s participation in basketball, but explained that basketball, unlike track and field, allowed for women to display their talent in a femininesque quality, a modified version of men’s rules and format. Cahn (1990) described how the historic images of Black women have hindered their progression and rise as an acceptable member in mainstream society, but how the Black community’s support was ever present.

Cahn (1990) also found the Black community’s support of Black women and their sport participation. However, in a sport such as track and field, its raw expression of athleticism, speed, and strength, was a negative force in the definition of womanhood. Thus, “while their success spoke to the reality of African-American cultural achievements, in racist eyes it also confirmed oppressive stereotypes of black women as animalistic, sexually deviant and ugly” (Cahn, 1990, p. 153); for “similar stereotypes applied to black women and formed the basis for their historical exclusion from dominant cultural ideals of womanhood” (Cahn, 1990, p. 176). So much so, that Black women, Black men, and their supporters made tremendous efforts to remove this connotation from the image of Black womanhood.

Cahn (1990) explained that “African-American women, exploited in their every day lives, excluded from educational, professional, and athletic opportunities, could demonstrate this excellence and character to the world” (p. 163). Thus, the sport of track and field would elevate the visibility of Black female. Wilma Rudolph, Ed Temple (head coach of the women’s track and

field at the HBCU Tennessee State University), and the famed Tennessee Tigerbelles were the new face of Black women in track and field, and women in track and field period (HBO, 1999a).

Nevertheless, the public visibility was not acknowledged as admiration, but rather as token acceptance of Black women. Cahn (1990) shared Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins (1989) sentiments on the strides of Rudolph's success by stating that:

When White culture has accepted African-Americans it has often been as "pets" rather than as equals, merely changing the terms of oppression from absolute subordination to subordination with affection....Applauding her amazing gold medal performance at the 1960 Rome Olympics, the public adopted Rudolph as a pet. As a gazelle, she still represented a wild, animalistic image, albeit an attractive, lovely beast. (p. 180)

However, Rudolph and the outstanding Black female track and field stars during this era were heroines in their community.

Therefore, this heroism was not a global acceptance because the universal notion of femininity was not embodied in the image of a Black female. Cahn (1990) concluded that the impact of track and field in the lives of Black females was a double-edge sword. While Black females would excel and raise their level of confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment, "they reinforced White norms which confined women physically, sexually, and athletically" (Cahn, 1990, p. 188), thus, still falling short of their male counterparts level of acceptance.

## The Black Female Collegiate Athlete

This section examines the history and current experiences of Black females in collegiate athletics. It will also examine the historical and sociocultural impact of race and gender in the context of sport.

There is a dearth of research on the experiences of Black women in sports (Sellers, Kuperminc, & Damas, 1997; Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005). Often times, the experiences of Black women are overshadowed by the experiences of Black males and White females, for as researchers discuss the Black race, it is often in reference to Black males; similarly, when researchers discuss gender issues, it is often in reference to White females (hooks, 1981; Giddings, 1984). Research addressing the experiences of Black females, often covers broad aspects on: 1) the status of Black female athletes, 2) academic performance, 3) athletic achievements and contributions in sport, and 4) eradicating stereotypes (Sellers et al, 1997, Bruening et al, 2005, Sloan-Green et al, 1981).

Sellers et al (1997) explored the life experience of Black women athletes in college. In their quantitative study 154 and 793, black and White women student athletes respectively, were compared to 250 black female non-athletes and 628 black male athletes in four areas of college life: 1) academic performance, 2) alienation and abuse, 3) perceived social advantage as a result of athletics, and 4) life satisfaction. Sellers et al (1997) concluded that athlete factor did not weigh as much on experience as that of race and gender. The impact of these two factors will be explored further through the selected theoretical frameworks. Prior to their study only two other studies, 1983 and 1984, explored the lives of black female collegiate athletes. Their findings revealed that black females: 1) fared well academically, often above the minimum grade point average requirements for collegiate institutions; 2) on average they did not experience alienation

or abuse; 3) perceived athletic status provided a greater advantage on social skill development than that of White women; and 4) overall life satisfaction was inconclusive, while some comparisons could be made between black female athletes and non-athletes, it was not significant enough to influence their experiences.

Corbett and Johnson (2000) expounded on the notions of sexism and racism, which influenced the daily lives of Black female collegiate athletes. Corbett and Johnson's (2000) essay on the "cultural milieu of the African American sportswoman" discusses the nature of inclusiveness, the impact of Title IX, and the effect of Black females during and after their collegiate experience. In the same vein of Ashe (1987), hooks (1981, 1984), Giddings (1984), and Smith (2000) explain that Black females have endured a tumultuous journey within the United States and in the world of sports. They have chronicled Black females reactions with participation in collegiate sport. The exploration of external, and internal/cultural factors, and how they impact the identity of the Black female athlete has had modest coverage, but these studies have presented interesting considerations for identity development.

#### Identity Formation and Development in College

Tony Martin's (1976) work on Marcus Garvey<sup>3</sup> incorporates an prophetic quote with respect to the Black race and the concept of identity, "in a world of wolves one should go armed, and one of the most powerful defensive weapons within reach of the Negroes is the practice of race first in all parts of the world" (p. 22). Reflecting upon the history of predominantly White institutions and the entrance of Blacks into institutions of higher education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) denote the multiple barriers Black people have endured to attain the rights and access for equality, but as the words of Marcus Garvey note, at the crux of each barrier is the

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus Garvey was a Black Nationalist and founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey was most noted for his *Back to Africa* movement; and his philosophy of Black racial pride and economic independence ([www.marcusgarvey.com](http://www.marcusgarvey.com)).



question of race. Lest we forget the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision that separate was in fact not equal<sup>4</sup>. This decision was a significant stepping-stone for Black equality and education.

Conversely, Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) state “predominantly White institutions may reflect the views and policies that are alienating to students from diverse populations,” (p. iv). Hence, the culmination of social, economic, racial, and gender factors still resonate a host of barriers for the lives of Blacks, and these factors have trickled over to the world of collegiate athletics and thus the lives of Black student athletes.

Beverly Daniel-Tatum (1997) states that Blacks, as youth, will begin to cluster based on how they see themselves; expressly, “estrangement from the dominant group”, or social alienation and isolation result. Consequently social isolation, or a feeling of loneliness, “based on social aspects such as class or some Black students roles as athletes” (Hawkins, 2001, p. 37), create barriers for athletic and academic achievement, achievement of a defined self-concept, and integration into the institutional environment. Therefore, their social alienation and isolation result from the lack of cultural diversity within an institution, but more specifically the time demands that placed on the lives of all student athletes (Carodine et al, 2001, Hyatt, 2003, Watt & Moore, 2001).

In an effort to address the developmental needs of the student athlete, the student athlete’s role and identity, must be examined. Identity and role conflict are enveloped in the developmental process, and often role conflict results from being a student and an athlete (Settles, Sellers & Damas, 2002). Chartrand and Lent (1987) define role conflict as the time “demands of one role are incompatible with the requirements of another” (p. 164). In other

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<sup>4</sup> The 1954 *Brown versus the Board of Education* court case overturned the 1896 verdict of *Plessy versus Ferguson*’s “separate but equal” which required the segregation of public schools. The decision states that “segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal” ([www.nationalcenter.org/brown](http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown) ).

words, race and gender are additional components that need consideration when addressing the developmental needs of the student athlete. Again, there is limited research on this particular dynamic of the female Black athlete. Thus, this study will explore the identity formation of the Black female collegiate athlete based on race, gender, and athletic status.

### *Race*

Race can compound the ability to form an identity. W.E.B. Du Bois, a Black America sociologist, studied the concept of race and racial identity for Blacks (Du Bois, 2005; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). He coined the term of “double consciousness” a “‘two-ness’ of being an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 2005, p. 7). Double consciousness refers to the “internal conflict in the African American individual between what was ‘African’ and what was ‘American’” (Bruce, 1992, p. 301). James Stewart (1983) explored the subsequent works of Du Bois, examining the concept of double consciousness and the Black psyche. It is Stewart’s contention that Du Bois unpublished novels address three additional notions of double consciousness and the state of the Black psyche that were not fully formed within his seminal work in *The Souls of Black Folks*. Specifically:

1) the extent to which double consciousness provides Blacks with vantage points unavailable to non-Blacks and whether this unique vision exists universally among Blacks; 2) the nature and strength of the cultural ties that bind Blacks together; 3) and the process by which the liberation of the psyche of Blacks is achieved. (Stewart, 1983, pp. 93)

Accordingly, the ideology established the foundation for many challenges that Black Americans faced as a minority in a majority environment; and experiences and interactions of Black student athletes in PWI’s, would be no different (Hyatt, 2003; Sailes, 1998).

Torres et al (2003) suggest that to understand the Black student identity formation, one must understand and acknowledge that institutional racism still exist. This hidden form of racism, found inside various institutions, is “subtle and less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing acts than overt racism where there are blatant verbal and physical racial attacks” (Hawkins, 2001, p. 33). Hawkins (2001) and Carodine et al (2001) suggest that when hidden within the constructs of athletics, institutional racism morphs into the world of a Black athlete as a self-induced manifestation of social alienation and social isolation.

Consequently, Black athletes are challenged with the task of managing environmental challenges and instances of exploitation similar to the colonized. Hawkins’ (2001) *The New Plantation: The Internal Colonialism of the Black Student Athlete* explores the notion of internal colonization. Hawkins (2001) defines colonialism “as a group of people relocating into another geographical area where the natives' labor, the land, and its natural resources are exploited by the newcomers or colonizers” (p. 43). Internal colonialism “exists where a minority, indigenous or transplanted, is subjugated and exploited by the dominant majority colonizer” (Hawkins, 2001, p. 45). Blacks athlete as internally colonized individuals at PWI’s, becomes exploited for their athletic ability to produce millions of dollars in revenue for the PWI and athletic departments (NCAA, 2005). Hawkins (2001) contends that the Black athlete falls into the reconstructed slave labor, an oppressive construct, with negative undertones and imagery.

Scholars in the area of student development recognize the consciousness ideology presented by Du Bois and developed psychosocial theories to address the complexity of identity formation within college. The concept of nigrescence and foundational work of William Cross, Jr.’s (1991) racial identity scale, known as the CRIS (Cross Racial Identity Scale) explore the concept of nigrescence. This sliding racial identity continuum is used to measure the four phases

of identity: pre-encounter, characterized by a range of racial salience and demarked by assimilation and an Anti-Black role; immersion-emersion, characterized by an intense involvement of Black culture; internalization, characterized by the acceptance of one's Blackness; and, Black nationalism, characterized by Black empowerment, and a keen awareness of Black culture and Black history (Vandiver, et al, 2001; Worrell et al., 2006). Cross's notion of nigrescence has influenced scholars in higher education to explore identity for its students. For example, Torres et al (2003) and Evans et al (1998) have discussed Cross's theory of nigrescence as a four stage model which address issues of race salience, personal identity, and reference group orientation in respect to social, cultural, historical, and psychological challenges that face Black Americans.

According to Torres et al (2003), Jackson developed a model of nigrescence similar to Cross. Conversely, Jackson took into consideration the impact of social phenomena. In particular, three issues resonated in the formation of this model: 1) the status of class in relation to Blacks, 2) the knowledge of Afrocentricity, or the awareness of African based customs and culture; and 3) the impact of race knowledge on self-concept (Torres et al, 2003). Black identity development, or "consciousness", focus on how Blacks have transitioned over time through five developmental stages 1) naïve, 2) acceptance, 3) resistance, 4) redefinition, and 5) internalization. His last stage denotes "the integration of a redefined racial identity into all aspects of one's self concept or identity" (Torres et al, 2003, p. 45). This is significant when considering the components of the student athlete identity formation.

Bank's model on Black identity, like Cross and Jackson's, honed in on the "importance of a psychological rebirthing process that entails an immersion into one's own racial group" (Torres et al, 2003, p. 46). Torres et al (2003) presented Bank's reflection of this notion through

a five-stage model: 1) ethnic psychological captivity, 2) ethnic encapsulation stage, 3) ethnic identity clarification, 4) bi-ethnicity, and 5) multi-ethnicity. Stage four and five, like that of Jackson's model, focus on the Black students' ability to function within the dominant cultures society, numerous cultures, and their own cultural environment. Therefore, PWIs, counselors, administrators, and coaches must be able to understand the importance of race identification by enabling Black athletes' the opportunity to adjust as a subculture within the university populace.

This study warrants the inherent need to address the cultural and historical notions that create the current atmosphere within the context of a PWI Division I athletic setting. Using the voice and the language of the Black female athlete, there is an opportunity to expose their "actual" experience assumptive media laden experience. Accordingly, "only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 75-76). The statements by Don Imus resonate not only racist connotations, but also sexist connotations. Therefore, when considering the Black female athlete, the impact of gender identification must be addressed because for Black females race and gender are not two separate entities, but a monolithic constraint (Collins, 2000; Smith, 2000).

### *Gender*

The second component of identity to be considered is gender. The gender roles of Blacks are an important factor based on historical, cultural, and socioeconomic variables. The negotiation of what was gender appropriate for Black woman remains to be challenged by the dominantly ideology of womanhood in America. Betty Friedan (1963) discussed this notion through her conceptualization of the feminist mystique. Her feminist standpoint challenged the Victorian ideology of femininity and the hegemonic expectations of the role of the woman, which serve as a catalyst for the Woman's movement in the 1960's and 1970's stating:

Woman is seen only in terms of her sexual role, the barriers to the realization of her full potential, the prejudices, which deny her full potential, the prejudices, which deny her full participation in the world, are no longer problems. The only problems now are those that might disturb her adjustment as a housewife. So career is a problem. And finally, there is the problem that has no name, a vague undefined wish for something more than washing dishes, ironing, punishing and praising the children. (Friedan, 1963, p. 61)

This is a profound statement within the context of women pursuing post secondary educations.

Furthermore, during the Woman's movement and even today:

No culturally similar heroines were evident in mainstream media, cinema, or on television at that time for African American girls, not even the first Olympic gold medallist, as this was not consistent with race, nor gender, logic of that era....Therefore, most girls who wanted to relate to the female personality were co-opted into identifying with White female media stars such as Shirley Temple". (Smith, 2000, pp. 178-179)

Thus, still thought of as subservient, often the images of Black women were depicted as vast distortions of the truth, with exaggerated features of their true essence. The media depiction left little to desire in the hearts and minds of both Black and White Americans.

Janet Helms researcher of racial and gender identity developed the womanist identity model. This model explores four stages of gender identity, quite similar to her racial identity model (Ossana et al, 1991). The four stages are: 1) pre-encounter, 2) encounter, 3) immersion-emersion, and 4) internalization. Each stage is designed to move through a progression of identity, with the goal of reaching womanhood. Subsequently, the notion of womanhood is based

on White patriarchy and the, traditional or Victorian Ideology. Student development literature further explores gender ideology using Helms psychosocial model to address the components of gender construction (Carter & Parks, 1996). However, the models fail to acknowledge the impact of race, for where do Black females fit into this model? Corbett and Johnson (2000) state:

The herstory of the African American woman has shaped concepts of her identity as well as her ideals, attitudes, behavior, role and responsibilities. The African American female is believed to be instilled with the skills essential to her maintenance and conducive to her survival....Instead, African American women have continually challenged the system to define and maintain their own personal being. (p. 200)

The observations of Corbett and Johnson (2000) captured the essence of Black female pioneers as they situated themselves within the context of sport and White America.

Great confusion of the Black women's self-concept was experienced at the crux of the Woman's and Civil Rights movement (Giddings, 1984; Collins, 2000). Black women were forced to reconcile for themselves whether they should conform to the dominant ideology of Whites or live their own reality within the context of the Black community. However, extending the double consciousness notion to that of the African American female Stewart (1983) acknowledges Du Bois intentional characterization of the African American women as "always more adept at achieving a psychic equilibrium" (p. 95). Thus, Black women are able to sync the multiple identities such as Black, female, mother, daughter, and even athlete. Yet and still, the context of the Black community, coupled with the quest for recognition as women, was further compounded by physical activity and involvement in the realm of sports.

### *Athlete*

“For Du Bois, then, double consciousness is indeed a universal phenomenon among Blacks. The resistance to pressures to submerge the essence of Black identity varies across personality types and individual circumstances, but all face the problem of “warring ideals”” (Stewart, 1983, p. 102). So, in the athletic context, the Black athlete has warring ideals (Harris, 2001; Hawkins, 2001; Sailes, 1998), but what does this mean for the Black female athlete.

Smith (2000) states that for elite Black sportswomen, “the only choice one has is to live her own social and cultural reality of physicality” eventually becoming known as “pioneers in women’s sports” (p. 176). Black athletes must manage the internal and external challenges while in the midst of the collegiate institution; and still balance life as a student and an athlete. The aspects of student and athlete fall in two main categories: 1) cognitive, or intellectual, and 2) non-cognitive, attitude and motivation (Hyatt, 2003; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). The cognitive and non-cognitive variables can exist independently, or in combination to hinder the chance for the Black student athlete to thrive within its environment (Hyatt, 2003).

Hyatt (2003) focused on the non-cognitive variables, stating that there are three barriers to the persistence of Black student athletes completing and attaining a college degree, 1) degree commitment, 2) athletic commitment, and 3) institutional commitment. Stating that for a successful college experience and ultimate degree attainment, student athletes must have balanced all three areas of commitment. Failure to have a high level of commitment in these areas could result in difficulty in attaining a degree, social isolation, and/or a failure to integrate into the institutional culture, thus resulting in forms of stereotypes and discrimination (Hyatt,



2003). Engstrom, Sedlacek, and McEwen (1995) state “college athletes may find the educational environment challenging because there is the assumption by many non-athletes, faculty, and administrators ‘that they possess innate athletic superiority but lack any academic competencies or abilities’” (pp. 217). Therein lies the necessity, and push, to ensure that athletic and academic balance is achieved, especially for Blacks.

Griffith and Johnson (2002) discuss self-concept in reference to identity formation as “how an individual’s evaluates his or her competence and worth” and that “the amount of worth and competence an individual places on self-concept may influence their self-esteem, affect, and motivation” (p. 226). Thus, athletic identity as a component of self-concept is “the degree with which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Griffith & Johnson, 2002, p. 226).

Therefore, finding value in defining one’s identity can be found through the ability to balance the roles of athletics and academics (Brewer, Selby, Linder, & Petitpas, 1999; McKerrow & Daly, 1990; Carodine et al, 2001; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). To coincide with this notion of athletic identity, Adler and Adler (1991) present athletic role engulfment.

Athletic role engulfment conveys that the athlete essentially will become fully captivated by the athletic experience, which includes fans and competition, but also the systematic structure and administration that take away any personal responsibility and independence for life as a collegiate athlete (Adler & Adler, 1991). Thus, the student athlete has been instructed on what to do, where to be, and what to say, losing agency, autonomy and themselves within the “student athlete” identity. Hence, student athlete identification, coupled with the concept of race and gender identification could lead one to have multiple identities.

Brewer and Cornelius (2001) address the student athlete identity through the development of a psychosocial model and inventory, the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

(AIM scale). The AIM scale explores the dichotomous relationship between athlete and student, or athletic identity. Athletic identity is defined as “the degree with which an individual identifies with the athletic role...a social dimension of self-concept influencing experiences, relationships with others, and pursuit of sport activity” (Griffith & Johnson, 2002, p. 226). The AIM scale is designed to encompass social, cognitive, and affective areas of athletic identity, as well as the daily experiences of the college athlete (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001)

More specifically, the AIM scale is a 7-item scale designed to determine the degree the sport participant identifies as athlete. The scale utilizes a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The higher the score of the individual, the stronger the correlation to the athletic self; while the lower score of the individual, the weaker correlation to the athletic self. As a result, examining Black female collegiate athletes based on their degree of athletic identity has the potential to impact their overall identity formation within the context of sport and the predominantly White institution.

#### Black Female Collegiate Athletes and Identity

The question continues to take shape, as to how do Black female collegiate athletes formulate their identity. As discussed, the work of Bruening et al (2005) continues along the lines of the work of Sellers et al (1997). However, where Sellers et al (1997) fall short through the quantitative format, Bruening et al (2005) fill the gap through their qualitative exploration. Their study brings forth the historical silence expressed by Black feminist bell hooks (1981) and Patricia Hill-Collins (2000). The notion of Black women’s marginalized status in America sets the tone for *Listening to Voices*, for these authors attempt to present the lives of black female student athletes through the use of stories, or narratives, to unveil the gender and racial discrimination in the intercollegiate environment.

Bruening et al (2005) explore the experiences of Black female student athletes in predominantly White institutions through the lens of Black feminist thought. This qualitative study explored the notion of silencing, or under representation, of Black women in the institution of sport. Utilizing an “outsider within” concept, 12 out of 21 Black females (out of 336 female student athletes) were interviewed in a focus group format. The semi-structured interviews focused on understanding the beliefs of Black female student athletes by asking: 1) are Black female student athletes silenced by race and/or gender; 2) how are they silenced; 3) whom or what silenced them; and 4) what is the effect of being silenced. Following the focus group interviews, four participants sat for an individual interview. The study concluded that women were being silenced by: a) the media; b) on campus influences; and c) coaches.

The media influences resulted in the belief that there is little to no media exposure for Black female student athletes. The belief was that more exposure, and exposure in non-traditional sports, displayed support for Black female athletes. In conjunction, the on campus influence consisted of the athletic administration, coaches, and athletic support staff; and based on the interviews, the coaches played a major role in the lives of the young women. Overall, the Black female student athletes had mixed feelings about the level of support for student led initiatives, as these women felt that the administration focused more on men’s athletics; resulting in a consensus that men’s football was a priority and that men’s football was also held to a different standard than women and non-revenue producing sports.

The study concluded that Black women are silenced. Bruening et al (2005) highlighted the major limitation of their study, akin to the impetus behind this research study, in that there is a lack of research of Black female collegiate athletes. In particular, there is a lack of capturing the voices of this population. Thus, through the lens of Black feminist thought, the researchers

were able to shed light on factors that contribute to the identity development of Black female collegiate athletes. For Black women are classified as both Black and women simultaneously.

Utilizing another perspective, Foster's (2003) study of Black female collegiate athletic programs examines the use of panopticonics to assess Black female athlete experiences.

Panopticonics is defined as, "the purposeful application of surveillance, control, and discipline to the development and maintenance of effective educational structures" (Foster, 2003, p. 319).

Thus, providing an understanding of how Black female athletes situate themselves, and their identity within the highly structured university academic and athletic programs.

Foster (2003) adopted a Foucauldian perspective to examine the overarching constructs of: 1) race; 2) athletic and academic facilities; 3) racializing norms and values, athletic performance, sexuality; and 4) the internalization of race. In other words, Foster (2003) utilized Foucault to explicate how Black female identities were shaped through various interactions and the demands of the athletic culture. Accordingly, Foucault's athletic environment was "an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power (Foucault, 1980, p. 71)" (p. 305). Thus, Black female athletes construction of their identities was a symbiotic relationship. Wherein, the environment in which they interacted provided structure that shaped their daily experiences; but their racial, gender, sport participation, and cultural upbringing provided shape to the experience and thus resultant identity.

Foster's (2003) Foucauldian analysis took the approach that while Black female collegiate athletes maneuvered within their environment as Black, female, student, and athlete; each of these were reflected back upon her through race, gender, and the non-athletic and athletic communities. Corbett and Johnson's (2000) prior work would support the exploration of factors that shaped the identity development of Black female athletes.

Corbett and Johnson's (2000) historical perspective on the nature of identity for the foremothers of Black sportswomen, were expressed through the voice of Althea Gibson. As the authors' state:

Icons such as Althea Gibson have made it clear that they did not perceive themselves as Negro champions, even though society perceived them as a model for Negroes. Gibson commented that she saw herself as a tennis player and that she "never set herself up as a champion of the Negro race" (Gibson, 1958, p. 35).

In addition, Corbett and Johnson (2000) present the contemporary voice of Venus Williams. As a Black woman, Williams express she and her sister Serena's desire to just perform stating "we just want to get out there and play like the rest. We've shown that we can play just like anyone else. We want to be a champion for people of all color of skin (Leand, 1998, p. 10)

The dichotomous views of Williams and Gibson present the complexity of self-definition and identity that surround Black female athletes. Taking into consideration the factors that impact the development of identity within the college environment, race, gender, and athletic status, will aid in understanding the positionality, and elements, that allow Black female athletes to define who they are.

### *Summary*

Identity formation is most crucial within the college years (Torres et al, 2003; Killeya-Jones, 2005). Identity formation, according to Erickson, is "the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly (1964, p.42)" (Torres et al, 2003, p. 9). The continuity and sameness Erickson refers to is ideal for all young adults as they progress through college. However, according to the problem in this study, the continuity and sameness can be confounded when race, gender, and athletic participation intersect in the form of

the Black female athlete. Therefore, assessing Black female collegiate athletes, their multilayered reality, and their intersectionalities of race and gender warrant a theoretical framework representative of that context as they try to “*decide which way to go*” in determining their own identity.

### Theoretical Framework

Howard-Hamilton (2003) explains that in the realm of higher education Black women are marginalized; furthermore she states that “the marginality is viewed as the ‘outsider within’ status, in which black women have been invited into places where the dominant group has assembled, but they remain outsiders because they are still invisible and have no voice when dialogue commences” (2003, p. 21). Race and gender remain at the fore of the Black female experience; and those categorical identities complicate the experiences and interactions within the dominant culture. In Badu’s (2000) *Didn’t cha know* she explains “*so many things I still don’t know/ So many times I’ve changed my mind/ But I ain’t scared to take the weight*” which convey the constant negotiation of identities, as well as the search for knowledge and consciousness within the institutional dynamic. Thus, in an effort to understand fully the identities of Black women Howard-Hamilton (2003) recommend critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist thought to carefully examine the roles and experiences within the dominant institutional context.

### *Critical Race Theory*

William Tate (1997), an advocate for critical race theory (CRT), states that the origins of this theory lie in criminal legal studies (CLS) with Professor Lani Guinier in the post-civil rights era. Guinier, a Black female activist with social justice goals, derived CLS out of her passion for civil rights and racial injustice. Guinier contended that race was a critical factor in the political

system, and racial injustice or disparities, must be addressed within the American government (Tate, 1997). Therefore, CLS had two main objectives: to illuminate the “internal contradictions”, through exposing the inconsistencies in legal issues and to illuminate the “external contradictions”, through exposing the contradictions within political views of the legal system. However, critical race theorists felt that CLS fell short in addressing race and the law in educational institutions (Tate, 1997). Thus, shifting education based on race to the center of the discussion, and in a light in which it could be seen clearly.

The use of the scholarship of CRT is just that “critical”; and the argument, method of analysis, and findings have been able to impart knowledge aiding in the “transformation of educational policy”. In addition, CRT has been able to address elements of equity with the construct of educational institutions. In an effort to fully understand its complexity and how it can and will be use in this study, an examination of three pioneers of CRT must be explored, namely Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberle` Crenshaw.

Tate (1997) referenced Derrick Bell, a former law professor at Harvard and one of the originators of CRT as having two primary purposes for developing CRT. First, Bell wanted to “contribute to [the] intellectual discussions concerning race in American society” (p. 211). Bell accomplished this task several times through his writings, use of allegory, and presenting stories infused with legal and racial lessons (e.g., see Bell, 1992). Second, Bell wanted to “promote political activism to achieve racial justice” (Tate, 1997, p. 211). Through his purpose, he would locate three significant arguments in his analysis of race in the law. They are constitution contradiction, the interest convergence principle, and the price of racial remedies, for each would aid in establishing doctrine in furthering litigation in civil rights and antidiscrimination law.

Delgado (1995) represents Bell's interpretation of CRT within a historical context.

Hence, Delgado established eight themes through his scholarship:

1) an insistence on “naming our own”; 2) the belief that knowledge and ideas are powerful; 3) a readiness to question basic premises of moderate/incremental civil rights law; 4) the borrowing of insights from social science on race and racism; 5) critical examination of the myths and stories powerful groups use to justify racial subordination; 6) a more contextualized treatment of doctrine; 7) criticism of liberal legalisms; and 8) an interest in structural determinism – the ways in which legal tools and thought-structures can impeded law reform... Delgado purpose was to extend and promote Bell's use of storytelling, but place the authorship in the mouths of people of color, and thus present the story, or counterstory to “name their reality”. (Tate, 1997, p. 219)

The use of storytelling and voice allowed Delgado to present four reasons that justified his methods of CRT by presenting: “1) reality is socially constructed, 2) stories are a powerful means for destroying and changing mindsets, 3) the stories have a community-building function, and 4) stories provide members of out-groups mental self-preservation” (Tate, 1997, p. 219). His focus on the voice of the oppressed was the catalyst, and the need co-opt CLS principles for the betterment of Blacks and minorities.

Delgado's (1995) critique of CLS for people of color was that it was: 1) an “incremental reform” or patchwork to pacify the oppressed, for CLS told Blacks how to interpret their experience(s); 2) an idealist vantage rather than carrying a realist undertone, which recognizes that the greater evil of racism was not a construct that could be curtailed with an all deliberate speed; and 3) presented an tone of false consciousness, or false hope. Instead, Delgado took that



stance that Blacks and minorities needed a voice; a voice from which to present their experience in their words, and not to take those words out of context or supplant them in academic rhetoric.

According to Tate (1997), Crenshaw concurred with her predecessors' use of voice and story, and like them, she takes the scholarship of CRT a step further by addressing the Black woman through antidiscrimination law. Her goal was to correct the wrongs of and bring to light the injustice and violence against Black women; for antidiscrimination laws in its conservative definition failed to: 1) address the complexities of the oppressed; 2) address the role of racism in America; and 3) limit the liberal framework and its ability to challenge and transform dominant views (Tate, 1997). Studies have been produced utilizing the tenets of CRT to uncover the injustices and experiences in educational institutions, institutions of higher education, and in intercollegiate athletics (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Parker and Lynn (2002) explore CRT in accordance to qualitative research and how it can “define, expose, and address educational problems” (p. 7). The goal of their text is twofold. The first was to present the liberating principles of CRT to support methodological efforts and an understanding of underrepresented racial minorities. The second was to present the need for CRT within educational research and through qualitative studies.

Parker and Lynn (2002) understand the outward effects and prejudices based on race, however, their interest on the personal effects, and the sociological and psychological impact of race and racism in the institutions of higher education presented a greater concern. The authors expressed the root of CRT and its legal ties failed to address “racial injustices, particularly institutional racism” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 9). Thus, uncovering the harbored racism of the underrepresented and disenfranchised through narratives and storytelling, can allow the majority,

as Delgado states, to “acquire the ability to see the world through other’s eyes” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 10).

Solorzano et al (2000) use CRT framework for education as it “simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these constructs impact on communities of color” (p. 63). Ultimately, CRT discerns racist injuries and links their origins, especially within the predominantly White institutional and educational environment (Solorzano et al, 2000).

Solorzano et al (2000) explained the five main tenets of CRT as: 1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective. Within the five tenets, there are three tenets that best addressed Black female experiences (Howard-Hamilton, 2003), and how these experiences shape their identities.

The first tenet revealed the microaggressions and collegiate racial climate. Howard-Hamilton (2003) describes microaggressions as “conscious, unconscious, verbal, nonverbal, and visual forms of insults directed toward people of color”, which are “pervasive” and can be “difficult to investigate” (p. 23). The second and fourth tenet, presented the counterstories, or experiences that are different from the dominant discourse of Black female experiences (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The culmination of the expression of these three tenets must ensure a safe space, or counterspace, for such verbal expressions (Solorzano et al, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For the Black female athlete, these spaces and individuals could lie within the sport team, coaching staff, practice and competition facilities, and/or living spaces.

Critical race theorists DeCuir and Dixson (2004) concur with the use of counterspaces as a way to provide the Black athlete a place, tools, and support to cope with the duality of their student and athlete identity. Most student-athletes have not been able to cope with the duality of the student athlete and their Black racial identity within the construct of the predominantly White institution. This study will be use to uncover the realities of these Black females to determine if their experiences are akin to those discussed by DeCuir and Dixson (2004). As Black male athlete experiences could present a different dynamic than that of a Black female athlete (Hawkins, 2001; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Killeya-Jones, 2005; Donnor, 2005; Singer, 2005).

Donnor (2005) and Singer (2005) continue to add to the literature and the use of CRT when examining the Black athlete, particularly the Black male college football player. Each presents a diverse vantage in their assessment of identity (Donnor, 2005) and perceptions (Singer, 2005) of the student athlete educational attainment and athletic achievements. Donnor (2005) study of African American football players and their educational experiences considers the elements of CRT presented by Derrick Bell. However, Donnor (2005) takes it a step further, focusing specifically on the educational aspects to include not only their experiences, but also their academic outcomes. Donnor (2005) employs the interest convergence principle, an aspect of Bell's CRT, examine the how the complexities of race impact on the educational experience. More specifically, interest convergence is described as "an analytical construct of CRT that explains how laws and policies established to promote equality and maintain the status quo" (Donnor, 2005, p. 47).

Donnor's (2005) examination of the theoretical lens, such as conflict theory and social psychology theory, present the positive aspects and the negative aspects when exploring the

educational attainment of African American student athlete. Conflict theory's focus on the revenue generation thwarts extreme pressure on the student athletes' ability to hold the educational mission in high regard. Whereas, social psychological theory's focus on the athletes, and character building; while subverting one's race and gender identity. Ultimately, both theories fail to captivate the conflicted student-athletic identity.

Donnor's (2005) implies that his focus on race, racism, and racial power within the context of the PWI, remains a limiting factor for African Americans to receive educational equality. Thus, through interest convergence he highlights the legal cases of *Taylor vs Wake Forest University* and *Ross vs Creighton University*, to explicate African American collegiate football players' experiences of athletic exploitation; and subsequent academic under achievements. Exploring this dimension, Donnor (2005) found greater systematic understanding of structural legalities that impacted African American male athletes within the PWI. Thus, not creating theory, but substantiating "the stories being told" (p. 62); especially, those incorporating CRT and the use of narrative voice. Ultimately, Donnor (2005) asserts that:

Critical race theory offers a means to better recognize and more fully understand the forces that have constructed a system in which African-American athletes are cheered on the field by wealthy alumni and powerful fans while at the same time denied opportunities to earn a degree that could lead to wealth and power of their own. (p. 63)

Singer's (2005), akin to Donnor (2005), implementation of CRT examined four African American male football players. This qualitative study sought to "engage in critical dialogue" with African American male football players to understand their perceptions of: 1) racism, 2) the impact of racism on personal development, and 3) racism's impact on their educational goals.

Therefore, his purpose was to understand “perceptions of racism in efforts to begin the process of changing social conditions under which these individuals experience life as student-athletes” (Singer, 2005, p. 371).

Singer (2005) found that the four African American males perceived: 1) they were denied access and opportunity for leadership positions within the college and professional sports (i.e. quarterback); 2) were denied access and opportunity for decision-making opportunities with college and professional sports (i.e. athletic director and team owners; and 3) that African American athletes received different treatment than White male football players in regards to academic achievements, goals, and environments and behavioral/character reprimands. As such, Singer (2005) alludes to the value of utilizing participants to assist with exposing the racial disparities, as well as, providing solutions to institutional racism “to move beyond the generation of practical and technical knowledge, and seek to create the emancipator knowledge (i.e. knowledge that empowers and challenges people to engage in the change process) (p. 383).

As DeCuir and Dixson (2004), Donnor (2005), and Singer (2005) presented, critical theory “keeps the spotlight on power relationships within society to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). When utilizing critical race theory in the context of education, the use of psychosocial models are helpful to understand the components of identity development and overall student development within institutions of higher education. Torres et al (2003) expressed that “a central notion of student development [theory] has been the idea that the college years are critical for the development of identity,” (p. 3).

Still there has been a gap in the research of student development theory and the impact of race on identity formation; which suggest that efforts are necessary to resolve, or contextualize, the external and internal factors that contribute to the identity of the Black female athlete to

formulate self as a college student athlete. Implicating educators and athletes working collectively to “understand what conflicts students must resolve to develop their sense of self and in turn how we can assist them in resolving those conflicts” (Torres et al, 2003, p. 3). The combination of CRT, studies utilizing CRT, and the psychosocial models relevant to identity, it would appear that understanding Black female athletes is simplistic. However, the role of gender intersectionality, as Crenshaw explains, warrants the lens of Black feminist thought (Tate, 1997). Tate (1997) captured the essential purpose for Crenshaw’s work stating that:

An intersectionality framework that explored race and gender while noting that the concept can and should be expanded by including issues of class and age. She described intersectionality as a provisional concept that links contemporary politics with postmodern theory. The specific purpose of intersectionality is to frame the following inquiry: “How does the fact that women of color are simultaneously situated within at least two groups that are subjected to a broad societal subordination bear upon problems traditionally viewed as mono-causal – that is, gender discrimination or race discrimination”. (p. 231)

Thus, as evidenced by Crenshaw (1991), and supported by Howard-Hamilton (2003), the use of CRT and Black feminist thought frameworks to capture the intersectionality of the Black female experiences proves necessary in examining the multidimensionality of Black female athletes within a predominantly White institutional construct (Tate, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

### *Black Feminist Thought*

Black feminist thought is a feminist theoretical framework with roots in critical social theory. Akin to CRT, Black feminist thought is committed to social justice and the emancipation and empowerment of Black women (Collins, 2000). Conceptualized by Patricia Hill-Collins, the

themes of Black feminist thought were borne out of a need to address the oppression of Black women in three distinct arenas:

1) The exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism....2) the political dimension of oppression [that has] denied Black women the rights and privileges....Educational institutions have also fostered this pattern of disenfranchisement....3) [the] controlling images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era. (Collins, 2000, pp. 4-5)

Thus, Collins (1986, 2000) sought to address the stereotypical images of Black women, which pervaded "popular culture and public policy", and acknowledged the efforts of the dominant White society to suppress the presence and purpose of Black women through complete omission.

Collins (1986) defines Black feminist thought as: 1) the meaning of self-definition and self-valuation; 2) the interlocking nature of oppression; and 3) the importance of the Afro-American women's culture. In the institutions of higher education, Howard-Hamilton (2003) present Black feminist thought as the: 1) documented stories of Black women's lives; 2) intersections of the experiences and stories of Black women; and 3) creating an understanding of the multiple experiences of Black women based on "the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 21), and thus redefine their identity.

Black feminist thought explicates the "interlocking components of most African American women identities" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003); and that of the Black female athlete based on race, gender, and sport participation. Within the context of a predominantly White institution, critical race theory and black feminist thought could unveil the experiences that influence identity formation for Black female collegiate athletes.

The first theme of self-definition and self-valuation challenge the historic connotations through self-definition, by redefining the historic and stereotypical images of Black women. Self-evaluation is then incorporated to aid in the replacement of stereotypical images with “authentic” images in present day. This theme compliments the tenets of CRT, through two directives:

1) Defining and valuing one’s consciousness of one’s own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified ‘other’ is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination. The status of being the “other” implies being “other than” or different from the assumed norm of White male behavior; and 2) “allowing Afro-American women to reject internalized, psychology oppression”. (Collins, 1986, S18)

Collins (1986) states one must have a level of consciousness and understanding of who they are; if not, their survival could prove difficult as both Black and female.

The second theme is the “interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression” (Collins, 1986, p. S19). Collins (1986, 2000) interpretation is, again, relegated on the heir of social justice and the intersectionality notion explicated by Crenshaw’s (1991) CRT vantage. Within this theme, Collins (1986) considers three key points: a) dualistic thinking, b) the impact of dualistic thinking is not complimentary, and carries with it a negative, or subordinate connotation; and c) the dichotomous relationships are ever changing. Hence, the “oppression experienced by most Black women is shaped by their subordinate status in an array of either/or dualities. Afro-African women have been assigned the inferior half of several dualities, and this placement has been central to their continued domination” (Collins, 1986, S20).



In Bart Landry's (2007) *Race, gender, and class: Theory and method of analysis*, he brings to light Black feminist ideology in his exploration of intersectionality. Landry (2007) affirms the notion of Crenshaw (1991) and Collins' (1986, 2000), expressing that race, gender, and class interlock and intersect. Thus, the oppressive constructs of Black women need to be reconceptualized, have a deeper examination, or examined through intersectional analysis. Intersectional analysis proposed examination allows the experiential complexities of the Black woman to be understood within and throughout the institutional constructs of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism (Landry, 2007; Collins, 2007, Crenshaw, 1991). Ultimately, redefinition becomes essential to the Black woman identity.

The third theme concerns the importance and redefinition of Black women's culture (Collins, 1986). Collins (2000) use of voice, quotations, and examples of Black women whom challenge the various power structures in America is significant; as "oppressed peoples may maintain hidden consciousness and may not reveal their true selves for reasons of self-protection" (Collins, 1986, p. S23). Therefore, similar to Foster's (2003) study, Collins (1986) contends that Black women might conform to societal norms especially within institutional constructs. The notion of redefinition utilizing shared experiences allows Black females to recognize an alternate, positive image, of Black women in America, and not succumb to the hegemonic ideologies.

As stated, one of the goals of Collins (1986, 2000) use of Black feminist thought is to link Black women across class, gender orientation, religion, and age. Thus, Black female participation in the sport context of PWI could shed light on the degree of consciousness. Thus, "Black female ideological frame of reference that Black women acquire through sisterhood,

motherhood, and creative expression may serve the added purpose of shaping a Black female consciousness about the working of oppression” (Collins, 1986, p. S23).

Examples of such works of consciousness are more commonly viewed through text on the historical experiences (hooks, 1981; Giddings, 1984) and self-help pieces (hooks, 1995; see hooks, 2000, 2005) by Black feminists writers. hooks (1981, 1995) presents a more radical approach to Black feminist thought. She is careful to address the historical experiences, but often presents the harsh realities experienced by Black women such as rape, beatings, and death. Her response to such injustice is activism and speaking out on the realities that occur in present day America. The work of Giddings (1984) presents a more liberal approach to Black feminist thought.

Giddings (1984) is also, careful to address the historical experiences, and highlight the sociocultural changes that occurred in the presence of the harsh realities hooks (1981, 1995) talks about. Giddings (1984) often refers to the foremothers such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ella Baker and the political positions they encompassed to fight against the racial and gender oppression of their day. Both hooks (1981, 1995) and Giddings (1984) present the most common dichotomies of Black feminist thought. Each continues to influence the work of those in sport and academe; specifically, the work of Bruening et al (2005).

### *Summary*

As presented in the review of literature Bruening et al (2005) explored the experiences of Black female student athletes in predominantly White institutions through the lens of Black feminist thought. Again, the qualitative study looked at the notion of silencing of Black women in the institution of sport. Bruening et al (2005) interviewed 12 out of 21 Black females in a focus group format. The use of Black feminist thought was beneficial in that it allowed, as Badu

(2000) states, Black female collegiate athletes to articulate their decisions on “*which way to go*”, as well as, address their beliefs as Black female student athletes on the nature of silencing and impact of silencing at a PWI. The study concluded that women were being silenced by: a) the media; b) on campus influences; and c) coaches. The work of Bruening et al (2005) and the aforementioned works on Black feminist thought provide a solid foundation to build upon in the realm of collegiate athletics.

Black feminist thought and CRT are applicable to inform the qualitative research on Black female collegiate athletes. In addition, the utilization of quantitative inventories will compliment the analysis of the experiences of Black female athletes. It will be necessary to use the appropriate methodology and design to elicit the voice of the marginalized in an effort to build a bridge of community, redefinition among Black female collegiate athletes, and a greater understanding of their intercollegiate experience on their identity.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

*If I multiply 2 times 2 is it really, really 4 me  
And if I add 5 to get 9 minus 8 that just leaves me  
So many times I define my pride  
Through somebody else's eyes  
Then I looked inside and found my own stride,  
I found the lasting love for me  
If I'm searching for my spirituality  
Passionately I must begin with me  
– Jill Scott, One is the Majic Number (2000)*

The purpose of the study is to determine how African American female college athletes construct their identity within the context of sport. A mixed method approach was utilized to capture the essence of this research, which entailed both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis.

The theoretical lens of CRT and Black feminist thought support the use of voice to elevate consciousness, knowing, or phenomenology. Phenomenology requires an open mind and the ability to receive the interview data at face value. Accordingly, Van Manen (1990) explicates phenomenology as the role of the researcher to “gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9). Jill Scott, R&B artist and Hip-Hop songstress, lyrical prose alludes to the search for self, and the desire of exploration. Additionally, Scott’s lyrics are profound, as she realizes that in her search for self and the constant characterization by others that she is the alpha and omega; and thus, the key to defining her own identity. Collins (2000) concurs, “blues has occupied a special place in Black women’s music as a site of the expression of Black women’s self-definitions. The blues singer strives to create an atmosphere in which analysis can take place, and yet this atmosphere is intensely personal and individualistic blues while simultaneously expressing the collective blues of African American women” (p.

106). Thus, the quest for self is similar to the primary approaches to phenomenology of oral narratives and life histories, as each is used to illuminate and understand lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Etter-Lewis, 1991; Riessman, 1993).

For the purpose of this study, oral narratives served as the principle format by which to conduct qualitative interviews. The format selection was most appropriate as, the literature suggest, there is a dearth of research on African American female collegiate athletes and identity formation. African American female collegiate athletes at predominantly White institutions (PWI) and Black females in America<sup>5</sup> have been historically oppressed and marginalized. Thus, when incorporating theoretical frameworks of “feminist or critical theory, the purpose may be emancipatory” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 99). Ultimately creating a gateway, and like the lyrics of Scott, African American female collegiate athletes will “find their own stride” and a truthful identity.

In this chapter, the methods are discussed in the following order: a) design of the study, b) selection of participants, c) data collection, d) data analysis, e) validity and reliability and research limitations. The research questions that guided this research were:

- 1) How do African American female athletes formulate their identity in college?
- 2) What are the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity?
- 3) What impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?

### Design of the Study

The mixed method study seeks to uncover the experiences that foster the development of African American female collegiate athletes attending a PWI Division I institution in the southeast United States. The fall 2007 enrollment of this PWI indicated 33, 831 students, with

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<sup>5</sup> The terms Black and African American are often used interchangeably. For this study, Black is used to represent a socially constructed category, which is attributed to persons of African decent. African American, is used to represent an ethnic group of persons with shared cultural experiences and social history. (Davis, 1991; Smith, 2000).

5% (n=996) of the student population consisting of Black female students. As such, the study will initially survey African American female athletes that volunteer to participate, and 12 participants will be purposefully selected from this group for qualitative interviews. The data obtained provides information on: a) demographics, b) sport participation, c) athletic perceptions, through the use of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), and d) perceptions on support and discrimination based on race, gender and athletic status.

The second part of the study consists of a qualitative design that will explore the significance of specific experiences, which fosters the development of identity as African American female collegiate athletes. Twelve participants will be selected for either: a) one – one-hour interview or b) two – thirty-minute interviews after review and analysis of the questionnaires. The participant interview option will be determined by the individual participant's personal schedule and time commitments. The selection process of participants will be by way of purposeful selection. The purposeful selection will be determined by the results and categorization of the AIMS scores. Ezzy (2002) states, “a purposeful sample is one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants...that relates to the research questions” (p. 74). Thus, four participants from each category of low, medium, and high (based on their cohort) will be purposefully selected from the overall participant pool of 38 African American female collegiate athletes. Qualitative analysis techniques, as suggested by Johnson-Bailey (2004) and Etter-Lewis (1991), served as guides for this aspect of the study.

#### Selection of Participants

The target population to select participants for this study was forty-nine Black female collegiate athletes representing the sports of basketball, equestrian, gymnastics, softball, and track and field. Those participants self-identifying as Black female collegiate athletes will

complete the participant questionnaire. Only those that self identified their ethnicity as African American will be considered for the study due to the selected theoretical frameworks of CRT and Black feminist thought.

## Instrumentation

### *Part I – Quantitative questionnaire*

The research instrument is a six page, originally designed questionnaire developed by the researcher with consideration of CRT and Black feminist thought. The first page contained demographic questions (e.g., current sport at university, athletic classification, academic classification, academic major, enrolled credit hours) and sport participation (e.g. age first competed in sport, sports participated before college, experienced setbacks, scholarship status). The second page contained seven statements that related to three specific athletic identity factors from the domains of social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity. Participants will be asked to judge how much they disagreed or agreed with each statement by circling one of the answers on a seven point Likert Scale (i.e., strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). (See Appendix B for copy of the questionnaire)

The second and third page also contained eleven statements related to four specific perception and attitude experiences from athletic opportunity, athletic support, racial discrimination, and gender discrimination. Participants will be asked to judge how much they disagreed or agreed with each statement by circling one of the answers on a seven point Likert Scale (i.e., strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). The third page also contained two open ended statements that related to the participant's influences or role models. The participants will be asked to explain the person(s) and or thing(s) and the time in which they were influenced. The sixth page contained more

demographic questions that were more personal in nature (e.g., age, ethnicity, city-state of high school graduation, parents socioeconomic status, etc.).

The AIM scale will be the principle section utilized by the quantitative questionnaire in the purposeful selection of participants for the qualitative semi-structured interviews. The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) has been administered by Brown, Glaster-Fender, and Shelton (1998) study of the *Psychosocial identity and career control in college student athletes* and Lantz and Schroeder (1999) study of the *Endorsement of masculine and feminine gender roles: Differences between participation in and identification with the athletic role*. The AIMS has been used most to assess the strength of athletes identification with the athletic role specific to the areas of: social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity. (See Figure 1)

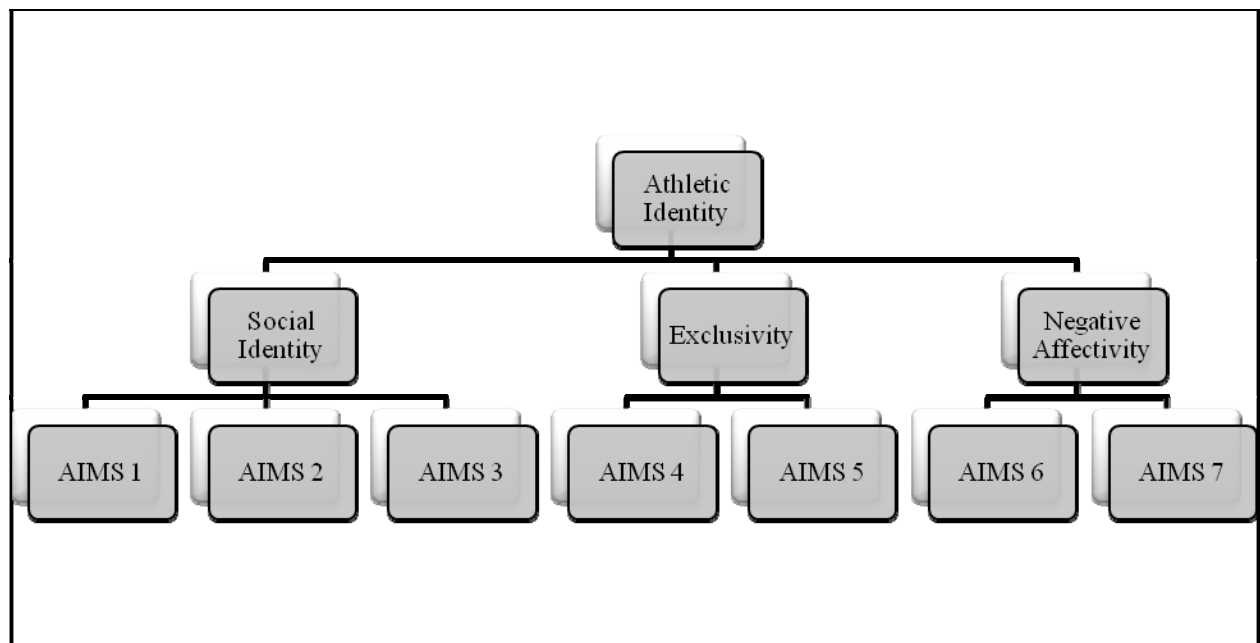


Figure 1. Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

Note. Athletic Identity include: 1) social identity, 2) exclusivity, and 3) negative affectivity.

### *Part II – Qualitative Interview*

The research instrument was an originally designed set of semi-structured questions developed by the researcher with the consideration of CRT and Black feminist thought. The



interview sessions will be as follows: a) one-one hour interview or b) two-thirty minute interviews. Participants will be guided to share their experiences through narrative voice. (See Appendix C for copy of the semi-structured questionnaire)

### Data Collection

To understand the experiences that foster identity formation for African American female collegiate athletes during the Fall and Spring semester of the 2007-2008 academic year from mid-September to mid January, multiple methods, or mixed methods, were employed for this study, which included quantitative and qualitative methods (Schutz, Chambless, & DeCuir, 2004). Fielding and Fielding (1986) highlighted multiple methods as the ability to “...choose at least one method which is specifically suited to exploring the structural aspects of the problem and at least one which can capture the essential elements of its meaning to those involved’ (p. 34)” (Schutz et al, 2004, p. 276).

Triangulation is the gathering of data from two or more sources using two or more methods (Lapan, 2004), or as Knafl and Breitmayer (1989), “a metaphor to characterize the use of multiple methods to measure a single construct” (p. 210). This study utilizes an inventory and the student athlete as data sources. More specifically, this study uses a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as methods for the collection of data. Furthermore, triangulation allows for the overlapping of data to present a more comprehensive presentation and analysis of social phenomena (Lapan, 2004). Schutz et al (2004) state, “...the nature of reality is complex and layered, which makes it important to attempt to deal with that characteristic by using one form of data collection to help describe the transactions themselves” (p. 276). Thus, the use of multimethods would prove beneficial and comprehensive with the formation of construct validity for this study.

### *Questionnaire*

Email solicitation and fliers were sent to all Black female athletes and to athletes in which racial identity was unknown. The researcher obtained information through the university athletic website and athletic media guides. The researcher obtained email addresses through the university electronic webpage. Six (6) self-identified Black female athletes responded, and all other participants responded through fliers and through the classroom and athletic environment interaction

The following procedures will be used to collect the data:

1. Distributed the participants an athletic experience questionnaire, which included the AIMS (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001); and instructed participants to answer honestly. Instructed participants to answer all questions based on their comfort level and personal perspective; and not that of their athletic coach, counselors, or the researcher.
2. Once all the quantitative questionnaires are collected, the researcher used SPSS (15.0) statistical analysis program to run frequencies to identify relationships and calculate AIMS (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001) scores. Participants will be deselected if they did not identify their ethnicity as African American. This left 38 of the 47 solicited participants eligible for this study.
3. Upon calculation of AIMS scores, 12 participants will be purposefully selected to participate in a 1-1 hour interview or 2-30 minute interviews. Purposeful selection of 12 participants will be based solely on the AIMS results; specifically, the low, middle, high categorization of the AIMS based on the researched cohort.

4. The 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews focused on the findings of the quantitative questionnaire, to include aspects of: a) sport participation and experience, b) personal support and influences, c) collegiate athletic experiences, d) racial experiences, e) gender experiences, and f) suggestions for future African American female athletes and athletic administrators.

#### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Riessman (1993) offers the use of interviews, supplemented with loose research questions, such that the participants will have room to determine which experiences they want to share, as opposed to strict specific questions, which will not allow their identity or self-representation to emerge.

The 12 semi-structured narrative interviews will focus on the findings of the quantitative questionnaire with the consideration of CRT and Black feminist thought. The interview questions include aspects of: a) sport participation and experience, b) personal support and influences, c) collegiate athletic experiences, d) racial experiences, e) gender experiences, and f) suggestions for future African American female athletes and athletic administrators. (Again, see Appendix C for questionnaire template)

#### *Data Analysis*

This study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The benefit of mixed methods, or multimethods, is that it will provide a corroborating and a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena (Schutz, Chambless, & DeCuir, 2004, p. 277). The combination of quantitative questionnaire, and the principal method of the narrative interview was used to acknowledge and expose the “one fundamental feature of this struggle for

a self-defined standpoint involves tapping sources of everyday, unarticulated consciousness that have traditionally been denigrated in white, male-controlled institutions (Collins, 1990, p. 26).

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

The quantitative data for this research will be acquired via the Black Female Intercollegiate Athlete Experiences questionnaire. The data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Means, frequencies, and the AIMS inventory totals and categorization will be drawn from 38 participants, along with demographic data. The purpose is to provide an image of the African American female collegiate athletes at this university, which encompassed their perceptions, attitudes, degree of athletic identity, sport, and demographic information.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The analysis process of the narrative does have a methodological component. Still, there are steps that must be taken to ensure the ability to analyze. For example, the researcher will conduct a preliminary analysis of the questions. This process of examination allows the biases and presuppositions of the researcher to be exposed; a vital component to ensure the voice of the disenfranchised and marginalized is represented (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Again, research biases must be considered. For this study the researcher categorizes herself as an insider-outsider, as she is an African American female that competed in track and field at a predominantly White Division I institution. The insider-outsider perspective of the researcher has the potential to represent the concerns of the African American female athlete through the contextualization of events, actions, and experiences. Still, the researcher considered her age, class, and educational status as potential barriers in the researcher-narrator interaction.

## *Narrative Analysis*

The literature review presented the theoretical perspectives of Black feminist thought as representing the voice of the “other” and CRT as representing the voice of the disenfranchised. Coupled together, narrative analysis is the most appropriate for explicating the experiences of African American female collegiate athletes. Johnson-Bailey (2004) supports the use of narrative for women of color, and African American women because:

The implicit collaborative and interactive nature of the design is recognized for attending to the power disparities involved in the research and this format gives preeminence to displaying data in its original state, which acknowledged as a trustworthy way of giving ‘voice’ to the participants. (p. 124)

Narrative analysis promotes the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, and it has the ability to illuminate the nuances of identity formation (e.g., see Riessman, 1993; Etter-Lewis, 1991; Minister, 1991; Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Narrative analysis provides the opportunity for the narrator to: a) connect events, actions, and experiences and move the narrator through time; and b) construct a story by structuring and framing relationships. While each experience may not take place in the order the stories are expressed, Kramp (2004) notes that each story has the same features, such that each story: 1) had a plot with 1 or more characters; 2) presented itself as a narrative, in which the perspective of the narrator is presented; 3) was located in a time and place; and 4) had an order with a “beginning, middle, and end.” Each of the components of the narrative is necessary to present, understand, and derive meaning from the human experience.

Johnson-Bailey (2004) suggests narrative analysis should be intentional, especially with the stories of the “other”. She endorses the use of narratives and states “no other techniques or

formula has been more appropriate than narratives as a way of letting the ‘Other’ speak” (p. 128). Etter-Lewis (1991) describes the experiences of Black women in America, or the “other”, as a complex task; complex in that, when Black women are explored, what is unveiled is “race, gender, and social class with language, history, and culture” (p. 43). For, Black women add value to our understanding of race and gender, because under the auspices of the oral narrative tradition the male model is norm. The male model assumes that all other perspectives and interaction are a dysfunction to the oral tradition model. Etter-Lewis (1991) also discusses the role of voice, the role of language, the focus on community, and the need for self-determination in the shaping of identity for Black women.

Compared to the White male model, Black females socialize differently. Black females socialize as a collective group, rather than the single entity, a voice that White males often represent. Thus, the lives of Black women must be looked at through a different lens, a lens that values their culture, their upbringing, and the way in which society impacts their individual being. Once this information is gathered, Black female voices will be viewed and heard as a collective. Thus, as researchers explore the lives of Black women, and other racial minorities, they must be in tune with more than the immediate self and include the culture, the community, and the experiences that shape their lives.

#### Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of the research question and/or research instrument focus on the ability to measure the intended result, and for that measure to be consistently repeated (Reaves, 1992). Thus, as an original questionnaire, the reliability, or consistency of the instrument was based on interrater reliability, such that the examination of the Black Female Intercollegiate Athlete Experiences inventory items were compared in and between the participants. Interrater

reliability is when “judgments by two or more different observers are compared” Reaves (1992, 80). The inventory items included: a) demographics, b) sport participation, c) athletic perceptions, according to AIMS, d) perceptions and attitudes, and e) influence and role models.

Validity, as stated, measures the item or construct which it intended to measure (Reaves, 1992). The study implemented a multimethods approach, or mixed method approach, to determine the factors which fostered identity for the African American female collegiate athletes based on their experiences in the context of sport. Thus, validity is based on the participant’s experiences, making validity difficult to determine. However, the experiences and perceptions of the participants will be corroborated through analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Additionally, triangulation and member checks were used to increase the validity of the study

#### *AIMS Reliability and Validity*

The AIM scale was the principle section utilized by the quantitative questionnaire in the purposeful selection of participants for the qualitative semi-structured interviews. The Athletic Identity Measureent Scale, AIMS, has been used most to assess the strength of athletes identification with the athletic role. The seven-item scale has a test-retest reliability of  $r=.89$  over a two week period, an internal consistency of  $\alpha=.81$  to  $.93$ , and a validity that increased based on: a) the level of sport involvement, b) the perceived importance of sport competence, and c) additional constructs related to athletic identity. According to Brewer and Cornelius (2001), the mean score of the athletes were 38.21 and the standard deviation were 6.54. Items 1, 2, 3 represent social identity, items 4 and 5 represent exclusivity, and items 6 and 7 represent negative affectivity.

### *Triangulation*

Triangulation is the gathering of data from two or more sources using two or more methods (Lapan, 2004). Participant questionnaires will be used as reference for conducting the semi-structured interviews, and corroboration when analyzing narrative interviews. Schutz, Chambless, & DeCuir (2004) explicate, “a qualitative study may implement a quantitative dimension to guide sampling or help determine what to pursue in depth or to help generalize results in different samples and test emerging theories” (p. 278). Additionally, the benefit of triangulation for this study is to gain insight and relationships within group categories and between participants.

### *Member Checks*

Member checks will be utilized with narrative interviews in an effort to ensure that the participants’ words and experiences were accurately represented through the transcription. Participants will be able to view a completed transcript of their interview such that they could make additional comments removed or to clarify personal statements and interpretations (Hays, 2004). Hays (2004) states that the purpose of member checks is two-fold: a) to add to the overall comprehensiveness; and b) increase validity.

### *Researcher’s Subjectivity Statement*

In order to clarify my position as a researcher, it is necessary to delineate clearly my background and some of the perspectives I bring to the research process. First, beginning the fall of 1995, I entered the University of Houston as a redshirted<sup>6</sup> varsity athlete in track and field. The following year, I set foot on the track and participated through the Spring of 2000. While in college, I pursued a double degree in psychology and Kinesiology – Exercise Science. My

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<sup>6</sup> The NCAA defines redshirt as a not competing with outside competition for one academic year. Athletes are eligible to practice with the athletic team without jeopardizing the allotted four years for competition. ([http://www.ncaa.org/eligibility/faqs/faqs\\_eligibility\\_seasons.html](http://www.ncaa.org/eligibility/faqs/faqs_eligibility_seasons.html))



experience as an African American female collegiate athlete was met with racialized and gendered experiences, some more positive than others. Upon the completion of my eligibility, I experience more racialized and gendered experiences outside the context of sport participation, and within the sporting industry.

Second, as the Assistant Director for Strength and Conditioning in the Department of Recreational Sports; and my engagement with the sociological experiences of the African American athlete, I became more in tune with the connectivity of the collective Black experience and that of the Black athlete. The former, and the later experiences, provoked an interest in and a quest to unveil the experiences of the African American female collegiate athlete. For I feel my resilience to cope with racial and gender interactions within the context of the collegiate sport, provided me with the ability to negotiate my identity and find a greater sense of self.

All researchers bring certain biases and assumptions to a study; therefore, it is vital to provide a subjectivity statement (Preissle & Grant, 2004). First, it is my belief that institutionalized racism and sexism does exist within the intercollegiate athletic setting and it does impact the African American female athlete in a PWI. Secondly, I believe the experiences of the African American female athlete must be explored, as there is a dearth of research for these women. Thus, the best way to capture these experiences is through the voices of the African American female collegiate athletes. Finally, my personal experiences as an African American female athlete provide me significant identification and understanding of the incidents, perspectives, and insights related to the experiences in the research setting.

#### *Trustworthiness of Data*

Ezzy (2002) recognizes the interest in the validity of qualitative inquiry and the trustworthiness of the resultant data. Highlighting the feminist standpoint methodology as an

epistemology is relevant for this study, based on the subjectivity of the researcher. The feminist standpoint epistemology posits an understanding of the experience of women based on the researcher being a woman herself. As such, this epistemology "...is not individualistic, but refers to a 'historically shared, group based experience' (Collins, 1997, p. 375). CRT and Black feminist thought focus on social justice and creating an environment in which consciousness is elevated, in spite of historical oppression and institutional dynamics. Ezzy (2002) supports the notion of Caroline New (1998) in that "feminist thought is necessarily concerned with the relationship between social positioning, experience, knowledge, interest and action' (p. 351). Thus, Ezzy (2002) further expands this notion by stating that feminist standpoint presents "less false theories and contributes to the emancipatory task of social justice and equality of the genders" (p. 23).

#### Research Limitations

The quantitative inventory and qualitative interviews both exhibited their own set of limitations. The quantitative inventory is useful in capturing: participant demographics, sport participation, athletic identity, and the perceptions and attitudes of athletic opportunity and athletic support. However, the inventory may not capture the full extent of the African American female collegiate athletes' perceptions and attitudes of racial and gender discrimination.

The twelve qualitative interviews, represent a limited perspective due to sample size and sample from a single university. The experiences represented are distinct, however they cannot be representative of all African American female collegiate athletes. In other words, the narratives cannot be generalized to all African American females whom attend predominantly white institutions.

### *Summary*

The experiences of the African American female athlete is decades in the making, however the voice and the particulars of those experiences has not been captured in abundance. As Scott (2000) states *One is the magic number*, for the African American female athlete often is defined through the eyes of others. Asking introspective questions is necessary for her and others to discover her past, acknowledge her present, and build up her future.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

*...Give thanks 'cause we alive, and been through the gutter  
Now we see the horizon  
It's clear to me now  
Used to be confused, took a lot of years to see how  
Now, we moving planets  
Take the average mind and expand it  
You take for granted like we are always gonna be disadvantaged...  
Not accidental, intentional conscious decision  
To Zion we are marching through with African Mayans  
Conquering Babylon with the heart of a lion  
And the walls of Jericho come a-tumbling down...  
- Santana featuring Lauryn Hill and Cee Lo, Do you like the way (1999)*

The experiences of Black collegiate athletes in predominantly white institutions (PWI) are demarked by the historic notion and present reality of alienation and isolation (Hawkins, 2001; Sailes, 1998). It is through these experiences that Black athletes have carried the mission of their historic circumstance and heir of social justice as they strive for racial equality in the midst of oppression within White America. Lauryn Hill's lyrical elucidation of circumstance of Black people dually illustrates their transcendence and resilience through these experiences. The African American female collegiate athlete has also experienced transcendence and resilience through her experiences; conversely, there is limited awareness of these narratives.

Whether narrative or song, each is necessary and each "can be seen as poetry, as expressions of ordinary Black women rearticulated through Black oral traditions" (Collins, 2000, p. 106). Hill alludes to the Black experience and the personal impact of years of physical and psychological oppression as "confused", but poetically illustrates that it will take time to "take the average mind and expand it" (Santana, 1999). Thus, acknowledging the plight of African Americans has left a prophetic imprint, in not only the minds of African Americans, but also in all whom they interact. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to determine how the African

American female college athletes construct their identity within the context of sport and within the walls of the PWI. More specifically, the research questions will identify: 1) how do African American female athletes formulate their identity in college?; 2) what are the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity?; and 3) what impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?

This chapter will contain the results and the data analysis. This study is a multimethod model, allowing the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In order to understand each question and increase the understanding for the reader, the results are separated into four sections. Section I displays the quantitative data addressing research question one, two, and three. This section contains descriptive data analysis and correlational data analysis in an attempt to identify if any relationships exists between the experiences of African American female athletes examined in this study. Section II displays the qualitative data addressing research questions two and three more descriptively. This section contains an interview description, data coding categories, interpretation of qualitative data, and the researchers assertions. Section III attempts to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data through a compare and contrast methods. Section IV includes a summary of results.

#### Participant Demographics

Thirty-eight African American female athletes self-identified themselves as African American among the group of forty-nine Black female athletes. The thirty-eight African American female athletes participants had a mean age of 19.95, representing six (6) sports, which included: 21.1% (n=8) basketball, 2.6% (n=1) gymnastics, 10.5% (n=4) softball, 2.6% (n=1) tennis, 55.3% (n=21) track and field, and 10.5% (n=4) volleyball. One (1) athlete participated in two sports, specifically in the sports of volleyball and basketball. (See Table 1)

Academically, a total of 21.1% (n=8) were first year, 28.9% (n=11) second year, 21.1% (n=8) third year, 23.7% (n=9) fourth year, and 5.3% (n=2) fifth year. (See Table 2) Athletically, a total of 28.9% (n=11) were first year, 23.7% (n=9) were second year, 21.1% (n=8) were third year, 21.1% (n=8) were fourth year, 5.3% (n=2) were fifth year. (See Table 3) In addition, 73.7% (n=28) participants were scholarship athletes and 26.3% (n=10) participants were non-scholarship athletes. More specifically, 52.6% (n=20) were full scholarship, 21.1% (n=8) partial scholarship, and 26.3% (n=10) were walk-on athletes. (See Table 4)

Table 1. Sports

<b>Sport Team</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Basketball*	8	21.1
Gymnastics	1	2.6
Softball	4	10.5
Tennis	1	2.6
Track and Field	21	55.3
Volleyball*	4	10.5

\*Note. Participant a member of basketball and volleyball teams.

Table 2. Academic classification

<b>Academic year</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> year	8	21.1
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	11	28.9
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	8	21.1
4 <sup>th</sup> year	9	23.7
5 <sup>th</sup> year	2	5.3

Table 3. Athletic classification

<b>Athletic year</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> year	11	28.9
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	9	23.7
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	8	21.1
4 <sup>th</sup> year	8	21.1
5 <sup>th</sup> year	2	5.3

Table 4. Scholarship classification

Scholarship classification	N	%
Walk-on	10	26.3
Partial	8	21.1
Full	20	52.6

There were a several academic majors represented within the cohort of participant, with Sport Studies having the largest number of athletic representation at 18.4% (n=7). (See Table 5) A total of 2.6% (n=1) were enrolled in 7-9 hours, 34.2% (n=13) in 10-12 hours, 44.7% (n=11) in 13-15 hours, and 18.4% (n=7) in 16 hours or more of academic study in the fall semester.

Table 5. Academic major

Academic Major	N	%
Accounting	1	2.6
Accounting and Sport Studies (Double Major)	1	2.6
Advertising	1	2.6
Biology	1	2.6
Broadcast News	2	5.3
Business	1	2.6
Child and Family Development	1	2.6
Consumer Economics	1	2.6
Criminal Justice	1	2.6
Early Childhood	2	5.3
Fashion Merchandising	1	2.6
Health Promotions	1	2.6
Housing and Consumer Science	1	2.6
Mathematics	1	2.6
Political Science	2	5.3
Pre-Journalism	1	2.6
Public Health	2	5.3
Social Work	1	2.6
Sociology	1	2.6
Sport Business	1	2.6
Sport Studies	7	18.4
Undecided	2	5.3
Missing Data	5	13.2

The African American female athletes self identified as 13.2% (n=5) low income, 76.3% (n=29) middle income, 10.5% (n=4) high income socioeconomic status. (See Table 6) A total of

5.3% (n=2) were from the state of Alabama, 5.3% (n=2) from California, 78.9% (n=30) from Georgia, 2.6% (n=1) from Illinois, 2.6% (n=1) from Massachusetts, 2.6% (n=1) from Tennessee, and 2.6% (n=1) from Virginia. (See Table 7)

Table 6. Socioeconomic classification

<b>SES</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Low income	5	13.2
Middle income	29	76.3
High income	4	10.5

Table 7. Geographic home state

<b>Home state</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Alabama	2	5.3
California	2	5.3
Georgia	30	78.9
Illinois	1	2.6
Massachussetts	1	2.6
Tennessee	1	2.6
Virginia	1	2.6

Additional demographic information was requested to establish other factors that may foster identity fomation within the context of sport and the predominantly white institutional environment to include: a) living on or off campus, b) working a full or part-time job, c) the number of hours worked per week, and d) participation in extracurricular activities and/or organizations.

The results of African American female collegiate athletes (N=38) that lived on campus were 86.8% (n=33). Also, a total of 13.2% (n=5) have jobs with 13.2% (n=5) that maintained part-time employment. A total of 2.6% (n=1) worked 4-6 hours per week and 10.5% (n=4) worked 10-12 hours per week.

The African American female athletes participation in activities were a total of 0% (n=0) in a sorority, 5.3% (n=2) in an intramural sport, 10.5% (n=4) in a student government



organization, 2.6% (n=1) in pre-professional organizations, and 13.2% (n=5) in other activities.

(See Table 8 for specific extracurricular activity participation and involvement)

Table 8. Specific extracurricular activity and organizations

<b>Activity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Intramural – Basketball *	2	5.3
Intramural – Volleyball *	1	2.6
Student Government – Student Athletic Advisory Committee (SAAC) *	4	10.5
Student Government – South Eastern Conference (SEC) Representative *	1	2.6
Pre-professional Organization – Di Gamma Kappa Broadcast Society*	1	2.6
Pre-professional Organization – News Source 15*	1	2.6
Other – (FDSA)	1	2.6
Other – Black Educational Support Team (BEST)	1	2.6
Other – Campus Ministries	1	2.6
Other – Hear My Hands *	1	2.6
Other – Infusion Magazine	1	2.6
Other – Middle School Mentor*	1	2.6

\*Note. African American female athlete represented dual membership within extracurricular activity.

### Section I: Quantitative Data Findings

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 15.0 (SPSS 15.0) was used to run descriptive and correlational analysis. A significance level of ( $p < .05$ ) was used to identify significant relationships. Data were collected from 38 self-identified Division I African American female intercollegiate athletes. Quantitative data was obtained through the administration of an original questionnaire. The findings will be presented in the following order: a) college demographic information, b) sport participation, c) athletic perception (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), d) perceptions and attitudes, e) influence and role models, f) personal demographic information.

### *Sport Participation*

The African American female athletes in the study acknowledged that they had prior experience with sport participation. The African American female athletes first competed in sport at a mean age of 8.62 with a standard deviation of 3.1. (See Table 9)

Table 9. First competed in sport

<b>Age of Athletic Competition</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
2	1	2.6
4	2	5.3
5	3	7.9
6	2	5.3
7	7	18.4
8	6	15.8
9	1	2.6
10	4	10.5
11	3	7.9
12	4	10.5
13	1	2.6
14	3	7.9
Missing Data	1	2.6

*Note.* Mean = 8.6 years, Median = 8.0 years, Mode = 7.0, Standard Deviation (SD) = 3.1 years.

The participants participated in several sports before they focused on their current athletic endeavor. The greatest percentage of athletic participation prior to college indicated 78.9% (n=30) in basketball and 68.4% (n=26) in track and field. (See Table 10)

Table 10. Sport participation before college

<b>Sport</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Basketball	30	78.9
Equestrian	0	0.0
Gymnastics	3	7.9
Soccer	4	10.5
Softball	14	36.8
Swimming and Diving	2	5.3
Tennis	3	7.9
Track and Field	26	68.4
Volleyball	11	28.9
Other – Baseball	1	2.6
Other – Cheerleading	3	7.9
Other – Cross Country	6	15.8

There were a few occurrences, or setbacks of six weeks or more. The responses reflected 23.7% (n=9) had experienced a setback and 76.3% (n=29) had not experienced a setback. The athletes that responded in the affirmative indicated the source of their setbacks were due to 21.1% (n=8) injuries and 2.6% (n=1) delayed filing of high school academic transcripts with the NCAA Clearinghouse.<sup>7</sup> (See Table 11)

Table 11. Setbacks

<b>Setbacks</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Injury	8	21.1
NCAA Clearinghouse	1	2.6

### *Athletic Perceptions*

The African American female collegiate athletes were asked to consider their athletic perceptions pertaining to their sport participation. The athletic perceptions, or AIM scale, was utilized to capture their identity based on a 7-point Likert scale. Items 1, 2, 3 represented social

<sup>7</sup> The NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse is designed to serve as an initial-eligibility organization for all intercollegiate athletic institutions, including DI, DII, and DIII institutions. The goal is to ensure that all prospective student athletes meet the general eligibility standards (core courses, grade point average, and SAT/ACT test scores) prior to participation at any NCAA college or university.  
([https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/general/index\\_general.html](https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/general/index_general.html))

identity, items 4 and 5 represented exclusivity, and items 6 and 7 represented negative affectivity resulting in a total of 49 points (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001). The results of the AIM scale indicated a mean score of 37.10, with a standard deviation of 6.37; thus, in comparison to the findings of Brewer and Cornelius (2001), male athletes were  $M = 38.21$ ,  $SD = 6.54$  and female athlete were  $M = 24.45$ ,  $SD = 9.56$ , demonstrating that this cohort of African American females have a strong identification with their athletic identity. More specifically, the African American female athletes' scores expressed a 'conceptualization of athletic identity as a superordinate construct ...of [their] sport specific self-identity' (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). The African American female athlete scores for the individual AIM scale items are presented in Table 12. The individual scores illustrate the disparity (strongly disagree to strongly agree) in each of the three segments which construct athletic identity.

Table 12. Individual Items – Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. I consider myself an athlete	38	4	7	6.79	.57
2. I have goals related to sport	38	2	7	5.97	1.24
3. Most of my friends are athletes	38	2	7	5.97	1.53
4. Sport is the most important part my life	37	1	7	4.19	1.79
5. I spend more of my time thinking about sport than anything else	38	1	7	3.63	1.60
6. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport	38	1	7	5.13	1.44
7. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport	38	2	7	5.29	1.35

*Note.* Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD = Standard Deviation

### *Perceptions and Attitudes*

The African American females were asked to consider their perceptions and attitudes based on the time and experiences at the university. The perceptions and attitudes measured included: a) athletic opportunity, b) athletic supports, and c) discrimination based on race and gender.

The participants were asked to determine if they felt that Black females had the same opportunity for collegiate athletic participation as White females. Using a 7-point Likert scale a total of 0.0% (n=0) strongly disagreed, 10.5% (n=4) disagreed, 10.5% (n=4) slightly disagreed, 28.9% (n=11) neutral, 10.5% (n=4) slightly agreed, 28.9% (n=11) agreed, and 10.5% (n=4) strongly agreed that Black females and White females have the same collegiate athletic opportunities.

Next the participants were asked to determine if they felt that Black females had the same opportunity for collegiate athletic participation as Black males. Using a 7-point Likert scale a total of a total of 2.6% (n=1) strongly disagreed, 31.6% (n=12) disagreed, 26.3% (n=10) slightly disagreed, 18.4% (n=7) neutral, 2.6% slightly agreed, 13.2% (n=5) agreed, and 5.3% (n=2) strongly agreed that Black females and Black males have the same collegiate athletic opportunities.

Then the participants were asked to indicate, in the past month, their level of athletic privileges, gender discrimination, and racial discrimination utilizing a 7-point Likert scale within three environments: the local community, the academic environment, and the athletic environment. Athletic support, or privilege, is described as extensions on homework assignments or access to tutorial services, explored three specific environments to include the athletic environment, the academic environment, and the local community environment beyond family

support. The athletic support responses presented mean scores of 3.79, 4.26, and 4.82 respectively. (See Table 13) Gender discrimination explored three specific environments to include the athletic environment, the academic environment, and the local community environment. Gender discrimination presented mean scores of 2.00, 2.05, and 2.37 respectively. (See Table 14) Racial discrimination explored three specific environments to include the athletic environment, the academic environment, and the local community environment. Racial discrimination presented mean scores of 2.55, 2.37, and 2.66 respectively. (See Table 15)

Table 13. Athletic Support

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
In the past month, I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the local community	38	1	7	3.79	2.03
In the past month, I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the academic environment	38	1	7	4.26	1.98
In the past month, I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the athletic environment	38	1	7	4.82	1.90

*Note.* Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 14. Gender Discrimination

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the local community	38	1	7	2.00	1.27
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the academic environment	38	1	7	2.05	1.34
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the athletic environment	38	1	7	2.37	1.48

*Note.* Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 15. Racial Discrimination

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my race in the local community	38	1	7	2.55	1.67
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my race in the academic environment	38	1	7	2.37	1.73
In the past month, I have experienced discrimination based on my race in the athletic environment	38	1	7	2.66	1.53

*Note.* Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD = Standard Deviation

### *Influence and Role Models*

The African American female collegiate athletes were asked to consider their general experiences, and the person(s) or thing(s) that influenced their lives. Similar to the responses about athletic setbacks, written explanations were obtained to gain a greater understanding of who and how person(s) or thing(s) were influential. The person(s) or thing(s) that have been most influential to the lives of the African American female athlete were 5.3% (n=2) sport, 15.8% (n=6) coaches, 15.8% (n=6) family, 36.8% (n=14) parents, 36.8% (n=14) mother, 5.3% (n=2) father, 7.9% (n=3) brother, 7.9% (n=3) teacher, 2.6% (n=1) mentor, 2.6% (n=1) friends, 2.6% (n=1) music, 2.6% (n=1) goals, and 18.4% (n=7) religion. (See Table 16)

Table 16. Influences and role models

<b>Influence and role model*</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Sport	2	5.3
Coach	6	15.8
Family	6	15.8
Parents	14	36.8
Mother	14	36.8
Father	2	5.3
Brother	3	7.9
Teacher	3	7.9
Mentor	1	2.6
Friends	1	2.6
Music	1	2.6
Goals	1	2.6
Religion	7	18.4

\*Note. Participants listed one or multiple sources of influences and/or role models.

### *Decisions of Influence*

The African American female collegiate athletes were then asked to consider a time or an incident when the person(s) or thing(s) influenced their decision(s). Participant explanations for the areas of influence that emerged were: 44.7% (n=17) choosing a college, 2.6% (n=1) choosing a major, 23.7% (n=9) pursue or maintain participation in a sport, 2.6% (n=1) sport development, 2.6% (n=1) participation in extracurricular activities, 7.9% (n=3) coping with racial alienation and discrimination, 2.6% (n=1) personal development, 7.9% (n=3) pursuing goals and making life decisions. (See Table 17)



Table 17. Decisions of influence

<b>Decisions of influence*</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Choosing a college	17	44.7
Choosing a major	1	2.6
Pursue or maintain participation in a sport	9	23.7
Sport development	1	2.6
Participation in extracurricular activities	1	2.6
Coping with racial alienation and discrimination	3	7.9
Personal development	1	2.6
Achieving goals and making life decisions	3	7.9

\*Note. Participants listed one or multiple explanations.

## Section II: Qualitative Data Findings

In an effort to breathe life and understanding into the quantitative findings, twelve (12) semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sampling of participants representing the following sports: two (2) from basketball, one (1) from gymnastics, one (1) from softball, one (1) from tennis, six (6) from track and field, and one (1) from volleyball.

Pseudonyms selected by the participants were used to maintain anonymity.

### *Category Description*

Six categorical areas were addressed through the interview sessions: 1) pre-college sport participation; 2) college athletic experience and coping strategies; 3) person(s) of influence; experiences as an athlete, 4) African American, and female; 5) participant advice and recommendations; and 6) a shared experience. Each category was defined by the interview questions, and each question elicited subcategories or themes based on the narrative responses of the twelve participants. Johnson-Bailey, (2004) states, “having acquired a holistic understanding of each narrative, you are ready to illustrate first the themes particular to each story. Introduce each participant/narrator. Make every effort to capture the experience narrated using the language of the participants to articulate the themes revealed in each story. Inductively generate a set of common themes from individual sets of themes in each narrative” (p. 119). Through the

interviews and the resultant narratives, indeed a range of themes emerged, that gave shape to the identities of these African American female collegiate athletes.

#### Description of Interviewed Participants

Twelve African American female collegiate athletes were purposefully selected to participate in one 1-hour semi structured interview. The selection was based on the percentage of representation from the six aforementioned sport teams and the AIMS inventory. The women were placed in three categories of low, medium, and high based on the cohorts (n=38) responses to the AIMS. Listed below is a brief description of the participants and their categorical representation:

##### *Low Athletic Identity (score range from 27 to 35)*

- Alyssa, a third year volleyball player majoring in Broadcast News. Originally, from the state of Tennessee, with aspirations of adding to the list of African American female sports broadcasters, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 30.
- Mary, a second year basketball player majoring in Child and Family Development. Originally, from the state of South Carolina, with aspirations of coaching men's basketball, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 31.
- Char, a second year track and field athlete majoring in Sports Studies. Originally, from the state of Georgia, with aspirations of working in the sports industry with a professional sport team, she is a walk-on (non-scholarship) athlete with an AIMS score of 33.
- Renee, a first year track and field athlete majoring in Journalism. Originally, from the state of Georgia, with aspirations of becoming a sports writer and work for ESPN magazine or Sports Illustrated, she is a walk-on athlete with an AIMS score of 35.

*Medium Athletic Identity (score range from 36 to 41)*

- Jane, a second year track and field athlete majoring in Health Promotion and Behavior. Originally, for the state of Georgia, with aspirations of going to pharmacy school to be a pharmacist, she is a walk-on athlete with an AIMS score of 36.
- Jessica, a third year track and field athlete majoring in Consumer Economics. Originally, for the state of California, with hopes of becoming a financial planner, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 36.
- LaSha, a third year track and field athlete majoring in Advertising. Originally, for the state of Texas, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated with aspirations of working with ESPN Magazine, and a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 36.
- Jordan, a fourth year softball player majoring in Sociology. Originally, for the state of Georgia, with aspirations of becoming a social worker, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 36.

*High Athletic Identity (score range from 42 to 49)*

- Sally B., a first year basketball player majoring in Sports Studies. Originally, from the state of Georgia, with aspirations of playing professional basketball, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 41.
- Bonita, a first year track and field athlete majoring in Biology however not certain of a future career. Originally, from the state of Texas, she is full of personality and the joys for life. Bonita is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 42.

- Nikki, a second year gymnast majoring in Applied Biotechnology. Originally, from Virginia, with aspirations of working in sports nutrition and going to medical school, she is full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 42.
- Carmen, a fifth year tennis player majoring in Accounting. Originally, for the state of Georgia, with aspirations of obtaining her CPA license, she is a full scholarship athlete with an AIMS score of 45.

#### Qualitative Data Related to Athletes

When I began this work, I had to thoroughly take into context the reality of the research. I was about to embark upon a work that would share experiences of young African American female collegiate athletes, and to do so I would have to share my intercollegiate experience in an effort to fully engage the twelve vibrant African American female athletes. Fortuitously, I came to the realization that by breaking the silence of this unfamiliar world of the African American female collegiate athlete I would become a advocate in social justice. Yet, I was apprehensive and at a loss of word to adequately express my fears. However, Audre Lorde (1984), poet laureate, eloquently captured my bevy of emotion with, “of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (p. 42). Thus, I would embark upon twelve insightful oral narratives exploring: pre-college sport participation; college athletic experience and coping strategies, persons of influence, experiences as an athlete, African American, female; participant advice and recommendations, and a shared experience.

### *Pre-college Sport Participation*

The three initial questions were designed to determine the inroads of the twelve African American female collegiate athletes into sport and the individuals whom were involved in shaping, supporting, and influencing their sport engagement prior to intercollegiate competition.

*How did you get started in sport?*

I believe how one enters the world of sport is significant as it can forever impact their engagement with sport participation. My own entrance was threefold: my parents, who's desire was to share their love of sport while providing an opportunity to socialize, for I was a very shy child; my brother, who was my hero at such a young age and I consequently wanted to be in his presence at all times; and health, I was stricken with asthma from birth and my doctor's impressed upon the benefit of physical activity and sports to manage my disease. The entrance of these twelve women is also demarked by, family, with an emphasis on mothers and the role of coaches and community organizations. The entrance and engagement with sport, for most, represented their current involvement and collegiate sport participation.

#### Family (siblings and parents)

- Well, our family has always been big in sport, so is my brother, he's two years older than me. Like my dad used to coach little league football and everything. But um, my first sport as a child was soccer, like the little league soccer, and then... I kind of like to follow my brother, but he went on to football. And ah, as he went to football, I got introduced to gymnastics. It was funny how I got started because my neighbor ...it was one of those deals, like, if you bring a friend to gymnastics then you get a discount, and they brought me, and I really liked it, so I just started from there. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Well, I can say. When I was in a fifth grade my older brother John, was a year older than me, played rec ball and I just loved how he played. Finger roll, between the legs. Any sweet basketball moves, you name them....but when we moved from South Carolina to Georgia, that's when my life started to change, and the only way I could get out the house was to play basketball. My parents were not comfortable with me and my brothers playing outside without adult supervisors and they were unaware of the neighborhood and kept us out of harm. – Mary, basketball

- I first started to play sports when I was about, I'd say 5. My parents first started me with soccer, to get kids active. So that was the first sport I played and then from there it just went on to basketball and then track. – Char, track and field
- Um, I grew up playing around like a little tomboy with my cousins. And my family is full of people that play sports. My mom played sports, all of her brothers and sisters played, so it was destined for me to play I guess. – Sally B., basketball
- Um, when was it. Like, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I just. I've always ran, you know. I've always loved running. And racing and growing up with boys. [laughing] You have to be in sports. So, in 7<sup>th</sup>. – Renee, track and field
- Um, okay. Well sport, I grew up with predominantly males. With my cousins and my brother and all that stuff. And I don't know, they were always into sports and playing. So I guess I got hooked because I wanted to be like them, you know. 'Cause their all older than me. It was always fun because it seemed like they would always have fun. Cause they'd meet all these people that I didn't know. And like, I don't know it, it, it kind of like grabbed hold of me. It was kind of like my calling almost, like, when I got to it. – Jessica, track and field

#### Mother

- My mom was always interested in me getting in sports too, so she put me in track when I was younger....And then I did volleyball, sophomore and freshman year, and then I stopped because I was like which one am I gonna get a scholarship in. It was gonna be track because I wasn't tall enough for volleyball. – LaSha, track and field
- A well, my mom used to play slow pitch softball with her church...whatever. So when I got old enough to play she put me in it. – Jordan, softball
- My mom played tennis and my dad played a little bit. And my um, my aunt coaches, a basketball so. They all were, kinda like, into sports a little bit. But I actually started because I was overweight. Which is pretty funny. Like, kids use to tease me at school, so, um, my mom had to find a way, to like, make me. So I wouldn't be the chubby kid in class anymore. So then I started playing tennis. – Carmen, tennis
- Um, well I actually started with track and field. My mother, she was into sport and she just really urged me to go out and try it. So, listening to my parent, my mom. – Jane, track and field

#### Scouting/Recruitment

- Actually, I was seven and, ah, this coach, we was at a elementary track meet, I guess, and that's when I lived in Texas. And track is a big thing down there so I was just doing my little track being at elementary school and he was out there recruiting for his track team.

And, I guess he was like, “You got the legs for it” and that's why I started. And I've just been doing it ever since. – Bonita, track and field

### Community Organization

- I started, basically going to the YMCA when I was about fifth grade. Really before that was softball, I started playing softball when I was in second grade. Just in my neighborhood softball youth Association. And I played basketball. When I was in second grade, and just basically, when I was in, second grade is when I started playing sports. I started volleyball in a fifth-grade. – Alyssa, volleyball

As stated, how one enters the world of sport can leave an indelible mark on their future sport participation. The women presented their entrance into sport as: a desire of their parent(s), like Char's parents initial desire for physical activity through the sport of soccer, which is known for its high caloric expenditure, it's aerobic function would serve as a gateway into running in the sport of track and field; their mother own recreational or collegiate sporting experience, like Jordan's mother's recreational involvement in softball, Jordan placement into the sport of softball would force the adoption of the sporting activity; their recruitment, like Bonita's expressed physicality for track and field and subsequent recruitment by a local youth coach; and lastly local community organizations like Alyssa who's involvement in fitness programs and facilities lead her to participate in a variety of sports such as softball, basketball, and her eventual college sport of volleyball. So while a parents desire, adoption of a healthy lifestyle, or an expressed skill set was uncovered, each young woman found success, which like myself, lead to sport participation in college.

*How did sport contribute to your youth development? What role did sport play as a child? What role did sport play as a teenager?*

The role sport played in each young woman youth was diverse. For myself, sport would assist in my social development, as stated, I was a very shy child. It would also lead to numerous opportunities such as mastering a sport skill set, travel, and to develop an heir of confidence that

was not seen in my classroom experiences. For the twelve young women sport would serve as social development, personal development, physical and sport development, and emotional development.

Social development: communication, time management

- Um, I guess it kind of just gave me something to do. It helped me make friends or identify with other people, basically. – Jane, track and field
- Um, it kept me busy. It kept me out of trouble and I got to travel and meet new people. And learn how to interact with different people...it was like set discipline in my life. – Sally B., basketball
- I can't say as being of the youngest...it kind help me get to know a lot of other people so. Especially girls, because I grew up with my two brothers, and I was kind of in that tomboy phase and I'm glad I'm a woman now, and straight with, my head right...I think is this has got more active with communication know how to communication, listening. As far as sports, it was a time management. My time management really worked out. I know I was young, but you know, you have to make sure your school work is done at the right time. So you can be get your rest at a certain time, and be in bed at a certain time. So I think time management was the biggest thing. – Mary, basketball

Personal development: balancing life activities, decisions making

- I think it made me a more well rounded, rounded person, like, time management. So I think time management, like learning how to balance things and, you know. It's taught me so much....You know, it gave me the drive to never give up and just keep on going and it will work out in the long run. – LaSha, track and field
- Um, it helped, like, there were a lot of situations that, where like, being an athlete you had to make the right decisions. And sometimes, you know, people make wrong decisions or whatever. But there were a lot of situations in my life, where like, I have to do the right thing because of track and it. – Renee, track and field
- It was basically the biggest part of what I did, I didn't do anything like ballet. I played violin. But that I mean, I did sports, way more than that for the most of my life I played three sports. So it was. That was all my extracurricular activities, and as a teenager, I narrowed it down to volleyball and basketball. But it was still on my time, that and weightlifting. – Alyssa, volleyball

Physical and sport development: competitive drive/spirit

- Yeah, it, um, it helped me get in shape. It helped me, um, learn like life lessons, you know. Like, staying focused and a, not giving up on things ever. [laughing]. Um, it



helped me, a, learn discipline. Especially, like, when it come to, like, just staying in shape and things like that. And, a, you know, like your timing, and making sure that you, like, fit everything in. – Carmen, tennis

- It made me very competitive, and like one of the guys kind of thing, just because um. Ever since I was younger I have always been athletic so, I would have my speed, agility and coordination maybe before other children had it. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Well as a little kid, like, I don't know like. It made me feel like I had something that other people didn't. I don't know. 'Cause like when I was doing sports, I was always good at them. Like I'm a really athletic person, so I could adapt to any sport. And it kind of just, I felt good. Like I was confident, it gave me confidence. It gave me like, I don't know. It made me feel good, you know. – Jessica, track and field

#### Emotional development

- I think it allowed me to calm down some, I was kind of hyper. So, playing sports probably brought joy to my parents first of all. Um, like I said, I could release energy just out there running around, having fun. – Char, track and field
- Um, sport has shaped my whole... I want to say, it helped me work with my attitude and other people, you know. How to resolve, just, certain situations, without running track, or without having something to help control myself in terms of in different situations like negative situations. I don't know. I don't know if I would still be here. Um, this is something that kept motivated to continue to stay in school because I was looking forward to track every single day. Um, I mean, yeah. Track is, track is the life. – Bonita, track and field

The ability for sport to provide social, personal, physical, sport, and emotional growth from childhood to teenager I find remarkable. Each young woman was transformed into an elite athlete, but one filled with skills that were transferrable to her daily life. For example, Sally B. was able to learn how to socialize with individuals outside of her everyday circle; LaSha was able to gain time management skills which aided in her ability to handle similar levels of stress; Jessica was able to assess her skills set in one sport and adapt to various other sporting activities; and Char was able to locate an inner spirit resulting in joy and peace because of her sport involvement. I believe the role of sport contributed to and built upon their collegiate participation.

*Why did you choose your current sport and eventual pursue in college?*

Selecting the sport for college is individualistic. My interest and focus for track and field grew while in high school due to numerous injuries in volleyball and greater involvement in track and field, which extended out of the high school season into club track and field during the winter/indoor seasons and outdoor seasons that included local, regional, and national competition. Ultimately, recruitment letters and scholarship offers, athletically and academically, solidified my choice to pursue track and field at the college level. Scholarship offers for the twelve participants played a significant factor, as well as, love of the sport.

Love and passion for sport

- I, just because I love it. Um, I. One day I remember in, like, fourth grade there was a race, at like the Olympics. Like the elementary school Olympic thing we had. And I beat all the boys [laugh] and ever since then I was just like, I am going to run track and I am going to the Olympics. And you know, so ever since then. – Renee, track and field
- Wow...to be honest, I was good at some other sports, like volleyball. But I didn't like wearing spandex. [both laughing]. Okay, I could do it, but I did play, ah, volleyball for couple of years, but I think I wanted to focus more basketball. I had more fun with basketball. I guess my talent was. I was good and volleyball, I was tall, I had long arms, I could jump and ran track. I loved it, but it interfered with AAU. – Mary, basketball
- I was really ranked really high. And then by the time I was a like, a sophomore, or a junior in high school, like I had a lot of coaches. Like, that, would look at me play. And um, so, I was looking at, like, a lot of colleges. And then I ended up playing here. – Carmen, tennis
- It was the one I was the best at, at the time. At the time that was really my life, and I just love to play it. – Alyssa, volleyball
- I chose basketball because, it's like I guess I have a passion for it. I love playing. I didn't want, I didn't want to do anything else. – Sally B., basketball
- Well I have been doing gymnastics ever since I was six. So, I have been doing it for years. And um, its just something I fell in love with. – Nikki, gymnastics

### Opportunity and scholarship

- It was the one [sport] I was the best at so I just chose that one, in terms of, I kind of felt like more into track than into basketball. Track was something that I felt I could do more with. Like basketball is such a team sport, and like certain things aren't seen in track, that you would see on the court sometimes. And so, I just felt like that way it was going for me, compared to how track was going for me. Yeah, I was there, um, and ah. Like okay. Well, when I was in high school I only threw shot and discus, but then when I went to JUCO [Junior College], whatever. I threw both the javelin and hammer. And ah, like javelin just came to me. Like, I was always pretty good at discus, pretty good. I wasn't great. But javelin, like, when I pick up a javelin, I just, I don't know. It was just so easy to me. – Jessica, track and field
- Um, I felt like I had the best opportunity. Track and field was the best oppor(tunity)...Was the sport that gave me the best opportunity to compete collegiately. – Char, track and field
- Um, I chose track and field. It was something that I look forward to. Um, and again about the traveling it was free travel, and I'm been a be running with the college and that is giving us a full scholarship that's gonna pay for everything and that free money there. Free traveling there. And I get to see different things. And experiencing people and cultures. You know broaden my horizons. So, that's, that was mostly what I was thinking about. It was sports first. What school had the best, what should college had the best athletic department and track. And it was gone keep me grounded. And then it was okay, they got track now. So, who's the top in academics. So, that's how I chose. – Bonita, track and field
- Mostly because, um, my mom wanted me to decide between volleyball and track. And it was like well which one do you think you'll get a scholarship in....So that's why I'm doing track here in college. – LaSha, track and field

### Mom

- Well, my mom, like I said, kind of just geared me towards it. And then, I just got good at it. So, I decided to keep going with it and follow it in college. I liked it. – Jane, track and field

The rationale the twelve women expressed for their college sport selection was indeed individualistic. Selecting the sport for college was individualistic. The most pronounced choices were based on talent, scholarship opportunity, a parent, and the love of the game. It is my belief that for these girls, their athletic ability and scholarship award were principal factors for college sport selection. While Jordan's voice was absent in this question, nine out of twelve women

were scholarship athletes and three women were walk-ons. It must be noted, that as a walk-on athlete they must operate with the same regulations, policies, and competition guidelines as scholarship athletes at the Division I level.

### *College Athletic Experience and Coping Strategies*

The next four questions were designed to determine the current collegiate experiences of the twelve African American female athletes. In particular, the role of sport as collegiate participants, the rigors of the collegiate athlete, the coping mechanisms for life as a collegiate athlete, and the role and/or impact of persons of influence as a collegiate student.

#### *How is sport shaping you now?*

This question was designed to determine personal growth in sport since they have been in the college realm. Did sport still have a developmental impact on their lives or had the role of sport changed due to the new environment and the different social dynamics? Again, sport in my youth was utilized for social interaction and health related causes. However, sport still served as a means for social interaction, and it also provided a means for increasing my athletic skill set, a vehicle to fulfill Olympic dreams, and to attain an educational degree. The ten women whom were able to provide this perspective presented themes of time restrictions and structure amidst the range of emotional feelings while enduring the experiences.

#### Time management, structure, and focus

- It's actually consuming all of my time....I can't go get my hair done. [smiling – both laughing]. I need to get it done real bad....And I wanna go get my nails done. And, like, playing basketball mess up your feet a lot. I have, my whole team, we all have, like, calluses and our feet look kinda rough right now. – Sally B., basketball
- It definitely shapes 'cause now you definitely need time management. 'Cause with school, and I used to work. I don't work now, but I worked last semester (fall 2007). You gotta balance that, and school, and working, and being in a sorority. I think, it takes a lot, it gives me a more well rounded person so. – LaSha, track and field

- You have something to focus on. Like, you have, when you're here you have a reason to do good, you know....And you have, it's like I have reason to do the right things, you know? And like it, you kinda mature 'cause you have to...'Cause you have to be responsible, you are representing (the university) track and field, everywhere you go, you know, and one thing that you feel is not bad could look terrible in somebody else's eyes. You just, I don't know, you start to think more about, instead of thinking about your little life, you think about your big track, track life, sport, playing basketball can be stressful everyday. – Renee, track and field
- Um, I think it's, I think it gives me structure. It gives me balance um, if I wasn't doing a track. I don't know I will probably be doing intramural basketball....And that gives me motivation like. Like, I know I have to do good in school. So, I can keep running track. – Char, track and field
- I'm a senior. So, um tennis has helped me, a, stay focused. Ah, it's helped me learn, like, how to plan things. – Carmen, tennis

#### Socialization, education, demanding environment

- Well, here, I see it. It helps me even more, kind of, identify with other people. And actually I have, like, a label, as a athlete [laughing]. – Jane, track and field
- Now its. Track now is, its not fun. No. Now, its like the fire is...slowly, slowly. It, its not. I don't know if it's just track, or it's the track team. 'Cause there's a difference. Um, I love runnin', but you gotta have that click. You gotta have that bond and connection on the team to wanna. Say okay, we gonna do this today, we gonna go out there, we gon' win. We don't have that unity. So it's, its hard to, you know, say I wanna keep runnin'. But you don't have that team effort, that's like, you know, we all in this together. It's all individuality, so. That's different for me. I've always had that team, that team love, that, we gon' pray together, we gon' stay together, you know. We gon' hang out together. This is one big group, when we're walkin'. You see the whole team walkin'. It's different. – Bonita, track and field
- Like as a smaller kid I could've said that sports is me. But, like, now sports has brought me to my education. I mean, it's like a prideful feeling now. Like when I talk about sports or just, like, throwing or javelin in general, like I feel like. Very good about it. Like, its like, it's a part of me. – Jessica, track and field
- It's the demand with the coach and I think certain pressure from the fans around you or what people expect you to do, and you like. I just want to go play. I mean, I know what all this politics going around well, you have to make a name for yourself. You have to be good on and off the court, its a lot of pressure. – Mary, basketball
- I mean, it definitely keeps you busy, um. It just, I think it makes everything else about life so much easier as hard as it is up in an athletic setting, and all the expectations and all

the things you are expected to do and do well. Um, it makes everything else look so easy. – Alyssa, volleyball

The women described the beneficial elements of their youth sport experience as providing social development, personal development, sport development, emotional development, and ultimately, college sport participation. The current themes would streamline to function in the sport specific regiment within a structured collegiate athletic environment. Therefore, Sally B.'s expression of, "It consumes all of my time", or Renee, LaSha, Char, and Carmen's acknowledgement of the rigid schedule and structure indicate that the structure has provided a means to focus and develop time management skills. As a result, as the other women state that the institution of sport granted skill transfer through social skills, educational attainment, and coping strategies that assist in balancing the demands and pressures of life.

*What is your daily life like on campus? Describe the typical day on campus.*

As previously stated, sport participation at the collegiate level cannot be fully appreciated without the acknowledgement of daily life of the collegiate athlete. The collegiate athlete's typical daily schedule consist of: early morning practice and/or physical rehabilitation/therapy; morning academic classes; afternoon practice, followed by a strength and conditioning workout; and evenings spent at the athletic academic center to ensure homework is completed (this includes tutorial sessions to review subject specific courses). Presented below is an array of daily and weekly schedules for the women based on sport team.

### Basketball

- Eight o'clock every day. Eight o'clock every day. Wake up in the morning have go to classes 8(am) to 12(pm). Get ready to go to practice around 1:15(pm) to 3:45(pm) and then maybe have rehab before practice. So that means you have to be at the gym and hour to an hour and a half, or get picked up. Or you got to watch film with the coaches or scouting reports. Or you have to lift [weights] or the ice bath or go back to rehab. And then, you know, you got before practice, you gotta go squeeze in that lunchtime, so you grab your bite. Come right back over to lift, you know. It is lifts weights or to go to

practice or eat dinner with your teammates and then head over to study hall. And then you are over there, probably like to 7 o'clock and then I head back in my room studying. And I am sleep, I'm tired and I have to be up for another day, every day. – Mary, basketball

- Well, I had to get up in the morning can't be late 'cause if you're late you gotta run. Ah, class, you have class may be two or three. Then I get something to eat, go to practice for a couple hours. Might have weights, if not, um, then after that there's study hall. And that'll end maybe 8(pm), maybe 9 o'clock (pm) and then gotta go to your room and try to wind down. Try to do homework, if you can, but it's kinda hard do homework in the room, when you've come from the study center. You just want to sleep. – Sally B., basketball

### Gymnastics

- Usually, um, go to class in the morning. Get some lunch and then do some work before practice starts either like on Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Monday and Friday starts at 1:15(pm) and Tuesday-Thursday it starts at 2:15(pm)....And just practice from then. Um, usually on Mondays- Fridays until like 4(pm) or 5(pm). And then Tuesday-Thursday to like 6(pm)....Yeah and then afterwards we usually have tutors and go to study hall, go get some work done. And then afterwards, try to get some sleep. – Nikki, gymnastics

### Softball

- I get up at five to get ready for weights. Then I have class at 10am...no excuse me, 11 until like 2:15pm. And then I might have a little break and then I go straight to study hall. And that's it. – Jordan, softball

### Track and Field

- You wake up. Ah, no breakfast 'cause you don't have ti-i-ime....Ah, go to all your classes. You get like a, maybe a hour break. Sometimes, like, now I have tutoring before practice and after practice, so. Um, not really, not really that much free time, but you have the weekends so. [laugh]. But then you have practice weights, and then the team goes to eat together. And then after that your back at tutoring, or mentoring. – Renee, track and field
- Wake up, go to class. After class, class usually ends right before track practice. So then track practice, weights, maybe study hall. But now that I'm a junior, I have a good enough GPA (grade point average) that I only have to go to study hall once a week. So I may go and just print off some stuff. And then usually meet with the sorority. Yeah, we usually have meetings or we usually have programs. – LaSha, track and field
- Oh man, okay. My typical day is I wake up. I have class at 8 o'clock (am) in the morning. So I wake up about like, 6:30 (am). Um get ready, you know, take a shower, whatever.

Go wait for the bus, half hour early because the bus takes forever. And um, get on the bus to class. Do my classes and stuff. I like my classes like back to back.

And then usually when I'm done with class I go back to my room. Um, just like, I go back to my room read a little you know, go to sleep some more if I didn't get to go to sleep early enough. Then I get dressed for practice at about, depends on the day. 2:30 (pm) or 3:30 (pm) depending on what I'm throwing for practice. And then, um, I go to practice. Practice for throwing is like an hour an half or so, two hours. Then a, then I go to the weight room do my workout, whatever it is, and lifting and stuff. And then I usually leave the weight room about 5:30(pm) or so.

Then um, get on the bus, go back to my room, take a shower, get something to eat really quick in the dining hall. And then go back to the (athletic academic center), the student, the athletic student thing. And then I either have tutoring, or I just having studying and stuff. And then I do that pretty much to like 8, 8ish, 8:30(pm). And then, get a ride back somehow or take the bus back. And then, I don't know hangout, maybe hangout with someone for a little bit. And go back to bed, and I like to go to bed at least midnight, but [laughing]. Yeah. – Jessica, track and field

- Um, wake up at 8(am), go to class all day. Then I have an hour to get something to eat and then I go to practice at 3. And then I lift weights, sometimes study hall in the evenings. And then go back home start over, go to sleep. – Jane, track and field
- Typical day, um okay, class probably start like 9:30(am)-10(am). So I wake up around 8(am), go eat maybe, If I wake up in time. Go to class, go to another class. Then about, most of time, that Monday-Wednesday-Friday I'm done at 12(pm) so I go eat. Then I go get ready for practice. Practice is at 3(pm). And Monday-Tuesday-Thursday we lift weight right after practice. So we go 3 'til (pm) whenever you finish. Weights are at 4:45(pm). Um, so Monday-Tuesday-Thursdays so normally those are the late days so we don't probably leave the coliseum 'til 5:30(pm) maybe 6(pm). The other days, we just go to practice at 3 and then we are done, Wednesday and Friday. Then after that, go eat again, go eat dinner, and then homework. Head back to Rankin (the athletic academic center) to study, it depends if I have a tutoring session. If not, just study and get ready for the next day [giggling]. Yeah, sometimes it's overwhelming. – Char, track and field
- Whew, it's a long day. Um, do you definitely got to go to sleep early. Um, if you want a function properly the next day. Um, I wake up at seven to go eat breakfast in the morning at, um, right here at the Summit. Um, I just sit and there for an hour, I guess. Until my class starts at 9:05(am). I may sit in there and read in go over some class notes, just in case they wanna have a pop quiz [both laughing]. So my first class is at 9:05, and then I don't get out, um. I don't know, dependin' on what day it is. I have one class on Tuesday and Thursday. And then Monday Wednesday Friday is four, and so that's a long day. I don't get out till 1:10. On both Monday Wednesday and Friday. After that it's practice at three. Then you have weight training at five. Well depend and when track practices over, which is supposed to end at 4:45(pm). Until you're done. And then after that it's study hall, and tutoring appointments, and in between that time. You got to figure out a way to leave and try eat. And get some extra study time in, and you're trying to sleep and your tired from practice. Stressful. – Bonita, track and field



### Tennis

- Basically I just pretty much just practice and study. Right now I only have three classes, but I have two accounting classes so they're pretty late, you know. And they're pretty rigorous. – Carmen, tennis

### Volleyball

- Okay. Well, we have practiced at 7 a.m. and then we go to class right after we have our [inaudible] since our practice is in the morning now, so I go to a class till 3:15 and then you have weightlifting at 3:45, and we do that for a little over an hour so I'm done by five, which is actually pretty good, because last year. We practice late in the afternoon and we were done until 7:30. So being done at five is really good. So we pretty much the whole day up until five doing things. – Alyssa, volleyball

I feel Carmen's statement of "pretty much just practice and study", while simplistic it is accurate and to the point. Thus, the ability to balance and endure demanding schedules that include practice, physical therapy, weight training, competition and travel, academic classes, study hall, tutorial sessions, social life, family and friends has a profound affect on one's identity.

*Describe the kinds of personal attributes that contribute to your experience.*

Taking into account the daily schedule for the collegiate athlete, I was interested in what personal characteristics or attributes allowed these young women to balance the rigorous demands placed upon them. My own experience was laden with a roller coaster of emotions consisting of happiness and laughter to sadness and tears. However, my parents would serve as the foundation of support and a model for enduring the challenges of life. For these young women several words emerged as descriptors for the attributes that contributed their experience; however, mothers would emerge as the model of character.

### Competitive, respectful, dedicated, resilient, conscious

- Um, [pause] Sport, I guess I could say, um, being respectful, not talkin' back. To adults and stuff. Because our coaches, you know, they holler and scream at us all day long. Yeah, so. I mean, I just, I'm not the type. I wasn't raised to talk back, you know, I'll just

listen and keep going on about what I had to do, so. I could that. Respectin', whether they were wrong or right. You still got to respect them because they're adults. Workin' hard, she (mom) worked hard. She's a single parent and stuff, so. Not givin' up, keeping God first 'cause that's what I really have to do in college. – Sally B., basketball

- Well, first I would have to say competitive, um, resilient and optimistic. Competitive that I just want to try to be the best at whatever I do. I just want to be as good as I can, And then resilient. Even though, I'm not just if I'm having a bad day, just try to push through it. Like different situations, like stress or... coaches. And then optimistic, I put positive because I feel like there is no reason to look at what I could've done or what should have been done. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Well, I would say that I'm really dedicated. Probably to both academics and sport. So I do whatever it takes for me to get through. In like my classes and in track. – Jane, track and field
- I guess I'm the type. I don't like let a lot of things phase me. I know there's a lot of people who can have someone approached them in a certain way or they just shut down. And I'm the type. I just has somebody type of coaches. I've had to get used to every type of coaches come and I'll let a lot of things phase me. I guess I was just kind of raised in the way. That's just like you have to be twice as good to get what other people have, to get what White people have. I hate to say that, but yeah. You have to be twice as good. I am sure you've heard that too. – Alyssa, volleyball
- I just think I'm more mental. So I stay positive, then. I think positive. No matter how bad the situation is, I mean, just everything just seems obsolete. So yeah. – Bonita, track and field

### Mother

- Oh, basically I think it just comes from my mom. Because she's a single parent with, that raised two kids, and I think she did, like, a wonderful job of raising my sister, like, she, like, stopped at nothing. She went to Grambling, got a degree in marketing, and works at a really nice marketing place. And provides so much for me and my sister, and my nephew. That's why I feel like, I can work and go to school, and do some much like she does so much, you know. Like in the end it will all work out because. Like being strong never giving up, you know. Sometimes you may want to, but, you know. It may not always go your way. But keep, like, working towards it. And in the end it will work out, I don't know. I just look up to my mom a lot. – LaSha, track and field
- Um, I don't know, I think main impact has been my mom. Like my mom is like, I don't know, when we were in San Diego, back home like, we're kinda like low income. So um, my mom has taught me how to like, pretty much save and like. I don't know. You never know what's gonna happen. And so, ah, I've learned that you just have to make sure you have things just incase something bad happens. I like to be able to help people whenever I can. I don't know. I'm a big religious person so....I've learned to be like a, safe. It's just

that, it's just the fact of I learned a lot of like, just maintaining myself. I don't know, I just had to learn how to be an individual and like be myself. And it doesn't matter what everyone else is doing, but what I need to do. And what I can do to help myself, and to help those around me. – Jessica, track and field

- I think that probably, like, watching my mom. My mom's. My mom's a physical therapist and um, she's probably the hardest worker I know in my life. She's working that hard and just seeing her go through that and seeing her grow through like a divorce. And like how she. She went through everything, and, like, it didn't shake her. – Carmen, tennis

#### Name own identity

- I've always been like the type of person who tried to not to be an outcast. But I don't like to. Like, just be what you want me to be, kind of. And when you get here you have to either be yourself or, you start being. You start to be what other people want you to be...And like, but I'm not going to change who I am for them. So I've lost some friends...the price to pay for being who you are... 'Cause its just easy to agree with everybody....And it's hard not to....But I'm glad I've got tough skin, I guess. – Renee, track and field

Reflecting back on pre-college sport experience, and coupling those with the overall college experience, the women expressed a growth in character, as explained by Jane's dedication to sport and academics; or Renee's ability to stay the course endure naysayers and individuals who would doubt her ability and choices. The self-described characteristic held meaning in each young women's experiences. Nevertheless, mothers emerged again, as the dominant model or person of reference for enduring the challenges of the collegiate schedule and collegiate environment.

*How do you cope with the new environment? Is there anyone or anything that helps you with the environment at this university?*

Indeed the daily schedule, coupled with representations of coping strategies assist with survival of the African American female collegiate athlete in the PWI. However, specific curiosity of "how do you cope in this environment?" was of interest. As expressed throughout this work, my most prominent coping tools were like theirs: music, as an escape and comfort;

family friends, for support and wisdom; and faith, my belief in God and solace found within His teachings. It became apparent that the combination of quiet moments filled with support and reflection were conducive to survival within the PWI as a varsity athlete. The women voices presented personal isolation and surrounding themselves with positive persons.

Personal isolation: writing, music, sleep, reflection, prayer

- I write. When I don't know what else to do.[half laugh]. Anything. You know, anything that's on my mind. I, I keep a journal and I carry it everywhere...it helps me to get it out, because sometimes you can't talk to people and you realize when you get here that some people just don't want to talk, you know.

I listen to music...every kind of music. Any kind of music. Um, I like India Aire. And when you're down. That's the kind of stuff you listen to, like Jill Scott, so. It's one of those things, like when you're, when you're feeling some think there's always a song that's feeling which are feeling...It's just like. To hear somebody else say in which are feeling, a kind of gets it out of you. – Renee, track and field

- Um, basically take naps, um, [laughing]. When things get hard I just go home and take a nap, and get it out of my mind, just back to normal, you know. You gotta take a breather for a second because you get overwhelmed with a lot of stuff. So just go to your room and take a nap, you know. Think about stuff, then. I really, really don't ever have, like, breakdowns or anything. For some reason I just feel like I can balance it in my head somehow something gets done the day of so. If it needs to be done. If not, I'll just take a nap and wake up and it'll be better. Normally I just pretty much go to sleep. I'm a, what's the word, I'm like a [pause thinking] introverted person.

So I like to go, when things start to get crazy I just go to my room, lay in the bed, and gather all of my thoughts. Like if I stay around too many people too much, my mind starts to go crazy. And I'm just like, oh my gosh, I can't take it anymore. That makes me go crazy, I don't like that at all. So to me just getting back to normal, being by myself in my room. Watching TV, laying down, like getting my thoughts together myself. – LaSha, track and field

- Well, if I ever have like issues or like oh man, you know, then I'll just like you know what. That's okay, because I've gone through like worst experiences before, you know. I um, so I just take the negative and like it motivates me. And then the positive I just try to, like, incorporate into my everyday life. – Carmen, tennis
- Well, um, at first like, I had a really hard time. Like, like the first semester like, all like, it was like mid-semester just like you, when I was starting to get home sick and stuff and like, but then like, I got to like Thanksgiving. And I got to go home for a little bit and kick back. And I felt better. And then after winter break I felt so good. And coming here I kinda had to just like reset my mind. Like, and just, I kind of thought of it like. Instead of it being, like I'm at school. 'Cause I kind of just thought of it, I'm at school and I'll be

back. And um, I met a couple close friends now. It's been really cool, like, being able to hangout with them and you know. It's almost like now when I go home I miss them, you know. And also this semester has helped me a lot. Because I've joined like team united which is a, a um, like Christian Athletes. – Jessica, track and field

- All I need is prayer. If you pray for yourself every morning you're good to go. – Mary, basketball
- My bible. Kirk Franklin, or Yolanda Adams, who's from Houston. [laughing] I really like 'um. I can't think of his name. Deitrick Haddon. Read my bible, read a couple of scriptures, get my mind right, listen to gospel. Also, call my mom. All the time I talk to her like four times a day. – Bonita, track and field

Positive persons: mentor, roommate, friends

- Actually, I have a mentor that I've had. I've known him, since I guess, it's been the ninth grade....And he's like a dad to me now. He tells everybody I his daughter. I call him, well I don't call him dad 'cause its kinda awkward, but he helped me, he tells me things that I don't want to hear....And he tells me stuff that'll help me. And he also just keep me encouraged. Most of all though, I do pray a lot. I have to pray a lot and keep God first. For almost everything and keep helping me out 'cause I need it. [both laughing]...I try to stay around people that aren't negative. I try to be around the most positive person possible. Or if there is nobody like that around at that time, I just. I just call my mom or mentor. Or I just separate myself. And 'cause it's, its easy to get influenced by other people. So I just kinda try to stay to myself as much as possible and try to trust less people as possible, kinda. I don't really trust a lot of people, so that's what I do. – Sally B., basketball
- Well I want to say my roommate, she's actually on the volleyball team....So, we always talk just about life and how the things we are going through. So that really helps, just talking and just getting it out. And usually, there are like 2 or 3 people I talk to, on my team that I am really close to. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Hmm. Well, I like to talk to my friends about any problems that I'm having, really....So basically I just talk to my friends about it, other African American people, it helps...I like sharing what goes on with your friends, that always helps. Or, just talking to them on the phone. [laughing]. – Jane, track and field
- Oh man. I think um, I think that group of people that I have around me. Help me cope, because um like I said most of the people that came in with me, walked onto the team. So um, even like last year, we can understand each other better than better than a scholarship athlete would in some instances so we naturally couldn't see each other. Like, I think us going through this together. So if someone's havin' a hard day. We are, like okay, we can talk to them. Like I know how you feel like, and that was me yesterday. I know what you're going through so. We have to keep each other motivated because at the same time, man, I'm not even I' no money for this. – Char, track and field

Each young woman expressed a variety of coping strategies and survival methods within the PWI to include their athletic organization. The support of positive persons and personal isolation and enabled these young women to name, analyze, and contextualize their experiences in an effort to accept or reject their reality. The support of positive persons, conveyed as mentors, friends, and teammates would provide empathy for the situation or incident. In addition, personal isolation as LaSha expressed when "...things get hard I just go home and take a nap, and get it out of my mind, just back to normal"; or as Mary attest that, "All I need is prayer". Thus, through moments of self-isolation and verbalizing their experiences, they were able to obtain a personal balance or, as Stewart (1983) explicates, psychic equilibrium.

### *Persons of Influence*

The two questions were designed to determine the persons and/or things that were influential in the lives of the twelve African American female collegiate athletes. The questions were also designed to understand in what way the persons and/or things were influential.

*What person(s) or thing(s) have influenced your life? Describe how the person(s) or thing(s) have influenced your life.*

The previous set of questions included references of person(s) and thing(s) that were instrumental in the daily lives of the young women. I felt that the exploration and acknowledgment of these entities could provide a deeper understanding of how these young women make decisions, cope with challenges, and shape their being.

#### Friend

- Um, those who. I have a best friend and she's going through a difficult time. She plays basketball at an HBCU (Historically Black College and University). And she's pretty spiritual too. So one time, she sent me a prayer, through text messaging. And I thought that was cool. So I talk, we talk to each other about our problems and try to keep each other. Try to keep our heads up. Keep each other motivated. But um, like I said, my mom

and my mentor – whatever it is, they. They really just keep me on track, keep me going. – Sally B., basketball

### Coach

- Mostly my personal trainer (personal track coach) in high school. Like he was more just a trainer to me, he was like. Kinda like a father figure role model. ‘Cause we, like, it was more than just a personal trainer, he was not just my coach...Then he always, just, like, motivated me that I could do good. My freshman and sophomore year, I really wasn’t good in track at all. At All. Then he, like stuck with me, he was like ‘if you stick with my then I promise you’ll get a scholarship by the time you senior year, I’ll make you better’. And like, he just believed in me, that I could do so much, and so good. And I actually did. – LaSha, track and field

### Mother

- Um, my mom is positive she's real. I think it's because she's a social worker. So she sees a lot, and she says it's a lot. So, she's like, you know, regardless of what you're in, a situation, there's people who are who are worse off than you are. Yeah, I think, just I call my mom why I tell her stuff going on like this situation now is going on. She's like just stay amongst yourself, do you. She gives me a bunch of wisdom. And, I would say (my main coach from club track growing up). Um, I love him, he's cool [laughing]. (My high school coach), she's great I love her too. She calls me, she checks up on me. – Bonita, track and field
- The only person in my life, I think is my mom. And she's just an influence to me because she she's come from a lack and...and I don't know, because I hate tellin’ the story because I always cry, but. She had me when she was 16 or 17. And she didn’t. She didn't have anybody. And so I went to college with her when she went to college. She came out successful. She was the first person in our family to go to college. So, that was huge. I was the first person in our family to not have a baby and high school. But I don’t know, she just, like she made it, she’s made it through. She's moved away from where we come from and made something out of herself, which nobody else has...And I just love her. – Renee, track and field

### Family: parents, aunt, uncle, sister, brother, mother, grandmother

- Um, I would say my parents just because they’ve just taught me to always want the best, and taught me to be smart and want the best for myself. And they got me into my sport, so, yeah my parents. – Jane, track and field
- I just think my parents, um. Just how they raised me to, to where I am today. They, they always encourage me to do what I what I believe is right. As far as like morals and stuff like that, but also to believe that I could, whatever I wanted to do. I could do it as long as I put my mind to it. – Char, track and field

- Well, definitely my parents a lot of tough love. Like I said, they always stressed they can we strive to be twice as good at everything. And I'm the type that just really thorough about everything....And definitely my coaches. I've had two club coaches from high school that we're really influential. One of them was from...I played in an all-Black club during the school year. – Alyssa, volleyball
- Um well being that [my mother is] a minister, she's like prepared me a whole lot, and tells me to read the Bible and fall back on that, pretty much, when I get in trouble and whatever. I would say my aunts and uncles. Um, they're ministers as well. I call them every now and then when I feel like when I'm down sometimes, I called them so. They just a...tell me to keep going, and they pray for me and stuff like that. Um, I think that caught my aunt one time, and I didn't tell her, but I think she knew that I was having trouble and she was like pray and worry about nothing. And I do take that to heart right now. – Jordan, softball
- I can say that a...since my older sister, was an athlete herself. She went to (another) University and she was an athlete there. And she got her degree in Human Resources, so she's a bright girl. And also she can relate to what I am going through now. But I can say overall what influenced me...how I started off life I wasn't born a healthy child. I fought through a lot of emotional roller coaster. I was born with wet lungs....Wet lungs is you have water in your lungs, and you are short of breath, and all this....Ah, having. I am hearing impaired so that has been a struggle for me for a while. You know, I have...I think the biggest thing, that really got me off track, and taught me not to take life for granted is when I tore my ACL (anterior cruciate ligament). – Mary, basketball
- Yeah, I always just think about my mom, and like what she went through. And um, and then like I if I ever have questions, if I ever need to vent.  
     My Aunt a basketball coach...like she's just she's a really hard worker and um. I like the fact that, like, my mom and my aunt. They both kind of take things like, like they take a step back and the look at it in and then they assessed the situation. Like my mom and her sister like they complement each other. Like when she was weak, my mom was really strong.  
     My grandma, my mom's mom, is really sweet...she's always just been like kind of the backbone. And she's not gonna sugar coat anything, but at the same time she's older. So you know she's wise.  
     My boyfriend...been such a big influence in my life. We were, we were friends for like a long time. Actually he plays tennis so we met playing tennis. And he's always and he's like my grandma. He always has my best interest, you know. – Carmen, tennis
- Um, I mean, I mean, the most influence in my life has been my mom. Everything my whole life, everything, like. My parents are like divorced and like, it's always been my mom my brother and my sister and me. – Jessica, track and field

Throughout my collegiate years, my persons and things of influence included my mother, my father, my brother, my friends, my local church community, and Hip-Hop music. The



narratives of the twelve women expressed similar support systems that firmly supported the quantitative data obtained (the researched population (n=38)). Ultimately, friends, coach, mother, and family would emerge as the most influential persons in the lives of these young women. Nevertheless, I would be remised if I did not highlight the role of faith and religion that is prescribed as a method to assist these young women in coping with their positive and negative experiences. I believe Jordan's narrative about the role and advice of her aunt is a prime example of this sentiment "I think she knew that I was having trouble and she was like pray and worry about nothing."

*Tell me about a time or recall an incident when they influenced you decision(s).*

As stated, the influential persons also aided these young women ability to understand and cope with life decisions as students and as athletes. My parents, friends, teammates, and faith in God each provided a guiding hand in my life decisions, academic challenges, and athletic endeavors; and the same was presented for these participants.

#### Choosing to participate athletically

- At the beginning of the season. It, it's always it's more than one occasion. But I can really remember at the beginning of the season when practice was starting and it was real tough for me because I'm the one that gets picked on the most. And not understanding why. And (my parents) just say, hold on, keep your head up. Stuff like that. So I'll, call them. And anything dealing with my life they'll help. I can tell them anything so. – Sally B., basketball
- My go to person in track would be (my personal track coach in high school), if I had needed, like, help with anything. Like, on what decision should I make....Like (he) talked to the coaches here. – LaSha, track and field
- Like, don't ever like to limit yourself and especially like my decision to try to like walk on here. They, (my parents), were very influential on that. It's like what's the worst that can happen to you? Oh, you don't make it oh okay is like you were on the team not to say mean you weren't even on the team. Like so, you know, just try and see what happens. – Char, track and field

### Choosing the collegiate institution

- Well, they (my parents) help me choose, like, school that I was looking at. – Jane, track and field
- (My parents with), probably coming to (this institution) in the first place. – Alyssa, volleyball

### Life choices

- (My mom) encouraged me. If I do anything, and she's just always there to support me. And she's not the type of person, she's real. Like instead of being in denial and you know trying to keep me sheltered. She was there helping me go through situations and make the right choices, because she made a lot of bad choices. Yeah, and so like she just helped and she just reminds me every day to, you know, think before. She's every day, telling me just not conform, I guess. Just don't be who people want you to be. – Renee, track and field
- Not really [laughing]. It's just funny cause like, I don't know. Me and my mom, it's so funny 'cause like I care so much about what my mom says. But, like, me and my mom are almost like opposites. It's just how we think about things. And, so, like, it's just the fact that like my mom has done so much. Like, she's like given like her life its like. For me, my brother, and sister. [emotional with acknowledging her mother's love and efforts throughout the duration of her life]. – Jessica, track and field
- No, because they're (mom, aunt, grandma, and boyfriend) all like intermingled. They really are because anytime I have a big decision I asked, like, those for people, like, besides my little sister and I'll, like, ask her, and she's, like, whatever you want to do. So, you know they're all intermingled it's not, like, I ever just ask, like, you know, its all of those people, you know. – Carmen, tennis

The persons of influence included friends, coach, mother, and family. As such, the type of decisions they were attributable to revolved around the following: choosing to participate in athletics, choosing to come to this collegiate institution, and making important decisions within their lives. It is my belief that the role and function of these persons further supported the factors used to comprise the formation of their identity.

### *Experiences as an Athlete, African American, and Female*

The six questions were designed to address the experiences specific to the theoretical notions of critical race theory and Black feminist thought. The goal of these questions were to allow the

young women to voice their positive and negative experiences as an African American female athlete at a PWI. My own tenure was demarked by athletic, racial, and gendered experiences that I felt played a role in the development of my identity.

*What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as an athlete? What made these experiences positive experiences?*

The first identity construct entailed their athletic status and participation. The positive athletic perspective was filled with a variety of reflections: academic accolades, volunteerism, support from the athletic administration, fans, teammates and coaches; improved self-confidence and self-esteem; and the experience of competition and winning. Each young woman was able to determine an aspect about their athletic endeavor that brought them joy either personally or using their status as athletes to help others.

Athletic service: community service, role model

- I would say positive experiences would be going to do volunteer work. Like, going to the Boys and Girls Club, and them looking up to us and saying, wow. Really admiring us, and we just making them happy 'cause I love kids. I love to see people smile, especially kids. So that was, a big. That was a positive experience for me. And going to the hospital and seeing the people light up when we came in, with the posters and stuff. So I think that was my favorite actually. – Sally B., basketball
- When I see like younger people. For instance, the parade when I see like younger people. Really, really looking up to us and wanting to be like us in a sense. They put us on a pedestal like, like they want to be us or you do something that they like or that they might admire in us. – Char, track and field

Athletic support: program structure, coaches, teammates, privilege

- I think we have a great athletic program, and they do a great job of um, if you need something. As far as like a specific class, or, you know. Like, they always try to accommodate, you know, they're athletes so, they, can, you know do well in their classes. So I think that's, that's a positive....I would say winning the AC (athletic conference) championship was pretty big, for me. – Carmen, tennis
- One time I was at practice with my coach. And it was um, it was pretty much just me and my coach. 'Cause a couple people were out because they were sick or something. And so

it was just pretty much just me and my coach; and I was throwing and he was like telling me to do this or this or whatever. And um, I don't know, I was just having an awesome practice. Great, like, I felt so good. Javelin was like flying crazy far. And my coach was just like after, after my practice was over he was like, "Jessica this is, this is really good. I'm really happy I can't wait 'til we go compete. I'm looking forward to this." I'm like yeah, this is awesome. He's like, he was just saying, he was pretty much saying I can't wait to see what happens with my throwing career and stuff. – Jessica, track and field

- Um, I can't think of anything in particular, but as an athlete. My positive experiences would probably come from me being with my team. Just because we go through all the hard work together and we always come out in the end together and we always finish in the struggle. And in the end it just helps, like, it helps make us better, so. That is a positive thing. – Jane, track and field

- Man, its so much, just, um. Well first of all the travel and just being with my teammates, all the places we got to go. It's just it's a lot of fun to camaraderie that you get with your teammates. And I would say definitely my experience with SAAC, the student athlete advisory council.

We just get. I didn't realize how many things we had a say in. It's gone, so we get to have that and we get to do service.

Well, we did at huge can drive. The AC (athletic conference) can drive, this semester, because we've done things like go to elementary schools. That's what we mainly do. And we go we sign autographs with like a bunch of other athletes. A lot of cool things we've done. And I'm also the representative for the AC. So I join the conference calls, and I get to see, we talk about legislation, and we have a lot of say in what the rules are an AC. – Alyssa, volleyball

- I get, lots of stuff, lots of Nike stuff. [laughing]. I just love it is wonderful. I love getting stuff that I don't have to pay for. Um, the tutoring. Where I have my own tutors. My private tutors. All to myself. – Bonita, track and field
- I think just being here as an athlete has been positive on me because of all of the good things that come with it. How like, all the benefits of being an athlete. And having formed that family bond, kinda, with the team, and the coaches. Being able to live, and not having to live in the dorm, the regular dorm. You know just, not, I guess kinda getting good treatment. Like going to the games, getting to the games, and getting to know more athletes. 'Cause that's my whole life I've been with athletes. So, I don't know, we all click or whatever. So just getting to know more people, and getting exposed, like, to different types of people. – Renee, track and field

#### Athletic participation: winning, playing

- I have to say like winning the championship and being around my teammates has been a positive experience here. – Jordan, softball

- As an athlete? I never focused on as an athlete, the positive things. You know, I just go out there and just play. – Mary, basketball

Personal accomplishment: self-confidence, academic achievement

- Hmm [pause] Probably getting the Round Table Academic Award, for like good grades. I had, I think I had the best GPA (grade point average) last semester....I've been on the SEC honor roll, and that's the like, and I'm glad about that because I'm not just, a, you know, people just think athletes are here just getting by getting by making 2.0's and I have above a 3.0....So, I'm really happy about that. And it is that I can balance school still, and run track, and do my sorority, and work, and everything. I'm just proud of myself for all of that. – LaSha, track and field
- Most positive, um. [Long pause] I don't know. Maybe probably helped with more of a, my self confidence....It's more personal, like, um, just go there. Maybe be more outgoing, just, and ...Also I've gotten to see my names in newspapers and stuff....When it happens it's good. So it's positive. – Nikki, gymnastics

The range of positive experiences expressed were categorized as athletic service, athletic support, athletic participant, and personal accomplishment. Each personal testimony highlighted their most central positive experience as an athlete, which begin to shed light on the meaningfulness of the experience, or phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990).

*What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as an athlete? What made these experiences negative experiences?*

The young women represented an array of negative examples based on their athletic experience. The emergent voices reflected stereotyped incidents of athletic privilege and academic inequities. The resultant experiences were isolation and alienation based solely on their athletic status.

Athletic privilege

- One thing, a lot of, people always say. Like, people who aren't athletes, like to um, say how um, how we get treated better and everything. And they like to rub it in your face. And try to make you feel bad about it. And like there was one class where, um, it was a small class so we knew each other and we talked the people. So like, they would always say, 'Well, she's an athlete, she doesn't need help she just has a tutor' and, you know, 'she's a athlete, I'm sure your going to pass her anyway'. And I don't, I work hard, you

know. I earn my grade. And I don't want people thinking that I, um, am getting by because I'm an athlete. – Renee, track and field

### Intellectual inferiority

- Probably some of the... when things come out of the newspaper about athletes, ah bringing, like, graduation rates down. They, like, generalize everybody that just with people that are like bringing them down. – Jordan, softball
- Um, not really negative, like, really any bad things. That is just, it just goes back to being, like so people don't thing athletes like really deserve to be here. Well not to be here, but you know some people don't think athletes are a smart as others and that the school, kinda favors them. That's kinda of, well it's not negative, negative, negative, 'cause I don't really take it that way. – Jane, track and field
- Probably people just say it we stupid. And like just comments about athletes like yeah ya'll don't do nothing' and 'ya'll just go to practice' you know' you don't care about school'. We're not concerned about school, and I'll just, because and you know some people may not be, but they're just, like, stereotyping based on maybe like one or two situations that may have heard about. – Char, track and field
- Yes, the negative experience that I have was having the Red and Black (university student newspaper) write in the paper how they (the teachers and Athletic administration) um, have to poke sticks at the athletes to show them how to read a book. It made me really angry, because of the fact that I do work so hard, and the fact that they stereotype athletes. – Carmen, tennis

### Athletic superiority

- Oh, I heard the stereotypes, even at football games. You know, I had to correct a guy one time. I think one of our varsity football players, he didn't catch a pass. The guy said, "Your Black. You're supposed to be fast enough to catch that." I turned around like excuse me. I said, "Are you drunk? First of all, are you drunk?" And he said "No." And he looked at me and he put his head down. [Mary asked], "So you really think all Black people are fast, huh? So what are all White people, slow?" And he didn't say nothing.  
So, I don't know, we're like puppets. This is how I see it. We're like, puppets, and ya'll play with us and ya'll have fun. And once they get tired of us, they throw us away. Because ya'll not gonna remember my name 10 years from now. – Mary, basketball

### Social isolation and alienation

- Um, let's see. Being, um, just not having time to be, like just. There's just no student, it's just athlete. Like to don't have time to be, to know the rest of the student body. Like none of the freshmen, being a freshman. How people, the freshman stay in the freshman dorms, and you have to room with certain people, but the athlete. Your staying in (dorms with more athletes and upperclassmen), you have like your own bedroom, and you own,

like....It's very secluded, not secluded, but just like. Your doing your own thing, while other freshman, like all the other freshman are over there. There's no getting to know everybody, living in the freshman dorms, having the hallway chit-chats....Like, everything is just so, like, separate. Like, it the athlete world, and theirs like a regular student body. I mean, it's good and it's bad. It's bad because, I just, I don't know that many people, like, normal people, like for a student. – LaSha, track and field

- Like being an athlete on a team, there are some negative things about it being the fact that a, like, your associated as that team. And then certain people of that team do things that are like. When they do certain things, that, I don't know. I don't know, like, anything like negative. Like you kind of associated with their bad behaviors. Or things we're um, their not thinking responsibly. Like, your, you see, even though you have nothing to do with it. You weren't there around the time, you weren't anything. Just because your on that team as an athlete. Your saw a like a person who did that, you know.

The situation was the fact that a couple of girls on the female track team, like, they ended up, like, just like, doing things. Like sexual things, that associated like the entire. Like all of a sudden it was know as the women's track team. So whenever I would say, "oh I'm an athlete." They'll go, "oh what team?" The women's track team. They'll go, "oh." [both laughing]. You know. – Jessica, track and field

- Um, sometimes. It just really gets on my nerves when regular students they say "oh I haven't seen you before have you, do you go here?" I'm like "yes" and like. I don't know if this really relates to me as a athlete though. But just because, like, I'm doing my own thing practice wise and just not in always in groups, or sororities, or activities, or whatever they do. They always, like, assume that I don't do anything, or something. I just want to like, 'How do you know everybody on campus, are you serious?' [both laughing]. – Nikki, gymnastics

#### Team dynamic: politics, decorum, coaching transition

- Most negative experience would be [long pause]. Negative experience would be [long pause]. I guess, just the difficulties of being on the team, I guess. Not understanding why some things are the way they are. As far as, um, decisions that coach making about playing, different people. And the way, things, things don't. No freedom...I mean, a, we can't, we can't go downtown....I wouldn't want to go downtown every night and get drunk or anything like that. I would just want to be able to have the freedom to go if I wanted to, and just be responsible. – Sally B., basketball
- Negative experience. You can't do crap as an athlete [laughing]. I went to the Level (local college dance club) one time. We went just to have fun, just to unwind, just to relax, nobody was drinkin'. Yes, we was dancin' the little, seductively. Somehow, it got to the head coach of the track team, and we all got in trouble that day so. I was like dang, we can even go to the Level! So now, I still go to the Level. I go. That didn't stop me. I just tried to stay conservative, and what now we just stay in our little groups. – Bonita, track and field

- Oh gosh, probably the. Probably just like the whole transition to a new coach. We just got a new coach this year. It's just been really, really tough. So everything really changed. – Alyssa, volleyball

The negative experiences as an athlete constituted: athletic privilege; athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority; social isolation and alienation; and the politics of the team dynamic, which were laden with Black racial overtones. The Black racial notions that manifested were in the areas of 1) athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority, as presented by; Jordan, Jane, Char, and Carmen; and 2) social isolation and social alienation, as presented by LaSha, Jessica, and Nikki (Hawkins, 2001; Sailes, 1998). In addition, the team dynamic, contextualized by the structured dynamic of the athletic association was described as both political, through Sally B.'s the example of unexplained coaching decisions; and, traditional, as expressed by Bonita's dismay with the restricted social life that must be maintained due to the social visibility and vulnerability as a collegiate athlete. It should be noted that the later experience, is indeed correct, as the social and entertainment options are limited to predominantly white establishments that consist of drinking bars and nightclubs. Therefore, due to the racial makeup of these female collegiate athletes, it is inherently difficult to blend in to the sociocultural environment of the predominantly white college town.

*What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as an African American?*

*What made these experiences positive experiences?*

The second identity construct entailed experiences based on their African American race. The experiences and/or acknowledgement as an African American at a predominantly white institution can be pronounced due to the minority status in the classroom and on campus. My positive experiences as an African American were through classroom engagement and academic courses that were specific to my African American heritage; and attending socials and special



events specific to racial heritage. The participants expressed similar experiences; however, not everyone could recall a positive experience as an African American.

#### Role model: athlete, African American

- I guess the thing that everybody like if you're athlete like everybody kind of looks up to you. – Jordan, softball
- As an African American. [pause] I don't know, I guess I can say I'm pretty proud to be an African American here because there aren't a lot of African Americans here. Even though I am an athlete, I think I can still hang, even if I didn't have an athletic scholarship. – Sally B., basketball

#### Racial consciousness through education

- Ah, probably just all the courses I've taken and how much I've learned about, because I take every course that has to do with race. Because, I guess there's so much I didn't know. And at first I just took it because I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn about stuff in my community. African American history, culture or whatever. And see what else I have to learn. And I wanted to know myself. Especially this semester I have taken a lot of classes about that because I'm a history minor as well. – Alyssa, volleyball
- I have no idea. There's not, there's not. I see there's not a lot of stuff for African Americans at (this university). I'm taking African American Studies now, this semester. So I'm starting to see some things, and hear about some good things. Oh yeah, I signed up for BEST but I just can't make the meetings. – Bonita, track and field

#### Social acknowledgment: African American organization and affiliation

- Um, [long pause] I don't know about a most positive thing, but I just feel like the university recognizes how um African Americans are minorities and they offer a lot of opportunities, like a groups so you can get to know, join. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Probably just the, just have heard or maybe seeing the Black organization and the Blacks on this campus trying to come together and do something positive. And maybe like try to erase stereotypes that show that like to gather up black people can do positive things like care about the community or perform community service  
One I guess encounter of for, like over last Thanksgiving, we went to my coach's church and helped out. It was the track team, the women's track team, and we help out. They had liked the less fortunate, to their church, and they gave them like showers, and they had close and like they were doing their hair and cutting hair. And we were just there and just being there and you could feel like they were happy and they were just talking to us and not even about track. – Char, track and field

- Like, as an African American on this campus it almost seems like. Like certain things, like certain events that happen on this campus. It's like, if your not African American and you go to these events, your out of place. So it's almost like, me being an African American going to these events, for me it's like, it's almost like a privilege to be African American. I don't know, like. I don't know if that's the right thing to say, but like. But like, sometimes. I don't know, cause its just different. 'Cause we don't like, back home, we don't have like the fraternities, the Black fraternities and sororities and stuff. We don't have that kind of stuff back home.

Like going to some of the probates (Greek sorority and fraternity initiation ceremony), and stuff, and like watching that. It's like, it's like I feel, I feel like whoa this is awesome. This is a privilege to be here. Like being an African American and watch other people join in and um in probate, for new members of the fraternity. I don't know, that's been a big thing to me. – Jessica, track and field

- One thing, they have the BEST (Black Educational Support Team) – it is designed as a peer mentoring organization to support incoming Black freshmen students) Association, or whatever its called....And meeting my BEST counselor....Meeting other freshmen, other Black freshmen comin' in. You know, people who you can relate to, you talk to, who are going through the same difficulty with change, that your going through. – Renee, track and field
- Um, I couldn't even say. At a school that justifies an African American or nothing like that. [pause] Like well I guess like maybe joining a sorority, like, being the first chartered. Like finally coming back and being a part of that after so many years. – LaSha, track and field

#### Minority status overshadows positive racial encounters

- Like distinguishing a positive to being African-American on campus. Nothing! – Carmen, tennis
- On this campus?...How can it be positive on this campus when you're part of a minority group? I didn't know we really had Black guys until I really got outside the athlete world. You know, I've read, other than that all of athletes are Black. And when I go out to parties like, where are all the Black people, where are they. I don't see anything positive being African-American on this campus. – Mary, basketball

#### Abstention

- That can be one of my skipped questions. – Jane, track and field

The young women presented experiences of: being a role model; acquiring racial consciousness through education; and social acknowledgement through participation in programs and organizations specifically for African Americans or Black students. Conversely, the voices of

Carmen and Mary were significant. Each emphatically stated, specifically Mary, that there was nothing positive about “being an African American on this campus”. I believe their negative encounters, coupled with their minority status, overshadowed any inkling of positive racial experience.

*What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as an African American?*

*What made these experiences negative experiences?*

The previous question alludes to the forthcoming negative experiences for these young women, as it was a much easier exercise for them to recall negative racial experiences than positive experiences. My negative experiences as an African American were defined by intersections of social, personal, gendered, and athletic notions. The narratives represented here were detail oriented, extremely candid, filled with anger and frustration. Whether they were seen as an athlete or a Black student, the results were the same, academic and athletic stereotypes based on race prevailed as the dominant impetus for personal discrimination. Yet, the findings of the quantitative inventory reflected minimal experiences with racial discrimination. As such, throughout the interviews, I felt that the expressed experiences were not only a revelation for me, but for these African American female athletes as well.

#### Minority status

- As an African-American...[long pause] hmmm. I don't know. It's clearly is that where a minority here [giggle matter of factly]. – Char, track and field
- Um, [pause]. Maybe that it's still always very few Black students in the classes that I'm taking....I've always gone to and there's just a majority whites, and it's just always the same. I just sit in class like 'how many of us, and like okay' ....So, yes. I do notice right away. – Nikki, gymnastics
- I really don't. I don't know why, maybe because it's not many of us. It's hard to find us. Unless we have a gathering every now and, like, a step show or sorority party or fraternity party. I don't know. And then the only Black kid in the classroom, you know I feel like outsider, and sometimes I forget that I really am the only Black person on this

bus, or in the classroom, or at this table. You know, but some people... They look at you differently, I think that they are intimidated by me because I am Black. And I'm 6'5" and I would say that really makes it worse.

I'm here (and) even watching my brother (who also attends this university) being a part of one experience. He got, my brother got arrested. His freshman year, but he didn't do anything. He returned a phone, but this girl thought my brother stole the phone. He found the phone on the bus. He returned it. She a 'defenseless little White girl', and (she) called the police officers, and had him arrested on campus. – Mary, basketball

### Perceived intellectual inferiority

- I took an English class last semester. He, I guess he, said I plagiarized one my papers. I, I guess, I don't know. I'm not the type of person. I don't plagiarize, and if I write, if I take somebody's work, I know I cite my work. So we went to the meeting, and it all came down to the fact that I'm the only black girl in the class and then I'm an athlete. And it all came down to, he said my priorities weren't straight. I'm an African-American athlete and I need to worry about academics first and then my athletics later....(It was) a white professor for English 101. I'm the only one, yes, I saw that the first day that I was the only black girl, but I didn't think we was gonna have any issues. – Bonita, track and field
- Oh, man. I had this teacher. Yeah, last semester I had this teacher, and she ah. It was very strange 'cause I couldn't find another reason why it was me, but because I am African American. Because what ended up happening was, ah, she didn't give me the grade that I deserved.

And she said that. Like 'cause I had a meeting with her after I had gotten the grade. Or I got the grade and then had a meeting with her why she didn't count certain points towards my grade. And I asked her, and um, she just told me that I was disruptive and that she wasn't gonna give me extra points, and I was like, 'I'm not asking for extra points. I'm asking for the points I deserve'. The thing is, the fact I would go to class, with other people that were a part of my team. And they're all Caucasian. And I was the only African American one in the class. And in the class of my group of friends, or whatever. And all of them got the points that they deserved. But when it came to me asking for the points I deserved in class assignments and stuff. She said I was disruptive, and she didn't feel I deserved that grade.

And I, I didn't know what to do, it really like hurt me. [pause] I don't know, like, it made me like cry. I was really like angry. – Jessica, track and field

### Racism: social, personal

- Um, like people saying all the time you eat chicken. Like I had a person come up to me. We asked her what she wanted to eat, and she said well I know you guys you all know you all like to eat chicken. I didn't say anything I just kind of ignored her that cause she's one of those people (a white girl) that really did grow up around black people, so that is why I let it go. – Jordan, softball

- Um, there's not one big situation or anything, but there are. There are people here who, like, there White people here who have made it clear that they don't like Black people. You know. And um, there's just little stuff that happens, you know. It just, it's apparent that it's racial. And like in class, one time, we were reading and there was something a White student had wrote in her paper using the N-word. You know, it, it's a rude awakening kinda. 'Cause in high school and middle school, I've never went through anything like that. So coming here, racism is here. You know, it's everywhere I'm sure. – Renee, track and field
- I had an incident. It was hard for me to understand how um, confederate flags are kind of acceptable. It was really hard. I had to deal with that. Like this is my fifth year, and I've had to had to deal with that for. You know what I'm saying; I've had to see it. – Carmen, tennis

#### Absence of racism

- Um [pause]. I can't really think of anything. – Jane, track and field
- Um, I really can't think of a negative experience being an African American here. – Sally B., basketball
- Um, [pause]. I really don't see, like, racism on campus. I don't really, to me I don't really look. I guess they say if you look for it you'll find it. But I never really looked for it, I never really said 'oh their doing that because I'm Black or anything. – LaSha, track and field

#### Consciousness through education

- There's got to be something I just can't think right now. Because it seems like everybody tries to be so politically correct about race and stuff. That I'm really trying to think of something. Um, as an African-American [long pause]. The only thing I can think of. I guess if I take all of these African-American classes I call myself racially conscious. And I don't know, I guess that's not really a negative experience of being an African-American. – Alyssa, volleyball

These young women negative experiences were being a minority, perceived intellectual inferiority, and experiences with personal and social racism. However, Alyssa reflected that despite the negative realities and experiences, she arms herself with knowledge of her African American racial heritage; and thus, deems herself racially conscious. Conversely, Jane, Sally B., and LaSha have failed to either see, experience, or acknowledge any negative occurrences based their racial status. Nevertheless, whether conscious or unconscious, positive or negative, the

articulated experiences emerged as racial microaggressions, and as dominant and overlapping in the athletic, the academic, and the social spaces.

*What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as a female? What made these experiences positive experiences?*

The third, and final identity construct, entailed their gender as females. During my own experiences as an African American female collegiate athlete, there were multiple opportunities of acknowledgement. As a female, my positive experiences consisted of serving as women's track and field team co-captain for two years at the University of Houston. I also had the opportunity to serve as the female track and field team representative for the Student Athletic Advisory Board, a student athlete based committee designed to represent the voice of the athlete and serve to assist in policies affecting the student athlete. The experiences represented by these young women were a bit surprising in their lack of expressed positive experiences.

#### Absence of gendered experiences

- I don't even know. I don't really think about it as female. – LaSha, track and field
- Well, not that I can really think of. – Sally B., basketball
- Um, [pause] no. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Not really, ah. There, not, the only thing that happens being a female are bad. Not bad, but, you know nothing has happened, like, "oh I'm glad I'm a girl." – Renee, track and field
- I don't know... No. – Jordan, softball
- Um, I don't really know. Like, I really can't remember anything that would, like, to distinguish like yeah she's a female. Like, you know, or anything like that. – Carmen, tennis
- Hmm. I don't know. – Char, track and field

- Um, as a female. I don't know. [laughing]. I guess there's lots of positive things about being a female. Um, I don't know. I can't think of anything specific. – Jessica, track and field

#### Social engagement: sexuality, physicality

- Um, as a female here [long pause]. A lot of boys like me. [laughing a lot]. You get a lot of attention, like, me being a female. I think the black female athlete. Because you got that body. Probably from that runnin'. – Bonita, track and field

#### Athletic achievement

- I could say being the first female to have in her jersey retired, in high school. I thought that was the biggest thing ever, and I said. My mom said, "You're the first female. How does that feel?" I said I don't know. But I guess, all I can say is I'm probably the best female athlete to come here to just to have that privilege. – Mary, basketball

#### Academic achievement

- Um, I guess just being looked at as a smart female for going to school here, I guess. Yeah, being, havin' good grades and stuff. Actually being here, is kinda good. – Jane, track and field

#### Majority status

- I guess just because it's so many more of us here. There is, I don't know who, I only know.... – Alyssa, volleyball

As you can see, there were limited expression of, and identification with, the female aspect of each of their experiences. However, there were four experiences reflecting social acknowledgement, athletic achievement, academic achievement, and having a majority status. The latter, majority status, as females represent approximately 60% (n=20,299) of the university student population.

*What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as a female? What made these experiences negative experiences?*

The negative expressions as female present more detailed and specific experiential accounts. My negative experiences are vivid in comparison to my positive experiences; as I experienced daily objectification based on my female and athletic status. For example, whether

practicing, competing, or just walking on campus in athletic attire commentary and interest in my person were based solely on my physicality, and the adjoining stereotypes that came with it.

#### Sexual orientation: lesbian stereotype

- Yeah, like a playing sports, especially softball. Some of my teammates are like lesbians, and so they assume you are a lesbian sometime. So it's kind of a downfall. – Jordan, softball
- Um, I haven't....Well, I guess a lot of people assume that female athletes, especially basketball players, are lesbians. Which I'm not, and a lot of my teammates aren't. – Sally B., basketball

#### Sexual objectification

- Well going downtown, and. Hanging, just hanging around boys. Being a girl, it, you. No actually men....When you realize that these are men and you are a woman. You know, and men want what they want and, you know, and they have one thing on their mind....Well, [laughing] Sex....But like, even just being an athlete, you have a nice body and, I'm not cocky, but like you. You go downtown and you wear your, you know, your little skirt, you know, your outfit....It's just like, wow, can I go somewhere without you trying to touch on me, you know. And without you grabbin' me. – Renee, track and field
- Um, [pause]. Well just like when maybe when we go downtown with just us girls, just the females. The guys are just like yelling, and just touching you. And it's like please don't touch me, I don't know you. – Nikki, gymnastics
- It was the distribution of the pornographic pictures last year on campus. At the USC (University Student Center). Um, apparently, a (white) fraternity on campus decided that it would be funny to distribute only African American pornographic pictures at the (University Student) Center. – Carmen, tennis

#### Title IX and athletic parity

- Oh, I'll tell you one thing, that really I'm very passionate about because I think its, like ridiculous. Even though Title IX and all this stuff. I think like, I think football players really have it made. I think football players have it made. Like, its ridiculous. Like male football, like it's all like males and football, you know. And it's just like, it's like that sport is above all other sports because it's football, and its glorified, and duh-duh-da-da-da. But when it comes to other sports. You can't get as high as football. But then that means that women in sports can't get as high as football, you know. – Jessica, track and field
- They (the athletics association) try to make everything equal to guys. Like you have the men's basketball team. You have a women's basketball team. Yeah, yes. As far as that.



And everything. I don't see anybody getting any special privileges, other than, you know, the football team. But that's who brings in the most money. So you know, I guess. – Bonita, track and field

- Um, [pause] Maybe as a female athlete guys don't think we work as hard or they don't think we try as hard maybe. [pause] Yeah, probably that, is the most negative thing I can think of. They think we're favored, as females. Females are favored. – Jane, track and field
- Um, (I'd) probably say maybe not. Maybe not getting the a proper credit, even from like males on the team like they think what we do is easy and like we don't work as hard as they work. They don't totally respect us as athletes. They think that they feel that they work harder than we do. – Char, track and field

#### Traditional/Victorian gender role

- Oh yea, I think they (people on this campus) really women think should be in the kitchen, having kids, I don't know why. You should go strive for a higher education. – Mary, basketball

#### Absence of gender experience

- I really can't think of anything is again females are like the majority. – Alyssa, volleyball
- Um, [long pause]. I don't think nothing ever stands out. – LaSha, track and field

The experiences presented expressed a multitude of overlapping issues from: Title IX and athletic parity; to issues of sexism and physical objectification; to the lack of acknowledgement for their hard work and athletic abilities. Notwithstanding were the emergent themes of sexual orientation, for example Jordan and Sally B.'s acknowledgement of the lesbian stereotype due to their participation in male affiliated sports; while Mary battled the traditional, or Victorian, notion of womanhood. Whether they are a first year student or a fifth year student, African American female collegiate athletes are not immune to the experiences based on their age, revenue or non-revenue sport status, or athletic or academic achievement. Again, these same issues were present during my tenure, and appear to be a mainstay within realm of intercollegiate athletics.

*If you were of rank order athlete, African American, and female where would you see yourself?*

*Would you rank them in an order or would they have equal rank?*

When I crafted this question, I wondered how I would have answered it during my tenure. I came to the conclusion that I could have answered as any one of these participants, and as such my answer could have varied for a number of reasons either based on my experiences, the guidance I received from my parents and mentors, or living vicariously through the realities of my peers. Nevertheless, the young women each presented a response that would provide a) clarity regarding self-description, or self-definition, and b) specificity regarding the three foci of athlete, African American, and female identities in the collegiate environment.

#### Athlete

- I just identify myself more of an athlete, first of all. Just because I just feel that's what made me, kind of like who I am. Yeah. And then an African American. – Nikki, gymnastics

#### African American

- I see myself as an African-American female athlete. Because when people look at me they see a black girl first. And then they see a young woman, and, um, and they might not know it but I'm an athlete. And, I mean, I feel like, um, those things are. I think, those to me are more important in that order. I mean, because I am African-American. I'm proud to be an African-American, and I'm female, and I like being a female, proud to be a female. And I'm an athlete and I love being an athlete and, um, black. And I'm a woman before I'm an athlete. – Sally B., basketball
- I would say I am a African American female athlete. I'm African American and I will always be. And I, I don't plan on being a athlete for the rest of my life. I plan on being in sports, but not an athlete. And I'll always be a female. You know [laughing] – Renee, track and field
- African American, female, and then athlete....Because I am always aware of my cultural background. You know, I'm not gonna be that Black girl that act White. You know, just to fit in. I'ma be myself. I would say female next, because that gon' be, because I think that's mandatory. Race, gender, and then your status. Athlete. I will always be an African American. I will always be a female. But my athlete, the title of the athlete will not always be there. – Mary, basketball

- Um, well if I had to rank it, I would say. An African American, and then a female, and then athlete. Because first, at this school I like to just identify with people that are like me, I'm African American. And then going further I would see a female versus male. And then I to have my little label as an athlete. [laughing] – Jane, track and field
- I think African American first 'cause that's what people see on the outside. And a lot of people don't know I'm an athlete because I don't dress like it in class and stuff. And they wouldn't know, I don't necessarily look like an athlete. Ah, and I guess athlete second because people will find out that over time, that I am one. And because that's the second biggest part of my life. And of course being, I don't know, I don't know, if it's being African American would be first. But it's like the biggest part of my life. That's something that I'll have all the time. Female (third). It's just 'cause I always think of it...because I'm in a sorority as well. I'm a UGA bulldog first and then sorority girl second. It's just like, um, there's just so many females here. Being female hasn't really affected my experience very much. – Alyssa, volleyball
- I would say African American, athlete, female because I take pride in being an African American, as far as, heritage and where I come from. Athlete, because it is a large part of the activity I engage in and the people I am surrounded with. Female, is not a big part, in that it's not influencing decisions I make as much as the other two. – Char, track and field

#### Female

- I would say first female, African American, and then athlete....Once I'm done with college, you know, and I'm retire like you. I just want to be done, and be an ex-athlete. 'cause I don't want people to think of me as, oh she's just an athlete, but to know that she had other things going on in her life. – LaSha, basketball
- Ah, I probably rank it. I'd probably be a, female, and African American and then an athlete. Okay, female first of all 'cause its like a big category of things. You know female-male. And then African American, because I mean, in a way, like race kind of. Race is starting to like mix, you know. It's like it's not as strong as, like, it's not as strong and like relevant. Well it's still relevant, but it's not as strong as it used to be. You know what I mean. It's not as strong as being a female. Like, being a female because that means your physical, you know, the way you act. Like it's almost like, she's still a double standard, stuff like that. And like African American, being an African American. I mean it's still strong within me. It's just like, I mean, it's not something that I want to be judged upon as. You know what I mean, I don't want people to see and only see, you know what I mean? So then being an athlete because and athlete is what I do, not who I am necessarily. – Jessica, track and field
- No, first I think I would be female first. Because yeah. I'm very sensitive. So I would rank myself female first athlete second, because when it's time to go. It's time to go when it's time to produce I'm down, I'm down, I'm down [each 'I'm down' said with emphasis]. Yeah, yeah, (African American) that would be last. – Bonita, track and field

### Equal rank

- I think that any time, if I were to like rank them. It would be hard because, like well, like you know, as soon as you think that like one's really important. There is always a comment that someone will make you think it was actually just as important, you know. So, I think that they would all pretty much be all about the same. – Carmen, tennis
- I would rank them all the same. They all carry the same weight because I don't want nobody to see me just as an athlete, I want them to see me just as a person. – Jordan, softball

Each young woman expressed their own perspective: six of the participants viewed themselves as African American first, four as female first, one as athlete first, and two explained that the three identities ranked equally. I believe the varied responses can be attributed to the degree of impact based on the positive and negative experiences of the three categorical identities, as well as, interactions with the persons of influence. But, how would these young women describe themselves without the categorical parameters?

### *How would you describe yourself today?*

An opportunity to describe themselves without parameters was warranted. Therefore, I asked the participants “How would you describe yourself today, without categories, who are you?” The African American females presented in this study described themselves as strong, diverse, mature, intelligent, determined, and just me. At the closing of our interviews, I could feel the relief and empowerment as they walked away. I believe they left feeling more assured and comfortable in knowing that I, an African American female athlete listened, understood, and was proud of who they had become.

### Strong person

- I am. I get, I get stronger every day, mentally and physically really. But, um, I'm a young woman, young African American woman who has her mind, her head on straight. I'm not perfect by any means, but I try my best to do what's right, everyday. – Sally B., basketball

- I definitely believe I am a strong black female woman that knows how to hold my, hold my own. And be a very independent person that I don't need to depend on anyone to get me what I want....Like I don't need, I can have your help, but I don't need your help. My attitude is like, I don't need your help I can do it myself. Like, if it takes forever in a day I'll do it, just so I can do it myself. – LaSha, track and field
- I think I am a, I think I'm a stronger person than I was before I came here. I think I can handle a lot more. I've also probably become more independent. Probably more open to meeting new people, because I've met a lot of different types of people. You know, once you get to college you meet people from everywhere. Everybody's different. – Char, track and field

#### Diverse person

- I'm so much. I'm very diverse, just a very different kind of person. Like, all about peace and all about, you know, causes and. I, I try to, you know, I love people...I just, I'm very open minded, I guess. And a, but I'm very honest too. And it's gotten me in trouble sometimes. – Renee, track and field

#### Mature person

- I am Mary, the only one. I mean, I would say I'm a young woman that knows how to carry herself. I have a great supporting cast. Like my family that has really helped me out. I think I'm a chore, and I think that's the biggest thing being an athlete is to mature and I think I know what I really want in life now. I can make my own decisions on what I want for my future. Instead of having all these people sayin'. You should do this, you should do that. I'm really seein' now, more of what I wanted to live, because I will have to deal with it, not you. – Mary, basketball
- I feel like I'm a bit more mature. I'm stronger, because like just the situations that I've been through. And what I have witnessed from, like, taking a step back and watching it. Like, they've all made me stronger as a person. – Carmen, tennis

#### Intelligent person

- An intelligent woman, and athletic...that even though I may be a minority in school I still strive for the best. – Nikki, gymnastics

#### Determined person

- Um, determined...um let's see. I guess I would say calm. I mean. Because I don't let too much get to me because in the end, it's not going...I'm not a let it affect me in, I can only affect myself. – Jordan, softball
- I'm really determined, and like I say, committed. I really liked to think. I'm not a perfectionist, but I really like things to be appropriate. I like to show how committed I

am, because if someone says bring in the list of the directions for something I'll do it and color printing and word art and make it look real nice. And that means a lot to me, and I'm just really thorough about things. I guess I'm really cautious. I don't like, especially financially, I'm always like, I always want to wait before I purchase something. I'm always like calculating before I make a decision on something. – Alyssa, volleyball

### Just Me

- Um, I am Jane. [laughing-possibly at the potential simplicity of the question]. And I go to school at (this university) and I'm a black female athlete and I run track. And I'm gonna be a pharmacist [laughing]. – Jane, track and field
- Who am I? I'm "Jessica". And I am, I am me. [laughing]. I'm a student at this university. I am confident, and I ah, I'm responsible. I am athletic and I am a female. I'm a strong female. I'm a strong African American female. And ah, I get things done. That's who I am. – Jessica, track and field
- Bonita today? Bonita today is [long pause]. I don't know. I don't wanna say a Beyonce song, *Flaws and All*. I'M A TRAIN WRECK IN THE MORNING/THEN I'M A B(BITCH) IN THE AFTERNOON/EVERY NOW AND THEN WITHOUT WARNING, I CAN BE REALLY MEAN TOWARDS YOU. [both laughing]. But I don't know. I'm a puzzle. (again, referring to the Beyonce's *Flaws and All* song). I'm complex in every way.

You know, people see potential in all my flaws. Sometimes I ask myself, why do people work me so hard. And why do they treat me the way they do. I mean, not just people, but I'm talking about like coaching wise. And why my mom pushes me so hard. Because everybody see the potential in me that I don't see in myself. And sometimes that frustrates me like while making me do all this work. (still, giving reference to the Beyonce *Flaws and All* song) – Bonita, track and field

The three identity constructs presented a comprehensive explanation within the intercollegiate realm. Through participant responses, and my own experience, the three constructs did not fully conceptualized our being. So, while the African American female college athlete may be viewed in these constrained constructs and images. They have, in their own voice, expressed a diverse and more complex representation of themselves, not the mediated, simplistic characterization of the African American female collegiate athlete. Collins (2000) Black feminist thought rhetoric supports this notion in "bringing about social change, challenging controlling images and replacing them with a Black women's standpoint" which inevitably "constituted an essential component in resisting intersecting oppressions" (p. 112). Thus, weighing the pre-college

experience; college athletic experience and coping strategies; persons or influence; and experiences as an athlete, African American, and female manifested a conceptual model of the African American female collegiate athlete identity negotiation. (See figure 2)

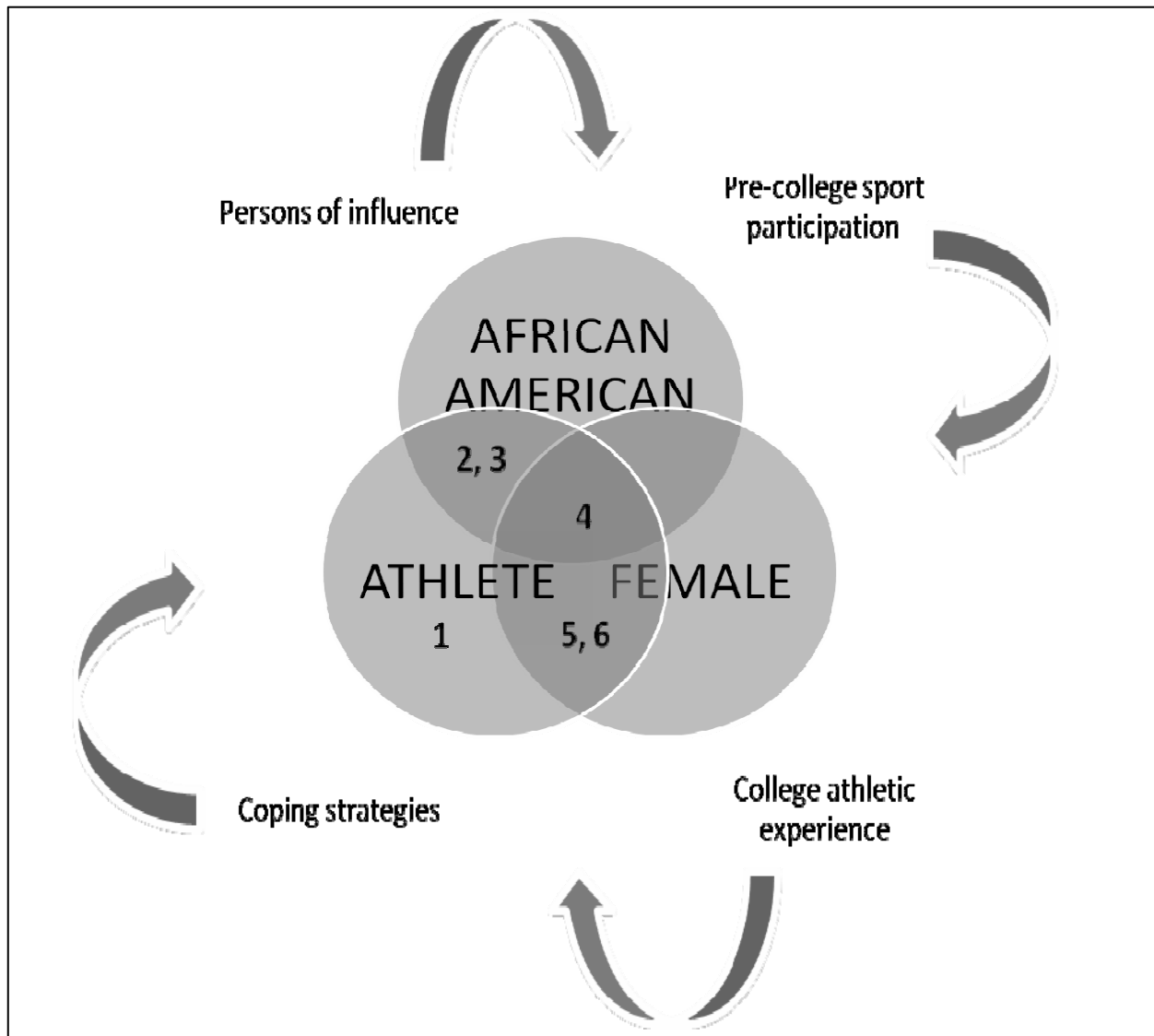


Figure 2: African American female collegiate athlete identity model

*Note.* 1=positive athlete experience; 2=negative athlete experience that intersects with race construct; 3=positive African American experience that intersects with athletic construct; 4=negative African American experience that intersects with athletic and female construct; 5=positive female experience that intersect with athletic construct; 6=negative female experience that intersect with athletic construct. This figure is representative of the intersecting and interlocking constructs of race, gender, and athletic status; and the degree to which they are impacted by pre-college sport participation, college athletic experience, coping strategies, and persons of influence.

In Landry's (2007) *The Theory of Intersection Analysis*, he highlights Candance West and Sarah Fenstermaker (2007) use of interlocking circles to convey the complex and dynamic nature of the African American female in society. Collins (1990) too, has described gender, race, and class as "interlocking categories of experience" (p. xii). Equally, this study found the experiences of the African American female collegiate athlete to interlock within the context of race, gender, and athletic engagement. Thus, I felt a need to develop a visual representation of those relationships. But, as stated racism and sexism permeate the walls of higher education (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Collins, 1986, 2000), which includes the athletic context.

Through the incorporation of CRT and Black feminist thought, I wanted to elevate the experiences of the African American female collegiate athlete, and the use of interlocking circles I deemed most appropriate. The use of the interlocking circles simultaneously demonstrates independent identity constructs, but constructs that are linked within the context of the PWI (West & Fenstermaker, 2007). Thus, while the circles framed the social position and social location for these women in the PWI, their identity was not constrained by the three experiential constructs. As the impact of the outer realm: pre-college sporting participation, college athletic experiences, coping strategies, and persons of influence also contributed, or fostered, their identity and self-definition. For example, the twelve participants narratives express negative athletic experiences intersecting in the African American context; positive African American experiences intersecting in the athletic context; and, negative experiences as an African American intersecting in all three contexts, African American, athletic, and female. I believe the young women internalized these experiences, and in turn began to reconceptualize their being.



### *Participant Advice and Recommendations*

These two questions were designed to elicit advice and recommendations from these African American female collegiate athletes. After all, who better to provide insight on their realities than the very individuals who were living as a minority in the predominantly white institutional context?

*What advice would you give to upcoming Black female athletes as they matriculate the collegiate student – athlete environment?*

Capturing the experience of these young women is vital to this study and of the collective African American female athletes. And as such, I wanted to use this study as a platform for this cohort to lift their voice, share their wisdom, and provide advice for current and aspiring African American female collegiate athletes whom attend a PWI.

#### Be focused and have an open mind

- I would say first of all to stay focused, because I've also noticed a lot of people come to college, and they aren't focused. You know, have a balance. Um, I would also say that they should choose wisely, when they choose their major. Because a lot of times, I don't think that they come, you know, coming in at 18-19. You, um, don't really look at the long-term effects of what you choose. But just know, whatever a major you choose, you know, just know what the long-term effects of choosing that major. – Carmen, tennis
- Main advice is don't get to college and act wild. Like, I think act like you have no home training, and I think with freshman and just the track team now, like. They get here, act like they have, like, no home training. And no respect for themselves, Like, their parents didn't tell them anything. Like, let these football, football boys, like, get into their head and like...then they'll do something that is degrading to themselves and, like, the team. And don't get into that type of stuff. Like you can have fun, like go downtown and have fun, but don't, like, degrade yourself and start being a slut and a whore, and people talking about you, you know. Like, have respect for yourself, you know.

(By getting) an upper class role model, or someone that you, I'm not going to say take them underneath your wing. But you know, an older person like me, talk to one of the freshmen, like, let her know. Not really telling her to not do something degrading or slutty, but just telling her 'stop' don't do that' because that's not a good look for you, right now....Like a big sis-little sis, type thing. – LaSha, track and field

- Yes, I would just say don't come into college with just one mindset. Things change. I came in thinking everybody, everybody's gonna be friend, and everybody's gonna get along, and everything's gonna be, you know, smooth. You just gotta get use to different people and, and their life styles. It may not fit yours, but you gotta, compromise. And then everybody gotta have a communication. There can be no, no communication barriers.

Don't try to do too much too fast. 'Cause I came in thinking. Okay, if everybody gonna go, I'll go. You know, but that's not the type, that's not how, that's not the type of stuff I did at home, you know. I say you set yourself apart from the other people. Um, you know people think because you're different, because you're not doing a group thing. But know when enough is enough for you. – Bonita, track and field

#### It will be hard and build friendships

- I would just tell them that it's going to be hard, like. Being an athlete hard enough and then be in a minority at a school at a predominately white school is hard too. And they and being a female is kinda hard too because you, because you don't want. You want people to respect you for what you do. Because a lot of people think girls are not athletes. Only football players are athletes, so....Stay true to who you are and what ever you do. Just do it to the best of your abilities, and no, like, no one can ever challenging you on that....Take advantage of all the opportunities, academically and socially everything and you'll enjoy it. – Char, track and field
- I would tell them, like, don't let anybody tell you you can't do something just because just because of your gender or race....Um, because there probably will, may be situations where that'll happen. But just stick with what you want to do....Find someone that you can relate to that you can just talk. Maybe find someone that's older that's been through the same situation, maybe like a mentor or something. To see how they managed. Just maybe someone to talk to somebody as an outlet, just 'til things gets better, kind of thing. – Nikki, gymnastics
- Well, I would say coming, going to school, coming here you should try to make friends. And you should always put academics first. And, you should always put yourself first. And make yourself better, when coming here.  
Well, try to go out instead of staying in your room. Well, okay, just make sure you make friends enough, you go out enough so you make friends. Or just be like nice, meet, so you can meet people. Just so people don't, like, have any problems approaching you. But always put your academics first, like if you have homework to do or if you have a test. Make sure you study before that, study before you go out with your friends. And then just make sure you make the best decisions for yourself, over your friends.  
[laughing]. – Jane, track and field

#### Have faith

- Um, I would say keep a strong faith in God. Watch who you trust. Have an inner circle, and don't let just anybody get in it. An inner circle for me is just a couple of people that

you can really trust. That you can really talk to and know they got your back and you got theirs. And that won't be many people. Maybe five.

I would say know that, stay focused, have goals. And don't be afraid to speak about them. Um, how you do it if you don't already have it? I think just being positive, it will lead you to a more positive things that'll happen. – Sally B., track and field

- Ooh, go to church. I think you always keep your belief and you faith. Don't ever let that go. You are going to go through times where you're going to be stressed out about anything....And I say watch out for these guys. And I'm gon' (a)'head and say this, if I was the guy I think I would be the biggest ho on this campus. But I can't do that because the way I was brought up. Like, if you sleep with boys, more than two guys, they'll consider you the town ho. I could not do that. I mean, watch out for them, they gon' play games with you, play games with them back. That's how I do. – Mary, basketball

### Be yourself

- I just think that wherever you go or whatever you do, just be you, you know. Always stay who you are, and you know, do what make(s) you happy. You just, you just have to find that thing, like that. This, I think everybody has this one thing, that will make them happy. Um, you have to find out what it is for you, I guess, and do it regardless. Regardless of who, you know, of who it satisfies, or who it disappoints, or you know, be who you are, like. 'Cause I see so many people come here and change. And they just, I don't know. – Renee, track and field
- Um just be yourself. Don't be anything you're not, because in the end. You got to be happy with yourself. I mean, don't try to be like something that you cannot be outside your own level. You might be hanging around a lot of White people...don't be doing stuff they do, knowing in your mind that you don't do that yourself, so. – Jordan, softball
- I mean, it's just all about being yourself, you know. And doing what you need to do. I mean [pause] I don't know, it's, it's kinda like, you kinda. I don't know, this is probably not going to make sense. But you have to be aware of who you are, but then not judge people for who they are. You know what I mean.

Like to define who you are it's just a matter of trusting yourself. You gotta question yourself on what you really like. What you really want in your future. It's kinda like, you just kinda, you can't go around with the crowd. Like you have to question. You have to question the things that you do. And question your surroundings and how people around you are acting. Like you can't just always be, go along with the flow and just let things go without asking yourself or thinking about it. – Jessica, track and field

- I'd say just go in knowing who you are and what you stand for because they are going to be a lot of people that are gonna try to change you. Like there is a girl whose played volleyball on my team, and she didn't make it past the first semester in her freshman year because just wasn't doing the right things academically. She was showing up late to practice because she was with a boy. I had known her, she was also in my club team in Atlanta, and she was at that kind of person and you just because so many experiences are

just thrown at that you never experienced before. Just like it's the freedom of being a college and just being able to go wherever you want to do and do whatever you want to do. You just have to go in there and know what you stand for and don't stray away from it and if you do, you need to make sure it's an informed decision, you know. – Alyssa, volleyball

The life of a collegiate athlete is challenging, and I agree with the collective voices of the young women in that: you must be focused, you must have an open mind, and you must have faith.

Renee's be yourself voice rings true, "I just think that wherever you go or whatever you do, just be you, you know....regardless of who, you know, of who it satisfies, or who it disappoints, or you know, be who you are." Ultimately, you must have and you must balance these notions to maintain a sense of self, negotiate the identities, and survive with in the PWI. So, how could interactions with counselors and coaches enhance these experiences?

*What support/advice would you give to counselors and coaches or ask from counselors and coaches about your daily experiences as a Black female collegiate athlete?*

While few were shocked at the thought of someone asking them specifically for advice, they were more than willing to share words of wisdom. A wisdom that was spoken from the heart of a young African American female. Each participant spoke, offering specific details for creating a better environment for the Black female athlete.

Treat us equally

- Well, treat everyone equally. And take us for who we are versus, like, being black or being a female or being an athlete. Um, and just, I guess just listen to our needs. Like what we really need, instead of like what you may think. Like stereotypically, something like that. [laugh]. – Jane, track and field
- I would say, even though it... I give them advice they still can't follow them, because the fact that they still have to deal with the politics on campus. You know, I would say it should not be difficult to treat every body on the team the same way. You know, give them the chance, the opportunity. You know, to earn that spot on the team or played that role they want to play. You know, learn how to, ah, instead of having all of that time playing your way. I'm just saying, understand, to take some advice from your players. You know, because your way may not always work.

My counselor is great. I really don't have too much she can't really relate to. Even know she is White. She played soccer here, so she knows what you're going through. We actually go to her like a psychologist. So she can give you advice. I'm going through this. This is what you're going to go through. She says, "I've been there, I know how you feel but you keep pushing." I was like, that's all she could say. – Mary, basketball

#### Be open-minded and avoid stereotypes

- Good question. I've never been asked that. I guess I...I can say we're just human. Like, we have problems just like they do, but it's kind a different, because we're different people. We may not react the same way as this other Black person next to us, so treat it as you know how. – Jordan, softball
- I would say, um, don't make stereotypes don't make assumptions first. Um, get to know, get to know that person, and go from there really. 'Cause you know, they got those first impressions, assumptions, but she can't do that. You can't look at someone and tell how they are. – Sally B., basketball
- Yeah, I would say for coaches and counselors, to ah. First of all be open minded because it's hard...I think also, um. That it would help if they, if they were like, more culturally aware of different things, you know. 'Cause you don't understand, you know, fully. No one understands what someone is fully going through, you know racially, or just everyday issues. So I just think like being open minded about all the situations, and kinda like deal with the stereotypes easier, from everyday. And I would say to always be encouraging. – Carmen, tennis

#### Greater communication

- I think like, if (they) just listen. Kind of listen to me, or to the person. And sometimes its okay. 'Cause people always try to act like they understand. Sometimes it's okay not to understand, 'cause some experiences you won't understand. And it doesn't make me feel better to know, oh you understand [both laughing], you know. It makes me feel better to know, maybe you don't understand, but your gonna help me go through what I'm going through. Or your gonna help me do the right thing, if I'm on the wrong, if I made a bad decision. Your gonna help me out of it regardless if you understand or not. – Renee, track and field
- For me, um, I've been in situations where like a coach really didn't understand, like, a female Black athlete before. And um, a lot of the times it's because the coach isn't communicating with the athlete as well as they should. So with taking the time to find out what's going on. Like asking them, like, what they want. You have to ask them what they want from the sport. You have to ask them what they want, like, what's going on in their life. Because sometimes that's what a big thing is. Sometimes, like, what happened to you to make you, be the way, or act the way you are.

And things like that. It's just coaches have to get more on a personal level, one-on-one. With each of their athlete if they really want to understand what's going on and what they can do. – Jessica, track and field

- Um, probably would just tell them to, to be more open. 'Cause I think sometimes coaches and older....And so try like, try like talking more instead of just demanding. Like they'll tell you what to do, but they probably won't ask you your opinion....I wouldn't say they're not open, but I don't think they listen as much if they give out advice. They don't ask the girls like well, how do you feel about this or you know. "Well what's going on in your life?" You know other stuff besides track and field. Besides school, like, you know, 'cause that could also have an influence on what you do. – Char, track and field
- Advice? I give advice? [shocked at the notion]. I think that's what you need to sit down and have a talk. You have to have that one-on-one. – Bonita, track and field

#### Develop a mentor-mentee relationship

- Maybe I would tell the counselor to tell the athlete to find like a, a group or activity. I don't know. That they could just join. I guess it's all about finding people you can relate to, I feel like. Someone you feel comfortable around to talk to. Because talking helps, helps a lot. Just get it out. And then when you talk about it its not as bad as you may think it is. – Nikki, gymnastics
- With like all the freshman, he should get together with next year's captain and devise like a, like a system of big sis-little sis(ter). Like don't let them go out and degrade themselves and do this....And show them around campus, and show what to do and what not to do. And I would just tell the coaches and, like, counselors don't treat female athletes, like. Treat them like their in college, like, don't baby 'em around. Like don't say 'okay, just don't do this anymore'. Like give them punishment and consequences for like, if they do something like that. Like okay you can't, can't travel the first like two, two meets or something like that. – LaSha, track and field
- I would say, don't make an issue out of it first of all, because I definitely don't think as a Black female (we) are more susceptible to have problems coming in. And as a freshman athlete, because you have White freshmen and Black freshmen that go wild when they get here and just make bad decisions (you) need to see it all over. I don't think there is too much you could do, but the older people on the team. Like leaders on the team should really step up and help with those kind of things, because a lot of times. If you could just have an older person tell you listen 'don't do this' 'don't talk to this guy'. 'Don't go there', you know, stuff like that, because sometimes you don't know as a freshman. You know, like, what I think, the leadership of older teammates. Because I think most of us don't like it when coaches try to get into your business or counseling....It may be something different, especially with your older teammates, who can help you out. – Alyssa, volleyball

As you can see, the four categories were insightful with wanting counselors and coaches to: treat us equally, be open-minded, increase levels of communication between the athlete and the coach, and develop a mentor-mentee opportunity. The overall advice given was simplistic in sentiment, through Jordan's "we're just human" and Renee, Jessica, Char and Bonita's notion of "just listen". Nevertheless, they advised coaches and counselors to be encouraging, hear their voices, and respect their individuality.

### *A Shared Experience*

The last, and final, question was designed to allow the participants to ask me, the researcher, a sister in sport, and someone who has lived their life anything they wanted to. For we, in my account, had formed a bond and as such were adding our stories to the collective of African American females.

*What would you like to tell me that I have not asked?*

For many of the young women I was able to share my experiences throughout the interview, and some were engaged more than others. But for these four young African American female athletes, it is my belief that they wanted to know: 1) is this the norm, 2) was this my reality, and 3) how did I cope with the daily, monthly, and yearly challenges of being an African American female athlete on a campus in which I, too, was a minority.

### Understanding, consciousness, and education

- Do you have any trials of being an African American athlete? – Jessica, track and field
- Did you go through this, like what did you go through on the track team. Like as far as being a female and like, African American. – Carmen, tennis
- Did you have a minority experience or was it mostly Black people around each other? – Alyssa, volleyball
- I wanna know. Hmm. [pause]. I wanna know. Where did you get this book, because I like this book? [Bonita was looking at a book I had on my desk about Black female

Olympians. I replied, “again, I am looking at black female athletes so, any book that I can get that deals with the black athlete experience, I try to find.”] – Bonita, track and field

At the beginning of this study, I stated that I was hesitant to share the events of my experience.

Yet, through each story, and through each interview, I shared my tribulations and triumphs, some good, some not so good. Moreover, listening to each story I relived my experiences with the same emotional excitement and pain, as if it were that day. I felt that the twelve African American female collegiate athletes at this predominantly white institution began to reflect on their experiences in a more conscious, and introspective way so that they too could transcend.

The stories shared were truths, their truths, my truths and the truths of our foremothers.

Nevertheless, I like them, and I believe like our foremothers, wanted to be taken as I am. At the end of the day, I just wanted to be me.

### Section III: Triangulation of Data

The mixed method approach was significant in obtaining “overlapping evidence rather than just one perspective” (Lapan, 2004, p. 243). The utilization of the questionnaire provided verification of demographic data, while it supported and refuted interview data. For example, pre-college sport participation and persons of influence quantitative findings were supported by participant interview. Conversely, athletic identity and discriminatory findings were refuted by the participant interviews.

In addition, the incorporation of the questionnaire, narrator, and I as researcher, complemented the study while providing construct validity for all of the aforementioned instruments (questionnaire, participant voice, and researcher). Thus, the questionnaire provided a baseline of quantitative demographic information (i.e. athletic support, racial discrimination, gender discrimination); the narrators provided individual experiences, which added to the collective voices for the experiences of the African American female collegiate athlete at this



institution; and, I as the researcher, and former collegiate athlete, validated their experiences. All of these pieces added to the collective voices of the African American female experience.

### *Interpretation of Qualitative Data*

“Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and Black feminist thought guided the interviews with the expectation of narratives of experience. I believe the twelve narratives present a “rich” and “thick” expression of consciousness. I believe the twelve African American female collegiate athletes’ interviews detail a verbal transcendence within the context of the predominantly white institution. Hence, the opportunity to vocalize their experience as an African American female athlete to an African American female athlete not only provided a safe space; an opportunity to reflect on their initial sport experience; their present sport experience; and more importantly, advice to rising African American female collegiate athletes. Thus, the resulting conceptual model provides insight on their experience within a predominantly white institution as an African American, an athlete, and a female, three constructs that contextualize their experience, but constructs that do not define their existence.

### Section IV: Summary of Results

Chapter III is prefaced with the lyrics of Jill Scott’s (2000) *One is the magic number*. While unplanned, the use of these lyrics was appropriate. Chapter III’s purpose was to provide clear and detailed explanation of the study, and how quantitative and qualitative methods were necessary to capture the experiences of African American female athletes in the PWI, and it was. The theoretical frameworks of CRT and Black feminist thought provided a platform to voice experiences, and to express the race and gender in those spaces. Chapter IV and its findings gave

rise to the question *Do you like the way* (1999) and the need for further exploration of these young women, along with the need to provide more opportunities to share voice with other African American athletes within and between universities. Eventually, raising consciousness of past experiences and illuminating the value of their individual selves, and their identity.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

*She's been down and out  
She's been wrote about  
She's been talked about, constantly  
She's been up and down  
She's been pushed around...  
She has no regrets  
She accepts the past  
All these things they  
helped to make she  
She's been lost and found  
And she's still around  
There's a reason for everything  
- Mary J. Blige, Take me as I Am (2005)*

The African American female athlete from past to present represents a range of images. For me, she represents strength, beauty, passion, determination, patience, elegance, and grace. As a track and field athlete, I am rich with images of Wilma Rudolph, Florence Griffith Joyner, and even during her time of circumstance, Marion Jones. For me, these women reflected images of what it meant to be a African American female athlete, filled with potential and dreams; each woman desiring to be unique and true to herself. *Take me as I am*, Mary J. Blige (2005), poetically express the plight of “she”, which I interpret as the yearning of African American women to be accepted and recognized for who they are, and not what they symbolize. Collins concurs that “the lyrics sung by many of the Black women blues singers challenge externally defined controlling images used to justify Black women’s objectification as the Other” (Collins, 2000, p. 106). Much like the twelve young women, who expressed a desire to be treated as an individual, and not to be included in the mediated stereotypical image of African American female athlete.

I further interpret Blige’s (2005) anthem as a reflection of the collective journey, past, present, and future. “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing

*this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:2-4 King James Version). Yes, faith and scripture were mainstays for the majority of these twelve women, and for me. For the aforementioned passage is tattooed across my experience as a collegiate athlete within the ivory towers, and forever ingrained with my identity.

This study proposed to explore the experiences of African American female collegiate athlete, and her experience within the predominantly white institution (PWI). More specifically, how African American female athletes formulate their identity in college; the factors used to shape her African American athletic identity; and the impact of race, gender, and sport on the formation of identity. The exploration of these experiences through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist thought gave rise to racialized notions within the context of the predominantly white institutions (PWI) and voice to the quiet journeys of the African American female athlete.

## Discussion

Through the incorporation of a mixed method approach, I was able to present a comprehensive collection of narratives. The “rich” and “thick” expressions of the African American female collegiate athlete experience provided content to answer the following research questions: 1) How do African American female athletes formulate their identity in college?, 2) What are the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity?, 3) What impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?

*How do African American female athletes formulate their identity in college?*

Several questions were used to elicit the formation of identity. Specifically, questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 as represented in the interview questionnaire. (See Appendix C)

Individual talent and scholarship opportunity brought many to participate at the intercollegiate level. The ability to withstand the rigorous schedules, filled with academic, athletic, service demands left little to no time for socialization and interaction with the general student body. The demands also left many isolated and alienated from participation with peers in such activities as African American organizations, conversations within the dorm, or a mere night on the town. The combination of rigorous schedules, social isolation and social alienation as African American athletes within the PWI (Hawkins, 2001; Sailes, 1998) are typical. However, the young women have either consciously and unconsciously found ways to cope with living as a minority amongst the dominant society, though their daily interaction and speech pattern. For example, Carmen, a fifth year tennis player from Georgia whom classifies herself as upper class discusses her personal strategies that enable her to cope with the predominantly white intercollegiate environment:

- Well, if I ever have like issues or like oh man, you know, then I'll just like you know what. That's okay, because I've gone through like worst experiences before, you know. I um, so I just take the negative and like it motivates me. And then the positive I just try to, like, incorporate into my everyday life. (p. 104)

Her use of prior experience and reflection assist her daily interactions, along with her ability to adopt the language or speech pattern of the dominant society. Thus, as the sole African American on the tennis team, her use of the word “like” indicates a speech pattern associated with White upper class society.

Ironically, Jessica, a third year track and field athlete from California whom classifies herself as lower class exhibits a similar speech pattern as she discusses her means for coping with life at this institution:

- Well, um, at first like, I had a really hard time. Like, like the first semester like, all like, it was like mid-semester just like you, when I was starting to get home sick and stuff and like, but then like, I got to like Thanksgiving. And I got to go home for a little bit and

kick back. And I felt better. And then after winter break I felt so good. And coming here I kinda had to just like reset my mind. Like, and just, I kind of thought of it like. Instead of it being, like I'm at school. 'Cause I kind of just thought of it, I'm at school and I'll be back. And um, I met a couple close friends now. It's been really cool, like, being able to hangout with them and you know. It's almost like now when I go home I miss them, you know. And also this semester has helped me a lot. Because I've joined like Team United which is a, a um, like Christian Athletes. (pp. 104-105)

Feelings of being home sick and missing family resonated within Jessica's voice. However, in her reflection and self-analysis, she finds an alternative perspective, coupled with membership and fellowship with the Christian athlete organization, to thrive within the PWI. But, as stated, whether conscious or conscious Jessica and Carmen have also adopted the language of the dominant culture at this institution, which could be viewed as a coping strategy and contribute to their identity formation.

Nevertheless, attributes such as resilience and dedication together with words of wisdom from mothers, mentors, or teammates and self-reflection through writing, music, and religious prayer gave these young women the motivation to endure. For example, LaSha, a track and field athlete; Carmen, the tennis player; and Jessica, the track and field athlete, each present stories of their mother's strength and character model as the source of their individual strength:

- Oh, basically I think it just comes from my mom. Because she's a single parent with, that raised two kids, and I think she did, like, a wonderful job of raising my sister, like, she, like, stopped at nothing. She went to Grambling, got a degree in marketing, and works at a really nice marketing place. And provides so much for me and my sister, and my nephew. That's why I feel like, I can work and go to school, and do some much like she does so much, you know. Like in the end it will all work out because. Like being strong never giving up, you know. Sometimes you may want to, but, you know. It may not always go your way. But keep, like, working towards it. And in the end it will work out, I don't know. I just look up to my mom a lot. (LaSha, p. 102)
- I think that probably, like, watching my mom. My mom's. My mom's a physical therapist and um, she's probably the hardest worker I know in my life. She's working that hard and just seeing her go through that and seeing her grow through like a divorce. And like how she. She went through everything, and, like, it didn't shake her. (Carmen, p. 103)

- Um, I don't know, I think main impact has been my mom. Like my mom is like, I don't know, when we were in San Diego, back home like, we're kinda like low income. So um, my mom has taught me how to like, pretty much save and like. I don't know. You never know what's gonna happen. And so, ah, I've learned that you just have to make sure you have things just incase something bad happens. I like to be able to help people whenever I can. I don't know. I'm a big religious person so....I've learned to be like a, safe. It's just that, it's just the fact of I learned a lot of like, just maintaining myself. I don't know, I just had to learn how to be an individual and like be myself. And it doesn't matter what everyone else is doing, but what I need to do. And what I can do to help myself, and to help those around me. (Jessica, pp. 102-103)

The three reflections present a detailed account of their mother's ability to thrive in challenging situation. Subsequently, the mother's model of resilience was adopted as the template for their own resilience within this institution. These young women attempt to socially reproduce their mother's strength of character was a common theme (Laslett, B. & Brenner, J., 1989). As well as, a constant dependence on their mothers for words of wisdom, and use of prayer and religion to, again, endure the challenges within the PWI. Bonita, a first year track and field athlete, reflects upon the role of her mother and the role of religious practice as she navigates the PWI and collegiate athletic environment:

- My bible. Kirk Franklin, or Yolanda Adams, who's from Houston. [laughing] I really like 'um. I can't think of his name. Deitrick Haddon. Read my bible, read a couple of scriptures, get my mind right, listen to gospel. Also, call my mom. All the time I talk to her like four times a day. (Bonita, p. 105)

Bonita, and her fellow African American female cohorts present a number of elements, (e.g. personal struggles, the role of their mothers, and religious practices) that contribute to the formulation of identity in college. Ultimately, the twelve women emerged as strong, diverse, intelligent, and mature African American female athletes within the context of the athletic environment.

*What are the factors used to shape African American female athletic identity?*

Several questions were used to elicit the factors used to shape the athletic identity.

Specifically, questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9. (See Appendix C)

The entrance into sport laid the foundation for the onset of athletic identity. For the twelve women reflected community programs, club coaches, and family, specifically mothers, as supporting in their athletic participation. Through the support of those individuals and participation as youth, each was able to reap a benefit from social interaction to greater self-esteem to increased sport skill. The positive interactions, while individual, allowed each young woman an opportunity to participate in a collegiate institution. Thus, sport participation added value to their lives. For example, Renee, a first year track and field athlete express how her participation provides structure; Jessica, the track and field athlete, conveys how her participation provides access to an education and contribute to her identity; and Alyssa, a third year volleyball player express how her athletic status provide perspective when she encounters life challenges:

- You have something to focus on. Like, you have, when you're here you have a reason to do good, you know....And you have, it's like I have reason to do the right things, you know? And like it, you kinda mature 'cause you have to...'Cause you have to be responsible, you are representing (the university) track and field, everywhere you go, you know, and one thing that you feel is not bad could look terrible in somebody else's eyes. You just, I don't know, you start to think more about, instead of thinking about your little life, you think about your big track, track life, sport, playing basketball can be stressful everyday. (Renee, p. 97)
- Like as a smaller kid I could've said that sports is me. But, like, now sports has brought me to my education. I mean, it's like a prideful feeling now. Like when I talk about sports or just, like, throwing or javelin in general, like I feel like. Very good about it. Like, it's like, it's a part of me. (Jessica, p. 97)
- I mean, it definitely keeps you busy, um. It just, I think it makes everything else about life so much easier as hard as it is up in an athletic setting, and all the expectations and all the things you are expected to do and do well. Um, it makes everything else look so easy. (Alyssa, pp. 97-98)



However, it became apparent that while sport and persons of influence instilled certain attributes, they did not provide adequate skills necessary to navigate the social environment or challenges within the predominantly white institution. While sport participation played a significant role in the formation of identity, race and gender also contribute to the strength of their athletic identities.

*What impact do race, gender, and sport have on identity formation?*

Several questions were used to elicit the impact of race, gender, and sport on identity. Specifically, questions 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18. (See Appendix C) Additionally, a follow-up question to interview question 18, or “how would you describe yourself today?” was asked. (See Qualitative Data Related to Athletes). The question was later developed to ascertain how the African American female athletes described themselves based on athlete, African American, and female status. Ultimately, this set of questions would evoke responses that spoke to CRT and Black feminist thought.

Again, critical race theory advocates the concept of social justice. More specifically, three tenets were deemed most useful in analyzing the experiences of the African American female athlete in the predominantly white institution. The first tenet, the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; the second tenet, the challenge to dominant ideology; and the fourth tenet, the centrality of experiential knowledge (Soloranzano et al, 2000). Similar to CRT, Black feminist thought advocated the concept of social justice and the empowerment and emancipation of Black women (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought aims to determine first, their own self-definition and subsequent self-valuation; second, the impact of the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class based oppression; and third, the importance of redefining the culture of the Black female athlete. Therefore, in

accordance with CRT, Black feminist thought, and the responses to the quantitative inventory and qualitative interviews race was at the fore of the participant experiences.

### *Critical Race Theory*

The racial prevalence was surprising, and I was not prepared to discover such experiences, as the quantitative inventory failed to capture the full extent of this component. However, critical race theory and Black feminist thought as the theoretical frame for the qualitative interview construction provided an opportunity for the experiential accounts of racism and sexism to manifest, for without voice, these accounts would have remained unveiled. Essentially, the daily interactions of racism and sexism that the young African American female athletes were at one time shielded from, upon entry into the collegiate environment, they became vulnerable to its realities as the positive and negative occurrences were presented for sport, race, and gender. Nevertheless, the most significant were the racial interactions and discriminatory experiences, or microaggressions. The three identity constructs, athlete, African American, and female, yielded racialized experiences. Mary, a second year basketball player, explicated an encounter with an individual within the sporting context:

- You know, I had to correct a guy one time. I think one of our varsity football players, he didn't catch a pass. The guy said, "Your Black. You're supposed to be fast enough to catch that." I turned around like excuse me. I said, "Are you drunk? First of all, are you drunk?" And he said "No". And he looked at me and he put his head down. [Mary asked], "So you really think all Black people are fast, huh? So what are all White people, slow?" And he didn't say nothing. (p. 114)

Mary's ability to verbalize her frustration with the binary notion of Black athletic superiority indicated a level consciousness, and a willingness take action.

Conversely, Bonita, the track and field athlete who is majoring in Biology, explicated a racialized classroom experience and the impact of a White professor's power and perception:

- I took an English class last semester. He, I guess he, said I plagiarized one my papers. I, I guess, I don't know. I'm not the type of person. I don't plagiarize, and if I write, if I take somebody's work, I know I cite my work. So we went to the meeting, and it all came down to the fact that I'm the only black girl in the class and then I'm an athlete. And it all came down to, he said my priorities weren't straight. I'm an African-American athlete and I need to worry about academics first and then my athletics later....(It was) a white professor for English 101. I'm the only one, yes, I saw that the first day that I was the only black girl, but I didn't think we was gonna have any issues. (Bonita, p. 120)

Bonita, presented the second half to the binary notion athletic superiority, intellectual inferiority.

However, unlike Mary, Bonita chose not to take action to the negative commentary of the White professor. Her silence is a common reaction for Black women in power relationships, and her experience exhibited a combination of white privilege and patriarchy (Collins, 2000).

After years of racial isolation and the sole African American on the tennis team Carmen, the tennis player, also experienced racialized incidents outside the context of athletics, but within the predominantly white institutional environment:

- It was the distribution of the pornographic pictures last year on campus. At the USC (University Student Center). Um, apparently, a (white) fraternity on campus decided that it would be funny to distribute only African American pornographic pictures at the (University Student) Center. (p. 124)

Carmen's interaction with the general student body was negative; and the presentation of African American female body as the objectified Other. The White fraternity reduced the African American female to the historically racialized image of the Jezebel (Collins, 2000; Woodward & Mastin, 2005). I believe for Carmen this experience added to her perception of this collegiate institutions as racist. James Stewart (1983) contends, "general knowledge of the larger society alone, however, is not sufficient to allow an effective accommodation to the pressures of psychic duality. This must be combined with a positive perception of the Black Experience" (pp.102-103). Therefore, while each of the participants had a level of racial awareness, I do not believe that they were adequately prepared to recognize and cope with the negative racial encounters,

microaggressions, and situations that affect their psychosocial behavior and personal identity as an African American female athlete.

Expressly, when capturing the quantitative construct of experiences of institutional racism and sexism, the question(s) were framed in a different light (e.g. Inventory factor “In the past month have you experienced discrimination based on race in the classroom setting”). Within each factor of racial discrimination, the African American female athletes indicated that they had no racial discrimination experiences (e.g. 65.7% (n=25) in the athletic environment, 79% (n=30) in the classroom environment, 73.7 % (n=28) within the local community). Similarly, negative experiences of gender discrimination, as indicated in the quantitative inventory also reflected that they had no discriminatory experiences (e.g. 79% (n=20) in the athletic environment, 86.8% (n=33) in the classroom environment, 86.8% (n=33) in the local community). Conversely, when asked “*what is your most positive and negative experience as an African American?*” the positive responses displayed cultural awareness, participation in or awareness of Black organizations, and for Alyssa, the third year volleyball player, racial consciousness through education:

- Ah, probably just all the courses I’ve taken and how much I’ve learned about, because I take every course that has to do with race. Because, I guess there’s so much I didn’t know. And at first I just took it because I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn about stuff in my community. African American history, culture or whatever. And see what else I have to learn. And I wanted to know myself. Especially this semester I have taken a lot of classes about that because I’m a history minor as well. (p. 117)

On the other hand, LaSha, the fourth year track and field athlete, chose not to recognize the race relations at the PWI:

- Um, [pause]. I really don’t see, like, racism on campus. I don’t really, to me I don’t really look. I guess they say if you look for it you’ll find it. But I never really looked for it, I never really said ‘oh their doing that because I’m Black or anything. (p. 121)

I found LaSha's absence of racism difficult to acknowledge, especially in relationship the verbal expressions of the eleven other participants' narratives. Specifically, Mary's foreshadowed expressions about life as an African American at this university:

- On this campus?...How can it be positive on this campus when you're part of a minority group? I didn't know we really had Black guys until I really got outside the athlete world. You know, I've read, other than that all of athletes are Black. And when I go out to parties like, where are all the Black people, where are they. I don't see anything positive being African-American on this campus. (p. 118)

Mary's candid nature, while an individual perspective, continue to challenge the dominant ideology about race relations. The culmination of her experiences as an African American have become central to her identity and way of knowing. Similarly, the negative experiences presented a range of stories from "I don't know" to the acknowledgment of minority status; to academic injustices; to blatant racism; and for a two women, the apparent absence of racism. In addition, the negative athletic experiences were compounded by African American racial stereotypes. The collective experiences revealed CRT's centrality of race and the intersections within the context of the athletic, classroom, and entirety of the campus environment.

The second and fourth tenets of CRT were more difficult to ascertain for two reasons. One, due to the aforementioned dearth of research to adequately substantiate, or challenge, the dominant ideology, or experiences, of the African American female collegiate athlete could not be determined. Two, the limited number of participants and subsequent narratives, restricted the ability to present counterstories; however, it did provide a stronger foundation to build upon studies like Foster (2003) and Bruening et al (2005). But, what did become apparent through the narratives was that racial and gender-based episodes had occurred. Again, Mary's racial episode explicates minority status, racial profiling, and the power of white privilege:

- I really don't. I don't know why, maybe because it's not many of us. It's hard to find us. Unless we have a gathering every now and, like, a step show or sorority party or

fraternity party. I don't know. And then the only Black kid in the classroom, you know I feel like outsider, and sometimes I forget that I really am the only Black person on this bus, or in the classroom, or at this table. You know, but some people...They look at you differently, I think that they are intimidated by me because I am Black. And I'm 6'5" and I would say that really makes it worse.

I'm here (and) even watching my brother (who also attends this university) being a part of one experience. He got, my brother got arrested. His freshman year, but he didn't do anything. He returned a phone, but this girl thought my brother stole the phone. He found the phone on the bus. He returned it. She a 'defenseless little White girl', and (she) called the police officers, and had him arrested on campus. (p. 119-120)

In addition to racial episodes, gender based episodes present notions of sexual objectification, lack of respect as female athletes, and stereotypes regarding sexual orientation as athletes:

- Um, [pause]. Well just like when maybe when we go downtown with just us girls, just the females. The guys are just like yelling, and just touching you. And it's like please don't touch me, I don't know you. (Nikki, gymnast, p. 124)
- Um, (I'd) probably say maybe not. Maybe not getting the a proper credit, even from like males on the team like they think what we do is easy and like we don't work as hard as they work. They don't totally respect us as athletes. They think that they feel that they work harder than we do. (Char, track and field, p. 125)
- Yeah, like a playing sports, especially softball. Some of my teammates are like lesbians, and so they assume you are a lesbian sometime. So it's kind of a downfall. (Jordan, softball, p. 124)

Whether you are Nikki, a gymnast; Char, a track and field athlete; or Jordan, a softball player, each presented negative experiences based on their gender. But whether the microaggressions were racialized or gender based not one of these women chose to speak up on the episodes of social injustice. Their reactions were internalized, and I believe for the majority of the women, their feelings were verbalized for the first time. Thus, interviews provided African American female collegiate athletes an opportunity for verbal expression; and what I believed to be a moment of emancipation and empowerment in accordance with Black feminist thought.

## *Black Feminist Thought*

The opportunity to articulate personal experiences, shed light on the impact of race, gender, and athletic status within the PWI. More specifically, it provided a platform for the twelve young women to self-define and self-value; reflect the interlocking nature of oppression; and redefine themselves as African American female collegiate athletes (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000).

I asked these women to describe who they were at that moment (question 18); additionally to define their identity based on athlete, African American, and female status. The response for the majority, six participants, was African American ranking first, three participants ranking female first, one ranking athlete first, and two ranking all three constructs as equal:

- I would say I am a African American female athlete. I'm African American and I will always be. And I, I don't plan on being a athlete for the rest of my life. I plan on being in sports, but not an athlete. And I'll always be a female. You know [laughing]. (Renee, track and field, p. 126)
- No, first I think I would be female first. Because yeah. I'm very sensitive. So I would rank myself female first athlete second, because when it's time to go. It's time to go when it's time to produce I'm down, I'm down, I'm down [each 'I'm down' said with emphasis]. Yeah, yeah, (African American) that would be last. (Bonita, track and field, p. 127)
- I just identify myself more of an athlete, first of all. Just because I just feel that's what made me, kind of like who I am. Yeah. And then an African American. (Nikki, gymnastics, p. 126)
- I think that any time, if I were to like rank them. It would be hard because, like well, like you know, as soon as you think that like one's really important. There is always a comment that someone will make you think it was actually just as important, you know. So, I think that they would all pretty much be all about the same. (Carmen, tennis, p. 128)

The four voices represented each identity construct as defining their existence. Collins (2000) supports this notion by stating “the struggle of living two lives, one for ‘them and one for ourselves’ creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definitions within the context

where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated” (p. 100). Again, indicating a strong connection heritage and the greatness of Black people as a collective. Yet, apart from the three identity constructs, I wanted to know who they were. The women did present themselves within the constructs of athlete, African American, and female; however, each presented an emotive characterization first. For example, descriptions of a diverse person, a mature person, an intelligent person, a determined person, and as Sally B., a first year basketball player, explicates, a stronger person:

- I am. I get, I get stronger every day, mentally and physically really. But, um, I'm a young woman, young African American woman who has her mind, her head on straight. I'm not perfect by any means, but I try my best to do what's right, everyday. (p. 128)

Thus, my conceptual model of intersectionality illustrates that three constructs do indeed interlock and contextualize their experiences within the PWI, but the constructs are not the only factors that impact their identity, nor do they confine their being (West & Fenstermaker, 2007; Landry, 2007; McCall, 2005, Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Tate, 1997; Crenshaw, 1991). (See figure 2) The voices and conceptual model reflect “an alternative humanist vision of societal organization” (Collins, 1986, p. S21).

This humanist rhetoric becomes clearer through the responses to questions 16 and 18, which spoke to self-definition; and they added to the theme of redefinition, especially with consideration to the responses from question 17. I wanted to know what suggestions, or advice they had for coaches, counselors, and other administrators whom work with Black female athletes. What emerged were themes of equal treatment, open mindedness, avoid stereotypes, greater communication, and the request for a mentor-mentee relationship:

- Well, treat everyone equally. And take us for who we are versus, like, being black or being a female or being an athlete. Um, and just, I guess just listen to our needs. Like what we really need, instead of like what you may think. Like stereotypically, something like that. [laugh]. (Jane, track and field, p. 136)



- I would say, um, don't make stereotypes don't make assumptions first. Um, get to know, get to know that person, and go from there really. 'Cause you know, they got those first impressions, assumptions, but she can't do that. You can't look at someone and tell how they are. (Sally B., basketball, p. 137)
- Advice? I give advice? [shocked at the notion]. I think that's what you need to sit down and have a talk. You have to have that one-on-one. (Bonita, track and field, p. 138)
- I would say, don't make an issue out of it first of all, because I definitely don't think as a Black female [we] are more susceptible to have problems coming in. And as a freshman athlete, because you have White freshmen and Black freshmen that go wild when they get here and just make bad decisions need to see it all over. I don't think there is too much you could do, but the older people on the team. Like leaders on the team should really step up and help with those kind of things, because a lot of times. If you could just have an older person tell you listen 'don't do this' 'don't talk to this guy'. 'Don't go there', you know, stuff like that, because sometimes you don't know as a freshman. You know like what I think the leadership of older teammates. Because I think most of us don't like it when coaches try to get into your business or counseling....It may be something different, especially with your older teammates, who can help you out. (Alyssa, volleyball, p. 138)

A number of themes emerged. But as I listened to their words and the tone of their voices, I felt the plea of *take me as I am*. The words of Blige (2005) resonated throughout each expression. Yes, they are Black. Yes, they are female. Yes, they are talented athletes. But as Jane petitions “take us for who we are versus, like, being black or being a female or being an athlete.” Again, as presented throughout this work, Black women are filled with complexity, virtue, and spirit, and it must be acknowledged and celebrated.

Utilizing the themes of Black feminist thought to self-define and self-value their personas, I wanted these young women to step outside of themselves and to provide advice for rising Black female athletes that would negotiating the terrain of the PWI. The twelve women purport a “be yourself” mantra:

- Um, just be yourself. Don't be anything you're not, because in the end. You got to be happy with yourself. I mean, don't try to be, like, something that you cannot be outside your own level. You might be hanging around a lot of White people...don't be doing stuff

they do, knowing in your mind that you don't do that yourself, so. (Jordan, softball, p. 135)

- I mean, it's just all about being yourself, you know. And doing what you need to do. I mean [pause] I don't know, it's, it's kinda like, you kinda. I don't know, this is probably not going to make sense. But you have to be aware of who you are, but then not judge people for who they are. You know what I mean.

Like to define who you are it's just a matter of trusting yourself. You gotta question yourself on what you really like. What you really want in your future. It's kinda like, you just kinda, you can't go around with the crowd. Like, you have to question. You have to question the things that you do. And question your surroundings and how people around you are acting. Like, you can't just always be, go along with the flow and just let things go without asking yourself or thinking about it. (Jessica, track and field, 135)

Be yourself. Question yourself. Trust yourself. Jordan and Jessica's verbal expressions suggest continual introspection in an effort to remember who they are and discern their multiple identities. In addition, the explanations confirmed that as African American women, you are okay just the way you are. This notion provided support for the second theme of Black feminist thought and the ability for these young women to recognize the interlocking significance of race, gender, and class.

In the end, Collins (2000) states "identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition" (p. 114). The journey of the African American female collegiate athlete was individual; yet the intersecting oppressions and interlocking identities of race, gender, and athletic status weighed on their psychology. Nevertheless, I believe the opportunity to convey their experiences will build a stronger sense of self; and, a more substantial foundation for African American female collegiate athletes to redefine the collective within the PWI.

### Conclusion

Now she's older now/ Yes, she's wiser now/ Can't disguise now/ She don't need/ No one tell in her/ What to do and say/ No one telling her/ Who to be/ She's on solid ground/ She's been

lost and found/ Now, she answers to G O D/ And she's confident/ This is not the end/ Ask me how I know/ Cause she is me. – Mary J. Blige, *Take Me As I Am* (2005)

As I embarked on this study I was not expecting to see a reflection of my experiences seven years post-collegiate athletic participation. The twelve African American female athletes represented the same strength, intelligence, beauty, and yearning I had, for acceptance and recognition, and to be more than an African American female athlete. African American female collegiate athletes daily experience “create the conditions whereby the contradictions between everyday experiences and the controlling images of Black womanhood become visible” (Collins, p. 99). However, by providing the opportunity for the African American female athlete to describe her experience and reflect upon her experience, not only allows a level of consciousness to be attained, but she begins to deconstruct the negative and/or derogatory images aligned with the African American female athlete. Thus, she defines herself.

This study, similar to Bruening et al (2005), explored the concept of voice through Black feminist thought. Expanding on the work of Bruening et al (2005), I infused CRT and asked broad questions about the overall experiences as African American female collegiate athletes based on race, gender, and sport within the PWI. In addition, and similar to Foster (2003), this study explored the experiences as African American female athlete in the PWI. Again, the use of broad questions allowed a more comprehensive array of experiences to manifest. The representation of voice, while minimal in numbers, found the interlocking experiences and interactions of the African American female athlete to be: a) isolated and alienated from the general student body and other African American non-athletes; b) outside of the sport context to have a significant impact on identity, as the demands of sport participation and affiliation

contextualize the college experience; and c) highly racialized, but an apparent disconnect and an inability to recognize discriminatory occurrences, or microaggressions.

I believe Collins (1993) says it best, “race, class, and gender may all structure a situation but may not be equally visible and/or important in people’s self-definitions” (p. 560-561). For these young women, African American, female, and athlete was their context. But in the spirit of social justice it is my responsibility, and it is the responsibility of these young women, to broaden the definition of the African American female collegiate athlete to elevate the multitude of personal experiences because institutional social injustices create the constant need to negotiate their identity.

### Implications

There are a few issues implicated as a result of this study: the salient impact of isolation and alienation based on athletic and racial affiliation (Hawkins, 2001; Sailes, 1998); the generational disconnect of the realities of racism and stereotypical nuances placed upon the African American athletes (Rhoden, 2006; Powell, 2008); and the cry for mentorship by other African American female athletes to negotiate the realm of the PWI and find understanding and guidance to handle the social pressures, life challenges, and daily interactions with racism and/or sexism.

The later implication stems from the final question in the interview. While only four of the twelve women asked about my story, I believe even one inquiry gives rise to the importance of the theoretical practicality and necessity to incorporate counterspaces and counterplaces to share the joys and pains of our collective experiences (Collins, 2000).

## Future Research

This line of research brought forth many questions of interest. While I was able to obtain at least one perspective from each sport that had an African American female representative, it left a few sports unexplored, such as: golf, equestrian, and swimming were not represented. It peaked future research interest in the following areas:

- 1) Student identity – How does student identity impact the African American female athlete identity? The African American female collegiate athlete has professional career aspirations, has experienced academic accolades, and has indicated her dedication to academic honesty and success. Thus, in addition to athlete, African American, and female identity this domain may or may not impact the overall identity development and formation.
- 2) The mother-daughter relationship – Do mothers play a dominant role throughout the collegiate athletic experience? Therefore, explore the relationship between mother and daughter and the role of sport participation.
- 3) Coping skills – Do African American female athletes possess an adequate skill set to cope with the range of challenges faced in the predominantly white athletic environment and institution? Due to the strong reliance upon mothers, and other persons of support, an interest in an adequate skill set to cope with the range of challenges faced in the PWI athletic environment.
- 4) Title IX – How does the legislation of Title IX reflect opportunity and access to sports for the African American female youth? Engagement for lower and middle income families in sports such as tennis, golf, equestrian, volleyball, softball, swimming, and gymnastics, which are often associated with high socioeconomic families, as youth could encourage

greater involvement and opportunity at the collegiate level. Increased involvement is ideal; however, greater interaction between majority and minority students in these particular sports could present counterstories and assist in refuting stereotypical perceptions of African Americans in general and African American athletes in particular.

- 5) The coaching dynamic based on gender – How does the coaching dynamic between male coach and female athlete versus female coach and female athlete impact sport participation and identity development? While sports such as volleyball, gymnastics, and softball expressed a positive coaching dynamic, track and field presented elements of gendered base conflict.

These are just a few questions of interest, but the most significant areas based on the findings from this study. Continuing to perform comparative research and analysis will be necessary to fill the gaps of identity development and experience for the African American female collegiate athlete in the predominantly white institution.

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## APPENDIX A

### Consent Form Inventory

#### CONSENT FORM (Participant)

##### A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research study titled, Negotiating Identities: Examining Black Female Athletic Experience at Predominantly White Institutions. Akilah Carter, a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology – Sports Studies, at the University of Georgia, is conducting this study. The principal investigator, Ms. Akilah Carter, can be reached at 542-8464 (work). I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and I can refuse to participate or withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I can also have the results of the participation; to the extent they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following has been explained to me:

#### **Purpose:**

Ones personal experiences can determine how a person shapes their identity. The underline purpose of the present study is to determine how Black female collegiate athletes construct their identity within the context of sport. The significance of this study will aid in the understanding of Black female feelings, expectations, and overall experiences within a Division I university.

#### **Procedure:**

##### Athletic Experience Inventory:

This study will only involve Black female undergraduate students.

If I agree take part in this research study, the following will occur:

1. I will be asked to participate in a 30-minute questionnaire, and if selected, a 1 1-hour or 2 30-minute individual interview session which will take place at a time and location that is convenient for me.
2. The researchers would like to make audio recording(s) of the interview session(s).
3. In addition, I may contact you 2-3 weeks after you participate in this study to seek clarification or more information regarding your responses.

#### **Risk:**

The researcher does not expect any risks for me from participating in this study. It is possible that I may feel uncomfortable answering some of the research questions. I can skip any questions that I do not wish to answer. In addition, I may stop answering questions or discontinue participation at any time. If I experience any distress as a result of my participation in this research, I may contact the investigator (or his/her advisor) for counseling referrals, assistance, and resources.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to me, but the findings may provide insight and information on the experiences of Black female athletes in a predominantly white intercollegiate environment. Findings could provide alternative methods to instruction, advisement, and preparation for this population.

**Results:**

The results of my participation will be confidential and will not be released in any identifiable form without my prior consent unless required by law. My signature on this form authorizes the use of my data in group analyses that may be prepared for public dissemination without breaching my confidentiality. To accomplish this, I will be assigned a four-digit participation number that will be used on all data collected during my participation in this research. A master list with my name and corresponding code number will be kept separate from testing data and locked at all times. The master list will be destroyed following the interviews and data analysis of the participant responses.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 542-8464 (work).

**Confidentiality:**

Information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with me will remain confidential unless required by law. Any data containing individually identifying information, including the audiotapes, will be securely kept in a locked in a filing cabinet or password protected computer in the researcher's office. After analysis is complete, the researcher will erase any individually identifying information from the data, remove any links between the name and the results, and will erase or destroy the audio recordings.

I understand the procedures described above and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

## CONSENT FORM (Participant)

### A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES

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The following has been explained to me:

#### **Purpose:**

One's personal experiences can determine how a person shapes their identity. The underline purpose of the present study is to determine how Black female collegiate athletes construct their identity within the context of sport. The significance of this study will aid in the understanding of Black female feelings, expectations, and overall experiences within a Division I university.

#### **Procedure:**

##### Athletic Experience Interview:

This study will only involve Black female undergraduate students.

If I agree to take part in this research study, the following will occur:

1. I have participated in a 30-minute questionnaire, and have been selected, a 1 1-hour or 2 30-minute individual interview session which will take place at a time and location that is convenient for me.
2. The researchers would like to make audio recording(s) of the interview session(s).
3. In addition, I may contact you 2-3 weeks after you participate in this study to seek clarification or more information regarding your responses.

#### **Risk:**

The researcher does not expect any risks for me from participating in this study. It is possible that I may feel uncomfortable answering some of the research questions. I can skip any questions that I do not wish to answer. In addition, I may stop answering questions or discontinue participation at any time. If I experience any distress as a result of my participation in this research, I may contact the investigator (or his/her advisor) for counseling referrals, assistance, and resources.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits to me, but the findings may provide insight and information on the experiences of Black female athletes in a predominantly white intercollegiate environment. Findings could provide alternative methods to instruction, advisement, and preparation for this population.

**Results:**

The results of my participation will be confidential and will not be released in any identifiable form without my prior consent unless required by law. My signature on this form authorizes the use of my data in group analyses that may be prepared for public dissemination without breaching my confidentiality. To accomplish this, I will be assigned a four-digit participation number that will be used on all data collected during my participation in this research. A master list with my name and corresponding code number will be kept separate from testing data and locked at all times. The master list will be destroyed following the interviews and data analysis of the participant responses.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 542-8464 (work).

**Confidentiality:**

Information that is obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with me will remain confidential unless required by law. Any data containing individually identifying information, including the audiotapes, will be securely kept in a locked in a filing cabinet or password protected computer in the researcher's office. After analysis is complete, the researcher will erase any individually identifying information from the data, remove any links between the name and the results, and will erase or destroy the audio recordings.

I understand the procedures described above and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

## APPENDIX B

### BLACK FEMALE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETE EXPERIENCES

The goal of this questionnaire is to understand the experiences of Black female athletes' intercollegiate experiences as it relates to race, gender and athletic participation at Division I university institutions. Please provide as much information as you feel comfortable. Thank you for your time and input.

#### SECTION I

Demographic Information: Consider your current status at this university. Please check the box(es) or list the information that most accurately represents you.

1. What sport do you participate in at this university: Check all that apply

- |                                       |  |  |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basketball 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Softball 3          | <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis 5        | <input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming & Diving 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Track & Field 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer 8     |

2. You are currently classified athletically as: Check One

- |                           |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. 1 <sup>st</sup> year 1 | 2. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year 3 | 3. 5 <sup>th</sup> year 5 |
| 4. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year 2 | 5. 4 <sup>th</sup> year 4 | 6. Graduate 6             |

3. You are currently classified academically as: Check One

- |                            |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 7. 1 <sup>st</sup> year 1  | 8. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year 3  | 9. 5 <sup>th</sup> year 5 |
| 10. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year 2 | 11. 4 <sup>th</sup> year 4 | 12. Graduate 6            |

4. What is your academic major?

---

5. How many credit hours are you taking this semester: Check One

- |                 |                   |                        |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 13. 3 hours 1   | 14. 7-9 hours 3   | 15. 13-15 hours 5      |
| 16. 4-6 hours 2 | 17. 10-12 hours 4 | 18. 16 hours or more 6 |

#### SECTION II

Sport Participation: Consider your current athletic status at this university. Please check the box(es) or list the information that best represents you.

1. At what age did you first compete in sport?

---

2. What sports did you participate in before college? Check all that apply

- |                                       |  |  |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basketball 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Softball 3          | <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis 5        | <input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming & Diving 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Track & Field 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer 8     |
|                                       |  |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other 9      |
-



3. Have you had any setbacks (injury, accident, athletic infraction, academic infraction) that left you out of collegiate sport for more than 6 weeks? If yes please explain below, if no please move to the next question.

Explain

4. Your athletic scholarship status is? Check one

☐ Walk on – no scholarship <sup>1</sup>

☐ Partial scholarship <sup>2</sup>

☐ Full scholarship <sup>3</sup>

### SECTION III

Athletic Perceptions: Please circle the number that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement regarding your sport participation.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. I consider myself an athlete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I have many goals related to sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Most of my friends are athletes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sport is the most important part of my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I spend more time thinking about sport more than anything else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### SECTION IV

Perceptions and Attitudes: Consider your perceptions based on the time and experiences incurred at this university as it relates to *athletic opportunity; athletic supports – for example, allowed extensions on homework assignments or access to tutorial services; and discrimination based on your race and gender*. Please circle the number that most accurately represents you and your experience(s) at UGA when applicable.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. Compared to White females, Black females have the same collegiate athletic opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Compared to Black males, Black females have the same collegiate athletic opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In the next set of questions, consider this past month, and your experience(s) with *support based on your athletic status*. Please circle the number that most accurately represents you and your experience(s).

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. In the past month I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the athletic environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. In the past month I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the academic environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. In the past month I have experienced support based on my athletic status in the Athens community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In the next set of questions, consider this past month, and your experience(s) with *discrimination based on your race*. Please circle the number that most accurately represents you and your experience(s).

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. In the past month have you experienced discrimination based on race in the athletic environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. In the past month have you experienced discrimination based on race in the classroom setting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. In the past month have you experienced discrimination based on race in the Athens community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In the next set of questions, consider this past month, and your experience(s) with *discrimination based on your gender*. Please circle the number that most accurately represents you and your experience(s).

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. In the past month I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the athletic environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. In the past month I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the classroom setting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. In the past month I have experienced discrimination based on my gender in the Athens community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## SECTION V

Influence and Role Models: Consider your experiences this past month and your experience(s) in general. Please indicate who or what has influenced your life. For example, parents, siblings, counselors, teacher, professional athlete, and/or music and other media. Provide a written explanation and/or examples that capture your experience(s).

1. What person(s) or things have been most influential in your life?  
Explain

2. Tell me about a time or recall and incident when they influenced your decision(s).  
Explain

## SECTION VI

Demographic Information: Consider your personal status in this current semester. Please list or check the box(es) that most accurately represents you.

1. What age will you be by December 30, 2007?

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2. How would you classify your ethnicity? For example – African American, Jamaican, African - Kenyan

---

3. What city/state did you graduate high school?

---

4. Your parents socioeconomic status would be classified as: Check One

19. Low Income <sup>1</sup>

20. Middle Income <sup>2</sup>

21. High Income <sup>3</sup>

5. Do you live on or off campus? Check One

☐ On campus <sup>1</sup>

☐ Off campus <sup>2</sup>

6. Do you have a job? Check One (If yes, go to the next question. If no please turn in questionnaire)

☐ Yes <sup>1</sup>

☐ No <sup>2</sup>

7. Your job is considered full time or part time? Check One

☐ Full Time <sup>1</sup>

☐ Part Time <sup>2</sup>

8. How many hours do you work a week? Check One

22. 3 hours <sup>1</sup>

23. 7-9 hours <sup>3</sup>

24. 13-15 hours <sup>5</sup>

25. 4-6 hours <sup>2</sup>

26. 10-12 hours <sup>4</sup>

27. 16 hours or more <sup>6</sup>

9. You participate in extracurricular activities/organizations at the university? Check One

28. Sorority <sup>1</sup>

30. Intramurals <sup>3</sup>

32. Pre-professional  
organization <sup>5</sup>

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33. Club Sports <sup>2</sup>

35. Student government <sup>4</sup>

37. Other <sup>6</sup>

List

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Thank you for your participation. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

**I am very interested in what happens to Black women collegiate athletes. I would like to ask you questions about your experiences in college. Although I will be asking questions and seeking answers from you, I want you to feel free to take your time in answering the questions and feel free to refuse to answer any question. My intention is to learn about your story. I am a Black woman who loves to listen and to talk and it is my hope that this interview will be fun.**

- 1) How did you get started in sport?
- 2) How did sport contribute to your youth development? What role did sport play as a child?  
What role did sport play as a teenager?
- 3) Why did you choose your current sport and eventual pursue in college?
- 4) How is sport shaping you now?
- 5) What is your daily life like on campus? Describe the typical day on campus.
- 6) Describe the kinds of personal attributes that contribute to your experience.
- 7) How do you cope with the new environment? Is there anyone or anything that helps you with the environment at this university?
- 8) What person or persons have influenced your life? Describe how the person/persons have influenced your life.
- 9) Tell me about a time or recall an incident when they influenced you decision(s).
- 10) What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as an athlete?  
What made these experiences positive experiences?
- 11) What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as an African American? What made these experiences positive experiences?
- 12) What have been your most positive experiences you have encountered as a female? What made these experiences positive experiences?

- 13) What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as an athlete?  
What made these experiences negative experiences?
- 14) What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as an African American? What made these experiences negative experiences?
- 15) What have been your most negative experiences you have encountered as a female? What made these experiences negative experiences?
- 16) What advice would you give to upcoming Black female athletes as they matriculate the collegiate student – athlete environment?
- 17) What support/advice would you give to counselors and coaches or ask from counselors and coaches about your daily experiences as a black female collegiate athlete?
- 18) How would you describe yourself today?
- 19) What would you like to tell me that I have not asked?