

ABSTRACT

OFOEGBU, EZINNE DEBRA. “*Being a Black Woman Means Strength*”: An Exploration of the College Experiences and Identity of Black Women Student-Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions. (Under the direction of Dr. Joy Gaston Gayles)

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the identity-based experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White institutions. Framed by Black feminist thought and critical race feminism, this study employed narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of Black women student-athletes ($n=7$). Using photovoice and photo elicitation, semi-structured interviews, and sista circles as methods of data collection, analysis uncovered four themes which captured how Black women student-athletes experienced college, and how they navigated and defined their identity throughout various periods of their life: “*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*”, which captured participants’ experiences of being an athlete in the classroom, “*I’m not like a normal person*”, which captured participants’ experiences related to being a collegiate athlete at their institution, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, which captured participants’ experiences navigating different relationships and creating community within the athletic space, and “*I'll be the only Black girl?*”, which captured participants’ experiences and perceptions of how being a Black women athlete shaped their experiences. This paper concludes with a discussion of the findings in the context of prior literature, as well as implications for future research, policy and practice. Exploring the ways in which the experiences of Black women student athletes differ from those within dominant narratives of “women athletes” and “Black athletes” can redefine how higher education and the NCAA define gender and racial equity for collegiate athletes.

Keywords: Black women, college athletics, critical race feminism, identity

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Being a Black Woman Means Strength”: An Exploration of the College Experiences and Identity
of Black Women Student-Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions

by
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DEDICATION

For my family.

BIOGRAPHY

Ezinne Debra Ofoegbu was born in Inglewood, California to Nigerian immigrants who came to America to pursue higher education. Ezinne is a proud product of California's public-school system, culminating in her graduation from San Diego State University (SDSU) in 2015, with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology. During her time as an undergraduate at San Diego State, Ezinne was very active on campus, serving in student government, and student organizations such as the Student African American Sisterhood and the Afrikan Student Union. She also became a member of the Nu Upsilon Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated and served as the president of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. These experiences sparked Ezinne's initial interest in higher education and student affairs. Following her time at SDSU, she completed her Master of Education in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs at the University of Southern California (USC) in 2016. As a graduate student at USC, Ezinne began working with student-athletes and was selected to attend the NCAA Emerging Leaders Seminar.

In the fall of 2017, Ezinne enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program in Educational Leadership, Policy and Human Development, with a specialization in Higher Education Administration at North Carolina State University. During her time at NC State, she served as the graduate assistant in the College of Education Graduate Student Support Services (2017-2018), graduate assistant for research and assessment in University Housing (2018-2021), and a teaching assistant in Interdisciplinary Studies (2019-2021). She also served as the President for the Black Graduate Student Association. She has presented and published works on the implications of gender and race, and larger issues of equity in college sports over the last several

years. Upon graduation, Ezinne will be returning to California where she will be an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Santa Clara University.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“To become a fine athlete she had to develop an assessment of herself in the face of a society which devalued her, as both a female and a Black” (Oglesby, 1981, p. 1).

Prior to the 1970s, Black women’s opportunities to play sports at the intercollegiate level were limited (Lansbury, 2001). Both the civil rights and women’s rights movements marked this period in American history. For much of this time, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were the only place where Black women could play. At HBCUs, Black women demonstrated their ability to dominate in sports, on intercollegiate and international platforms (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). For example, the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) Tigerettes dominated the sport of track & field and produced Alice Coachman, who was the first Black American woman to win an Olympic gold medal (Gissendanner, 1996). Moreover, during her time as a student-athlete at Florida A&M University, Althea Gibson was a world-renowned tennis player and the first Black American to win a Grand Slam title (Harris & Kyle-DeBose, 2007; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). Their unprecedented success came at a time when both race and gender discrimination were heightened in United States and internationally (Gissendanner, 1996; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). These women found success despite discrimination, and broke both color and gender barriers in their respective sports. Their will to thrive in spaces such as the Olympics and Wimbledon demonstrated their ability to navigate spaces that had historically excluded them. Several years after Coachman and Gibson have left college sports, however, Black women student-athletes still find themselves moving through unfamiliar spaces within the college environment.

Black women athletes continue to navigate spaces that have historically excluded them, particularly historically and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) across the country. While contemporary Black women student-athletes have greater access to different institutional types

and sports, they are still navigating spaces in which they are considered “other” and may be facing challenges that ultimately shape their ability to persist and graduate, and how they perceive their identities in the context of larger society (Bruening et al., 2005; Carter & Hawkins, 2011; Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Withycombe, 2011). Because they hold subordinate racial and gender identities, their experiences cannot be understood by simply examining the implication of race or gender, separately (Carter-Francique, 2017). Furthermore, Black women student-athletes at Division I institutions, the highest level of competition within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), have distinctly different graduation rates than their Black male counterparts, and women counterparts from other racial groups. According to the NCAA, the graduation rate for Black women student-athletes is 67 percent, 77 percent for White women student-athletes, 69 percent for other women athletes of color (e.g., Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, etc.), and 57 percent for Black male athletes (NCAA, 2020). Differences in graduation rates suggest that there may be differences in lived experiences, thus warranting an exploration of their college experiences in order to better understand how their identities may shape the way they experience both college and different athletic spaces.

Background of the Problem

The subsequent sections of this chapter describe three distinct problems which may shape Black women’s experiences in intercollegiate athletics: 1) the (under)representation of Black women student-athletes, particularly those at Division I institutions, 2) inequities and differential treatment that exist within sports, and 3) the implications of intersectionality in intercollegiate athletics. These problems, although not exhaustive, establish the context which frames the study of Black women student-athletes’ college experiences, within the context of their multiple identities.

(Under)Representation of Black Women in Intercollegiate Athletics

Increased opportunity for Black women to play sports at the intercollegiate level was influenced, in part, by the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, henceforth referred to as Title IX. Title IX explicitly addressed sex discrimination in educational settings, explaining that no person should be excluded or discriminated against within any education program or activity that receives federal funding (Title IX, 2019). For intercollegiate athletics, this meant colleges and universities receiving federal funding were required to offer women equitable opportunities to play sports, equally distribute scholarship dollars across men's and women's athletic programs and provide equitable access to resources such as tutoring and athletic facilities (NCAA, 2014). As of the 2018-2019 academic year, women made up 47% of student-athletes at Division I institutions, even though the NCAA sponsors more women's sports than men's, 21 vs. 19 respectively (NCAA, 2020).

Although Title IX was meant to increase the opportunities for all women athletes across all sports, Black women make up only 7% of student-athletes at Division I institutions, including those at HBCUs (NCAA, 2020). Further, Black women continue to be overrepresented in basketball and track & field (Alexander, 1978, Barclay, 1979; Murphy, 1980). Being saturated in these two sports further exacerbates the underrepresentation issue, as it demonstrates that Title IX did not benefit Black women athletes' access to college sport in the same way it did for White women (Pickett et al., 2012). In the 2018-19 academic year, Black women accounted for 47% of women's basketball players and 28% of women's track & field athletes. In all other sports Black women's participation ranges from 0% to 15%, with Black women making up 15% of women's volleyball, 8% of participants in women's gymnastics, and rifle, and 0% of women's ice hockey ($n = 1$) and skiing ($n = 0$). This may indicate that something is limiting Black girls' access to

certain sports before they begin their undergraduate careers, meaning that issues of representation speak to larger issues of access to sports, and potentially higher education as a whole.

When Black women are few in number, they experience discrimination and microaggressions from being the only one or one of few and are misunderstood because their experiences are not centered in research (Bruening, 2005; Norwood et al., 2014). This includes increased instances of racial microaggressions, stereotypes and slurs (Norwood et al., 2014; Ockimey, 2019; Raphael, 2016) and loneliness and isolation (Ockimey, 2019; Raphael, 2016). Underrepresentation in these sports also leaves Black women vulnerable to increased criticism regarding their appearance, performance, etc. Contemporary examples of the implications of this underrepresentation includes Serena Williams and Simone Biles, who are both very accomplished in their respective sports, but have also been represented in stereotypical ways (Ifekwunigwe, 2018). Such harmful representations may impact the ways these athletes see themselves and how they interact with others.

Differential Treatment and Inequities in Sports

Aligned with Black women's underrepresentation in intercollegiate athletics is the reality of differential treatment Black women athletes experience, particularly at the hands of media (Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). A 2018 report explained the Black women in professional sports have experienced increased instances of racism and sexism related to their image, behavior and skill, across various sports (School of Global Journalism & Communication, 2018). A contemporary example of this would be the portrayal of Serena Williams' performance and reaction in the 2018 Wimbledon, in which she was repeatedly likened to the "angry Black woman" stereotype (Chase, 2018; Prasad, 2018). Much of this differential treatment can be

attributed to racial and gender stereotypes, particularly those that call into question Black people's intellectual and leadership capacity (Holder et al., 2015) and stereotypes which paint Black women as either one of two extremes: angry and unattractive (e.g., Mammy and angry Black woman) (Corbin et al., 2018; Domingue, 2015) or overtly sexual (e.g., Jezebel) (Corbin et al., 2018; Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016). Media portrayal is significant, as media represents historical and contemporarily situated cultural norms and expectations that are universally held and valued.

Differential treatment may impact the way Black women view themselves in the context of their sports participation, as well as their sense of belonging within the athletic space. According to Bruening et al. (2005), such differential experiences contribute to the silencing of Black women student-athletes, a practice which describes Black women's metaphorical lack of voice and a symbolic explanation of the ways in which the marginalization of Black women has led to their underrepresentation in sports and other aspects of society. If such treatment occurs in professional sports, it is possible that the same treatment occurs in the collegiate space, in which even Black women non-athletes are susceptible to both racism and sexism in various academic and social settings (Corbin et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2013; West et al., 2016; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). This is not surprising as college serves is a microcosm of what they will experience in the professional world (Bruening et al., 2008a; Cooper et al., 2017).

Furthermore, structural differential treatment and inequities also exist within the larger scheme of women's athletics. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions have a long history with regard to gender (in)equality in intercollegiate athletics. A 2017 report on the status of women in intercollegiate athletics revealed that Division I institutions spend about twice as much on men's athletic programs than they do on women's

athletic programs. Division I athletic programs allocate about 42% of their budget to men's programs, 21% to their women's programs, and 36% is either allocated to coed sports (sports with both men's and women's teams), or left unallocated (NCAA, 2017). At this level, football and men's basketball are often the only sports that generate revenue and as such, cost more to operate. The issue lies in that these revenue-generating sports are men's programs, which results in Division I institutions spending an average of \$17,500 more on each male student-athlete compared to female¹ student-athlete (NCAA, 2017). Additionally, women's athletic programs are allocated a smaller portion of the revenue generated through the collection of student fees each year (Waxman, 2018) and receive a smaller portion of the fees collected through television broadcasting rights (Rayburn et al., 2015). These discrepancies result in certain resources being exclusive to men's teams, such as team doctors and medical equipment, use of facilities, decreased travel budgets, and the quantity of coaches for women's teams, and these coaches' salaries (NCAA, 2017; Simiyu, 2010).

Intersectionality and Intercollegiate Athletics

Issues of the underrepresentation of Black women in sport, and differential treatment and inequities are both informed by intersectionality. Intersectionality can be understood as a framework for understanding and examining the interlocking forms of oppression that exist for people who hold multiple marginalized social identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). These interlocking forms of oppression create inequitable and oppressive structures and barriers that shape the lived experiences of those who are marginalized in multiple ways. Kimberlé Crenshaw conceptualized this term to explain Black women's experiences with discrimination in the

¹ The terms "woman" and "female" will be used interchangeably depending on the original source. I recognize that female refers to one's biological sex, whereas woman refers to one's chosen gender identity.

workplace and domestic violence. Single-identity oppression such as racism and sexism do not adequately explain how Black women experience discrimination and violence as a consequence of their race, gender, and social location. Similarly, gaining a comprehensive understanding of Black women student-athletes cannot be done without centering their experiences and taking into consideration the multiple marginalized identities they hold.

Crenshaw (1991) outlined three types of intersectionality: *political*, *representational*, and *structural*. *Political intersectionality* describes how policies and social justice movements (e.g., antiracist and feminist projects) actually marginalize and silence the unique issues of Black women. *Representational intersectionality* describes how stereotypes and caricatures are taken to be representative of an entire group of people, ignoring the complexity and diversity that may exist within the group. Finally, *structural intersectionality* describes the ways in which race and gender intersect to make Black women's experiences with discrimination and other forms of oppression different from the experiences of White women and Black men (Crenshaw, 1991). All three forms of intersectionality manifest in Black athletes' lives in distinct ways, and particularly in intercollegiate athletics.

In regard to underrepresentation in sports, political intersectionality provides a lens for understanding how Black women have historically been rendered invisible through the development of policy. One example is gender equity policy, such as Title IX, that does not consider the racialized implications of gender. Title IX benefitted White women across all levels of athletic involvement (e.g., student-athletes, coaches, administrators), to a much greater degree than it benefitted Black women and other women of color (Pickett et al., 2012). Title IX did not acknowledge how gender equity might look differently for Black women and other women of color (Mathewson, 2012). Only considering gender when creating policies and practices meant to

address gender equity, explains why White women make up 62% of women athletes at Division I institutions, and 29% of student-athletes at Division I institutions in general, making them the largest gendered racial subgroup of Division I athletes (NCAA, 2020b).

Representational intersectionality emphasizes the implications of Black women's underrepresentation and differential treatment in sport. Black women in sport have been represented in a manner that perpetuates negative stereotypes, leaving them vulnerable to increased criticism regarding their appearance and performance (Collins, 2000; Mowatt et al., 2013; Simien et al., 2019). For example, in 2007 Don Imus and the executive producer of his radio show referred to a predominantly Black women's college basketball team as "rough girls", "hardcore ho's" and "nappy-headed hoes" (Carter, 2007). This example demonstrates how controlling images, or longstanding images based on racist and sexist notions that incorrectly represent a group of people (Collins, 2000), do not allow Black women's lived experiences to be fully recognized and celebrated. Furthermore, prior research has demonstrated that Black women student-athletes contend with such stereotypes in the classroom (Harmon, 2009; Moody, 2011), and in different athletic settings (Cooky et al., 2010). Such incidents may inform how Black women student-athletes experience differential treatment in other campus and athletic spaces.

Structural intersectionality best describes how Black women's lived experiences in sport are different than those of White women and their Black male counterparts. Black women student-athletes' experiences can be informed by the intersections of their racial identity, gender identity, and other salient identities within the context of their social location. Literature discussing the experiences of Black athletes often only explores the implications of racism, suggesting that Black athletes navigate racial stereotypes related to their "innate athletic ability" and academic inferiority (Bruening, 2005; Comeaux, 2010; Harrison et al., 2009). Black women

student-athletes, specifically, must also contend with gender stereotypes that are informed by both their racial and gender identity, particularly in relation to their appearance (Cooky et al., 2010; Norwood et al, 2014; Withycombe, 2011) and performance (Ferguson, 2016). As such, Black women's student-athletes experiences need to be examined intersectionally. Using this approach allows the researcher to consider multiple forms of identity-based oppression, as well as the diverse perspectives that exist within this population (Carter-Francique, 2017). Therefore, assumptions and inferences about the experiences of Black women student-athletes cannot and should not be made solely using data about on Black people or women in general.

These problems provoke a conversation about how gender and race might shape Black women student-athletes' experiences in a manner that is distinctly different from student-athletes who experience a singular form of identity-based oppression. For instance, how does gender and race shape how Black women student-athletes experience college? Are there specific college-related challenges or obstacles that are uniquely faced by Black women student-athletes? How can higher education and student affairs practitioners better support the needs of Black women student-athletes? What we need to know is the extent to which these aforementioned problems show up in the academic, social, and athletic experiences of Black women student-athletes, how these problems inform their understanding of what it means to be a Black woman, and how practitioners can support their development. These questions and concerns warrant the exploration of Black women student-athletes college experiences.

Deficiencies in Prior Literature

Many studies on Black student-athletes at PWIs either take a holistic look at all Black student-athletes, regardless of gender, or place a hyper focus on Black male student-athletes. Examining this population in the aggregate can be misleading because the athletic environment

is one that privileges male-dominated norms and behaviors. Additionally, the majority of previous studies that exclusively examined Black women student-athletes focused specifically on their experiences academically (Cooper et al., 2016; Moody, 2011), in different athletic spaces (Carter-Francique et al., 2011), or how they contended with stereotypes (Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2016). Accordingly, few studies have specifically explored how Black women make sense of their identities within the context of athletic participation, be it racial, gender, or athletic identity. The lack of attention to how the college and athletic space influences their understanding of their identity is troublesome, as data reveals differences in the identity development processes of Black male and female student-athletes (Anthony & Swank, 2018).

Research that centers Black women student-athletes will help practitioners and researchers begin to understand how these students make sense of their racial, gender, and other salient social identities, and how the athletic space either facilitates or hinders this development. This is particularly significant because Black women student-athletes must navigate both a predominately White college environment and a predominantly male athletic environment, meaning their subordinate identities are reinforced across multiple university contexts. Without such knowledge, practitioners cannot support these students in culturally relevant ways. Furthermore, not exposing these experiences perpetuates discourse that contends that all the Blacks are male, and all the women are White (Hull et al., 1982; Patton et al., 2017), thus continuing the suppression of Black women's voices and pushing them further along the margins.

Problem Statement

Prior literature asserts that Black women students face a multitude of obstacles as they navigate PWIs. These obstacles include struggling to find sense of belonging in spaces where

very few people look like them and having to contend with gendered racism (Hannon et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2013). Black women student-athletes must not only navigate such obstacles that are presented by the predominantly White college environment, they also have to navigate the subculture of intercollegiate athletics, a space that is rooted in White and male-dominated norms that exist unchallenged (Ann & Rodriguez, 2000).

The abundance of research on the state of Black men as college athletes creates the narrative that while Black men are in crisis, Black women are doing “just fine” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 195), a result of not considering the interlocking marginalized identities that Black women hold. In such research, Black women student-athletes’ experiences are either only discussed in comparison to Black males or are completely ignored. As discussed in prior sections of this chapter, Black women student-athletes face racialized and gendered experiences that are distinctly different than those of Black males and women of other races, thus studies which discuss Black athletes must take an intersectional approach to exploring how Black women exist in predominantly White and male environments (Carter-Francique, 2017; Ferguson, 2016). There is a need for research that centers Black women student-athletes, instead of using them as a reference group to compare their experiences and outcomes to other student populations. More specifically, an intersectional approach is needed to consider the interlocking nature of multiple subordinate social identities and how they play into larger systems of power, oppression, and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). Such an approach provides the opportunity to understand how and why the experiences of Black women student-athletes are unique to those of their peers.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experiences and identity of Black women student-athletes at PWIs, specifically within the context of their intersecting social

identities and the barriers they may experience within the environment. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

This study captured the stories of their experiences and how they made sense of their identities in the context of sports participation. To frame the study and center the experiences of participants, Black feminist thought and critical race feminism informed the research design.

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks

To answer the research questions, I used the theoretical lenses of Black feminist thought and critical race feminism. Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race feminism (CRF) provided “sociohistorical lenses to the experiences of Black women” (Few, 2007, p. 453). Black feminist thought is a critical social theory which “describes Black women as a unique group that exists in a ‘place’ in US social relations where intersectional processes of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation shape Black women's individual and collective consciousness, self-definitions, and actions” (Few, 2007, p. 34; Collins, 2000). At the center of this conception is that while Black women’s voices have purposefully been suppressed and/or silenced, Black women have continued to exhibit intellectual creativity and work toward equity for all marginalized communities of people (Collins, 2000). BFT is both a theoretical framework and a social justice movement which aims to “empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (Collins, 2000, p. 22). This framework guided the development of my data collection tools and was used during data analysis to center

participants experiences and unpack the collective manner in which Black women student-athletes experience college.

Furthermore, critical race feminism (CRF) is a framework that considers experiences that exist along the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of identity-based oppression (Wing, 1997; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). CRF was born in legal studies to focus on the status of women of color under the law (Wing, 1997). The underlying assumption of this framework is that women of color's experiences are distinctly different from those of White women and men of color, in a manner that warrants a framework which considers the implications of multiple forms of oppression (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). CRF provides an analytical framework for understanding the intersections of race and gender and relies on the concepts of intersectionality and anti-essentialism to examine and explain how Black women and other women of color experience various aspects of society, such as the legal system and education (Berry, 2010; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing, 1997). This framework guided the selection of the methodology, methods for data collection and protocols. The framework also provided a more nuanced perspective during data analysis.

Overview of Method

This study used narrative inquiry to capture the stories of participants' experiences and how they made sense of their identities in the context of participation in intercollegiate athletics at their PWIs. Narrative inquiry is designed to study human experiences through the collection and telling of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Specifically, a counternarrative approach was used to present the stories of people whose lives have been shaped by stereotypical representations and dominant societal narratives (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). With such an approach, participants were able to reflect on their time as a student-athlete,

contribute to oppositional knowledge about Black women in America, and tell counterstories that “talk back” (hooks, 1989, p. 5) to dominant narratives about Black women in sports and education. Data were collected through participation in a photovoice activity, semi-structured interviews with each participant, and *sista circles* with all participants.

Significance of Research

Understanding how Black women exist in athletic spaces is significant, as sports are a microcosm of American society (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). The unique blend of patterned behaviors, social structures, and relationships makes intercollegiate athletics an optimal space for examining the experiences of students and how they navigate social subordination in a predominantly White, university setting (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). Understanding how Black women student-athletes maneuver spaces historically dominated by White people and males can provide useful information about how these women develop and navigate academic, athletic, and social relationships, overcome negative stereotypes, and persist toward degree completion. Given that education is a social institution rooted in systemic relationships of domination and subordination, understanding how Black women navigate this space can inform how Black women navigate similar social institutions (e.g., hospitals, government/politics) (Collins, 1993).

This study is significant for practitioners and policymakers as well. This study will help scholars and practitioners understand whether or not the current state of their campus environments is truly an inclusive one. This is significant because research shows that inclusive campus environments foster a greater sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2015; Museus, 2014), and motivation to persist and graduate (Carter, 2006; Hurtado et al., 1999). For policymakers, this study provides insight into how the experiences of Black women student-athletes differ from those within dominant narratives of “women athletes” and “Black athletes”. Such insight can

change how higher education and the NCAA define gender and racial equity and provoke a shift toward more equity-minded programming and initiatives. These women's stories can serve as a source of empowerment and motivation for each other, and other Black women and girls who have similar experiences or aspirations, in the same ways that the stories of Alice Coachman and Althea Gibson have opened doors for the participants of this study. The study was an opportunity to transmit knowledge and wisdom associated with being a college student, an athlete, and a Black woman.

The methodological and theoretical significance of this study are also of note. Using nontraditional data collection strategies, such as photovoice and sista circles, provides researchers with the tools to conduct research with a social justice and equity focus, as such practices position participants as “knowers” and experts of their own experiences (Chapman et al., 2019; Huber, 2008). Such research is important for understanding the influences of institutions and society on the experiences of Black students and other students of color (Chapman & DeCuir-Gunby, 2019). This study demonstrates how the use of narrative inquiry can be employed to breed power and transformative resistance to those who have been pushed along the margins (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As Crenshaw (1989) explained at the conclusion of her foundational piece on intersectionality, when the issues of Black women are addressed, the issues of all marginalized people will also be addressed.

Definition of Terms

Counternarrative

Delgado (1989) describes counterstorytelling as a method of telling the stories of people who have been pushed along the margins of society and a tool for challenging the dominant

narratives that have been perpetuated by those who are in power. Counternarratives are the product of counterstorytelling.

Dominant narrative

Harper (2009) defined dominant or master narratives as “dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Blacks are hopeless and helpless) – such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways” (p. 702). Also referred to as master narrative.

Predominantly White institutions (PWIs)

In this study, the term predominantly White institutions is used to describe institutions with a historical legacy of excluding Black students and other marginalized populations of students, some even relying on slave labor to build and upkeep these institutions immediately following their inception (Johnson, 2019). Black students and other students of color continue to make up a small fraction of their student body (Thornhill, 2018).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be understood as a framework for understanding and examining the interlocking forms of oppression that exist for people who hold multiple marginalized social identities. These interlocking forms of oppression create inequitable and oppressive structures and barriers that shape the lived experiences of those who are marginalized in multiple ways (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Nonrevenue generating sports

College sport programs that do not generate revenue. This includes sports like baseball, softball, gymnastics, and soccer. This group of sports are also referred to as Olympics sports, as majority of these sports are also played during the quadrennial Olympic games.

Revenue generating sports

College sports programs that do generate revenue. Men's basketball and football are the only revenue-generating sports in college sports. At most institutions, the revenue generated from these sports is used to subsidize the cost of operating the remaining sports (i.e., Olympics sports).

Chapter Summary and Dissertation Overview

This study addressed two research questions that expand our understanding of Black women student-athletes: 1) What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions? and 2) How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

To address these research questions, I begin with Chapter 2, which reviews the literature relevant to the research questions which guided this study and the theoretical foundations which influence the study in various ways. The literature is divided into three general sections: 1) theoretical frameworks, 2) Black students and higher education and 3) gender and race in intercollegiate athletics. Chapter 2 opens up with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, BFT and CRF. These frameworks are critical for understanding and addressing the experiences and needs of Black women student-athletes. I then discuss the experiences of Black college students and Black women in particular. The overview of Black students in higher education provides a framework for understanding how race is and has always been a salient aspect of Black women's experiences at PWIs. Research on Black women college students is discussed to identify the experiences Black women student-athletes may share with their non-athlete counterparts. The discussion of student-athletes in higher education provides an overview

of student-athletes in college, both historically and presently. This literature discusses the impact and implications of both gender and race in intercollegiate athletics. The chapter concludes with a discussion of literature that specifically focuses on Black women student-athletes, identifying the distinct gendered and racialized differences in how Black women student-athletes experience college and make sense of their identity.

Chapter 3 summarizes the research methodology I used to complete this study. In this chapter I discuss how I employed narrative inquiry and various data collection and analysis strategies to answer my research questions. Chapter 4 presents counternarratives of seven current and former student-athletes. These counternarratives provide a portrait of who each participant is, including their family background, early sporting experiences, and unique stories related to navigating identity as Black women student-athletes at PWIs. Chapter 5 presents themes across all participants. These themes can be understood as the collective experiences of Black women student-athletes at PWIs. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses this study's findings in the context of prior literature, as well as the study's scholarly contribution. It concludes with implications for future research and recommendations for practice in youth sports programs and in higher education policy, programming, and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the literature which framed this study and the theoretical foundations which are relevant to this study. It is organized in two sections. The first section presents the theoretical foundations of this study: 1) Black feminist thought (BFT) and 2) critical race feminism (CRF). The second section provides an overview of the literature which frames the context of Black women's experiences as student-athletes, specifically exploring Black college women and their college sports participation. This section begins with the historical context that frames this participation and concludes with a discussion of their lived experiences.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I will discuss Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race feminism (CRF) as frameworks for understanding Black women student-athletes experiences and identities. These frameworks provide a critical perspective toward both race and gender, which challenge historically situated narratives regarding Black women and other women of color. Gayles et al. (2018) asserted that using critical frameworks in athletic scholarship can “highlight, analyze, and transform cultures and structures that are oppressive and inequitable for marginalized populations” (p. 14).

Black Feminist Thought

Collins (2000) explained that race and gender are inextricably linked, and as such are the fundamental causes of the social conditions Black women exist in, a fact that is overwhelmingly overlooked in dominant feminist and anti-racist social movements and scholarly discourse. This oversight has only led to the silencing of Black women's voices and the promotion of White, Eurocentric frameworks for understanding society. Collins (2000) presented Black feminist

thought (BFT) as a critical social theory which “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black women as a collectivity” (p. 9). As a theoretical framework and social movement, BFT holds a commitment to social justice for Black women, but also similarly oppressed groups.

There are a number of key concepts associated with BFT. For example, *outsider-within* status refers to the social location of Black women in America’s racial hierarchy, which is underscored by unequal power dynamics due to race, gender, sexuality, etc. (Collins, 2000). *Matrix of domination* is a paradigm which explains how intersecting forms of oppression are created and maintained, and how power and subordination appears differently depending on the intersections of one’s identities. The matrix includes forms of identity-based oppression related to race, gender, sexuality, etc. While all Black women exist within the matrix, their location varies depending on their intersecting identities (Collins, 2000). *Controlling images* are longstanding images based on racist and sexist notions that incorrectly represent a group of people (Collins, 2000). Finally, *self-definitions* describe the methods of challenging knowledge production process that have led to stereotypical images of Black women and girls throughout history (Collins, 1986). These key concepts explain how Black women have historically been othered in society, as well as how Black women have continued to be oppressed structurally and representationally. These concepts can be used to explain and understand how Black women student-athletes’ experiences are distinct from their Black male and other women counterparts, particularly in college sports where Black women historically have not held the same rights as other racial and gender groups and have been represented in a manner that evokes historically situated stereotypes.

In qualitative research, BFT can serve as both a researcher positionality tool and a methodological tool. As a positionality tool, Black feminist researchers can adopt a Black feminist epistemology, which describes how Black women create and validate knowledge. This epistemological stance stands in complete opposition to Eurocentric, masculine epistemologies that Collins (2000) argues reflect the interests of White men. There are four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology: 1) lived experiences as a criterion for meaning, 2) the use of dialogue as a means of generating and validating knowledge claims, 3), the ethic of caring and 4) the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2000). I explain these four dimensions in further detail in Chapter 3. As a methodological tool, Black feminist researchers are also tasked with 1) uncovering multiple truths, such as reporting how participants' experiences are different, 2) sharing participants' experiences as a collective, or sharing themes across all participants, 3) and creating opportunities for self-definition and self-determination, as in selecting data collection tools that allow participants to name and share their own realities (Patterson et al., 2016). BFT served all of these functions in this study.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism (CRF) is an intervention of both critical race theory (CRT) and feminist theory and provides a critical lens for examining the intersections of racial and gender oppression (Wing, 1997). As a theoretical framework CRF posits that “women of color’s experiences and perspectives, are different from the experiences of men of color and those of White women” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 20). CRF is an outgrowth of critical legal studies (CLS), critical race theory (CRT), and feminist jurisprudence. Legal scholars such as Richard Delgado and Adrien Wing argued that these three strands of legal jurisprudence excluded women of color, and did not adequately serve her their legal or social interests in areas

such as criminality and domestic violence, employment and discrimination, and pregnancy and motherhood (Wing, 1997). Wing (2007) argued that the intersections of race and gender identity create a multiplicative identity, which means that women of color are not simply White women plus race, or men of color plus gender. As such, CRF theorizes how and why women of color have been excluded from certain legal and social discourses and create avenues to increase the visibility and narratives of women of color (Wing, 2007).

Wing (2007) identified intersectionality and anti-essentialism as two contributions that makes CRF distinct from CLS, CRT, and feminist discourse and analysis, intersectionality and anti-essentialism. Intersectionality acknowledges that there are barriers and oppressive structures in place that oppress people who face multiple forms of identity-based oppression, while anti-essentialism describes the rejection of the idea that experiences related to a single social identity are monolithic (Crenshaw, 1989; Grillo, 1995). Below I discuss these two tenets and how they aligned with this study.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be understood as the interlocking forms of oppression that exist for people who hold multiple marginalized social identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). These interlocking forms of oppression create inequitable and oppressive structures and barriers that shape the lived experiences of those who hold multiple marginalized identities. This concept was conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in a discussion on the experiences of Black women in the US legal system. Crenshaw (1989) described that:

The experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be

captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (p. 1244)

With this tenet comes a call to push beyond single axis and additive approaches of exploring identity-based oppression. Over time, the scope of this concept has expanded to incorporate other subordinate social identities (e.g., sexuality, ethnicity, ability, etc.). Rather than exploring identity-based oppressions in isolation of each other, we must consider how the intersections of one's identities may be interacting to create an experience that presents a more nuanced explanation of what it means to be oppressed (Crenshaw, 1991).

Anti-essentialism

Because intersectionality rejects the notion that social identities are separate with limited interaction, this is closely tied to the concept of anti-essentialism. Grillo (1995) proposed that anti-essentialism is the rejection of the idea that experiences related to a single social identity are monolithic (e.g., a singular "Black" experience). A Black woman will experience her Blackness differently than a Black man, and similarly, a Black queer person will experience their Blackness differently than a Black straight person. In her essay, *Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House*, Grillo (1995) identifies three lessons to be learned from a critique of intersectionality and anti-essentialism, two of which were particularly important for this study: 1) we should not give into the "oppression sweepstakes", in which we are competing to determine who's more oppressed, and 2) we must be careful not to essentialize the experiences of people who share our social identities.

Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) explained that "intersectionality is fundamental to holistically explore the experiences of Black women at an PWI. To view their identities as separate experiences would be an injustice to their experiences as Black women" (p. 284). This

study builds upon the concept of intersectionality by providing an understanding of how this might manifest in the athletic space. Not only did the participants in this study identify as Black and woman, but these identities were also intersecting with an athletic identity. Athlete status/identity has historically been synonymous with maleness (Adams et al., 2010; Connell, 2005). This study was particularly interested in understanding the relationship between one's identities and how they might influence their experience as a student and as a collegiate athlete, within the context the predominantly White university space, which has historically restricted access for Black students (Harvey et al., 2004; Litolff, 2007), and intercollegiate athletic space which has historically excluded and underfunded women's programs (Gregg & Gregg, 2017; Lovett & Lowry, 1995). Intersectionality and anti-essentialism provide lenses for this understanding, as they consider that shared identities do not necessarily mean a universally shared experience.

These theoretical frameworks provided lens for understanding the societal context which has shaped the lives of Black women across history. BFT was both a positionality and methodological tool that allowed me to center participants experiences and uncover their individual and collective stories (Collins, 2000). CRF provided a critical lens which informed the research design of this study and helped me make sense of how participants experienced their identities. Additionally, both frameworks acknowledged that while the Black women's point of view is collective, it is not homogenous. Black women's experiences differ across social class, sexuality, level of education, etc. (Collins, 2000). This shows that all Black women's voices are equally important and valuable because they add to the collective. Together, they provided structure for this literature review. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the implications of gender and race and higher education and intercollegiate athletics. As posited in CRF, both

gender and race must be considered when examining the experiences of Black women. I present these identities as separate entities to demonstrate why it is important to examine Black women student-athletes experiences' intersectionally. I begin with a discussion of Black college students, in general.

Black Students and Higher Education

To understand the significance of race for present-day Black college students, it's important to discuss and acknowledge the historical context which frames Black students' college going, particularly at PWIs. Prior to the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Black students were widely denied admission and excluded from PWIs across the country, but particularly in the southern states (Harvey et al., 2004). Just 10% of Black college goers were enrolled at PWIs before the Court's decision (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The decision in *Brown* called for public schools across the country to fully integrate Black students "with all deliberate speed" (Harvey et al., 2004; Litolff, 2007). Although the decision was explicitly intended for secondary schools, it had some implications for postsecondary education as well. Following the ruling, PWIs cracked their doors open a bit more, and Black enrollment at PWIs increased to 30% (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Following the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, legislation that allocated federal funds to provide financial assistance for college going students, PWIs experienced an increase in Black student enrollment due to the allocation of federal funds to implement policies and programs to increase college access for Black students and other students of color (Anderson, 2002; Redd et al., 1998). By 1980, about 80% of Black college goers were enrolled at PWIs (Freeman & McDonald, 2004). Unfortunately, PWIs are not often conducive to student learning, particularly for Black students.

Campus Climate at PWIs

Inclusive campus environments foster a greater sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2015; Museus, 2014), and motivation to persist and graduate (Carter, 2006; Hurtado et al., 1999). PWIs are not always an inclusive space for Black students and other marginalized people. Campus climate is defined as “the current perceptions and attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding issues of diversity on a campus” (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 48). A positive campus climate is one in which people of color are included throughout various aspects of campus, programming and initiatives support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color, and the curriculum reflects the history and experiences of students of color in some capacity (Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Black students and other students of underrepresented backgrounds and/or identities, are often faced with hostile campus climate, which is fostered through racial prejudice, lack of structural diversity, and discrimination toward students who do not identify with the majority (Griffin et al., 2016; Mwangi et al., 2018; Solórzano et al., 2000). Recent studies of campus climate at PWIs have shown that Black students navigate a hostile campus climate which includes dealing with racial conflict and unrest (Ancis et al., 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005), differential treatment from faculty and staff (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2016), and navigating stereotype threats that minimize their academic ability (Steele, 2003; Strayhorn, 2013). Such outcomes of a hostile campus climate both directly and indirectly affect college adjustment (Cabrera et al., 1999; Woldoff et al., 2011) and degree completion (Campbell et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2008).

In addition to campus climate, Black students must navigate microaggressions and stereotype threat as potential barriers to degree completion. Negative stereotypes have implications for Black students’ academic success and sense of belonging at the institution, as

many students feel they must prove that they earned their place at their institutions (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Watkins et al., 2010). These findings are corroborated by other studies which have found that Black students are highly susceptible to the negative effects of stereotype threat (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004; Steele, 1997, 2003). Additionally, experiences with racial microaggressions have negative implications on Black student's self-esteem (Bennett et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2014), and may result in academic setbacks such as withdrawing from courses, changing their majors, or transferring to different institutions (Solórzano et al., 2000). This is particularly true for Black women who perceive campus climate less favorably, and experience classroom inferiority and racial stigma more frequently than White women and other women of color and experienced less academic satisfaction as a result (Leath & Chavous, 2018).

This literature sets the context for understanding how Black students came to have access and how they presently experience PWIs. Exploring such literature is necessary for understanding how race is and has always been a salient aspect of how Black students experience college.

Black Women College Students

Literature concerning Black college students in higher education often examines Black students in the aggregate. Because race and gender are inextricably linked, it is important to understand how Black women's social identities are connected (Simien, 2005). Although limited, research has documented the unique experiences of Black women college students, including experiences related to stress and coping (Lewis et al., 2013; Robinson-Wood, 2009), microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2013, 2016; Williams & Nichols, 2012), and body image and

self-esteem (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010; Smith et al., 1991). The amount of literature on Black women still lags behind the amount of research on other student populations.

One of the first studies to examine Black women's college experiences, compared the experiences of those attending PWIs and HBCUs (Fleming, 1983). Fleming (1983) explained that "at White colleges the demands for achievement might be strong, but the poor social life (relatively few Black males) and non-supportive institutional climate might erode the development of achievement concerns" (p. 45-46). Similar to the findings of Terenzini et al. (1997), this study found that women attending HBCUs reported a more supportive atmosphere and less fear of failure than women at PWIs. This study also found that women at PWIs displayed more assertive abilities, derived from the desire to "hold their own intellectually" (Fleming, 1983, p. 145). This behavior comes at the expense of their mental and physical health. This finding is consistent with the stereotype of the "strong Black woman", which characterizes Black woman as strong and resilient, but also self-sacrificing (West et al., 2016). The findings of this study further demonstrate the need to explore how stereotypes and microaggressions may shape the experiences of Black women college students.

Stereotypes and Microaggressions

In addition to contending with racial stereotypes, Black women must navigate stereotypes associated with gendered racism, or the "the racial oppression of Black women's as structured by the racist and ethnicist perceptions of gender roles" (Essed, 1991, p. 31). Examples of gender racial stereotypes for Black women include the tropes of the "strong Black woman" (West et al., 2016), Jezebel (i.e., the oversexualized Black women) (Givens & Monahan, 2005; West, 1995), and mammy (i.e., the loyal house servant) (Givens & Monahan, 2005). Participants in Winkle-Wagner et al.'s (2019) study discussed the impact of certain stereotypes on their identity

development. Participants in this study contended with stereotypes related to their academic majors, their appearance, and their perceived hypersexuality. The problem with these stereotypes is that they make it challenging for one to establish their own individuality apart from the dominant narratives created by such stereotypes. These challenges increase the prevalence of identity negotiation, wherein Black women adjust how aspects of their identity show up in different spaces or groups of people in order to either counter the stereotype or get what they need from the space or group of people (Harlow, 2003; Rockquemore, 2002; Swann, 1987). The present study provides understanding of how Black women define themselves in light of these stereotypes.

Microaggressions also play a role in Black women's college experiences. Solórzano et al. (2000) define microaggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconscious" (p. 60). These subtle insults can be related to racism, sexism, or other forms of identity oppression. For Black women and other women of color, microaggressions are often not simply informed by one form of identity-based oppression like sexism or racism. Like stereotypes, they are informed by gendered racism (Essed, 1991). Prior research has discussed Black women's experiences with gendered racial microaggressions in interactions with faculty (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016), and other students, (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016; Williams & Nichols, 2012).

Microaggressions unique to Black women include comments related to their hair (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2013), being hypersexualized (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016, Lewis & Neville, 2015), their physical appearance (Lewis et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016), and having their presence on campus questioned (Lewis et al., 2016; Lewis & Neville, 2015). These microaggressions present a "longitudinal, environmental threat" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 679) to

Black women, which has implications on their academic performance, as well as their emotional, mental and physical well-being (Aronson et al., 1998). Increased instances of stereotyping and microaggressions create a hostile campus climate for Black women and other underrepresented populations of students. The present study lends insight into how Black women student-athletes navigate hostile campus climates and contend with stereotypes and microaggressions.

Identity

College has been identified as an optimal space for identity development and exploration (Mayhew et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2016), which makes it fruitful to mention the literature that discusses the identity exploration of Black women college students. The intersecting identities of race and gender present challenges to navigating different aspects of life. Winkle-Wagner (2009) found that Black college women navigate “identity dichotomies” related to their racial and gender identities. For example, a fear of being “too White” or “too ghetto”. In addition to this, because they are often the only one or one of few in predominantly White settings, they feel internal pressure from their Blackness and external pressure from non-Black peers to represent their race (Solórzano et al., 2000; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). This pressure is commonly known as “spokesperson pressure” (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Higher education scholars and practitioners must understand the implications of these dichotomic challenges and work toward developing strategies to aid in navigating them.

In regard to Black women student-athletes’ interactions with people and spaces, prior studies show that Black women college students seek different social systems and resources in an effort to nurture the development of their social identities (Croom et al., 2017; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Ferguson, 2016; Hannon et al., 2016; Porter & Dean, 2015). This is to be expected, as underrepresented students utilize counterspaces, whether physical, digital, or

otherwise, in which their identities can be affirmed and validated and where they can be in community with students who share similar experiences (Harris & Patton, 2017; Patton, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). When such spaces do not readily exist, Black women “self-segregate” as a response to microaggressions, stereotypes, and blatant racism experienced in different spaces at PWIs, such as residence halls (Haynes, 2019). The present study adds to this body of literature by uncovering whether the athletic space is one in which Black women feel that their racial and gender identities can be nurtured and validated.

While athletic identity adds an additional set of unique experiences and challenges, Black women student-athletes experiences are shaped by their race and gender, whether this is intentional or not (Jones & Abes, 2013). As such, it is important to discuss the experiences of Black women college students in the aggregate, as there may be significant overlap. The present study adds to this body of literature by using CRF to expand the theoretical understanding of the role of context in shaping how Black women experience their multiple identities in different academic and athletic spaces. Furthermore, understanding how context influences one’s identity salience, specifically because sports is a space built on norms of masculinity, or traits and behaviors traditionally associated with maleness (e.g., physical strength, leadership skills, assertiveness) (Adams et al., 2010) may reveal other challenges or rewards of being a Black woman that have yet to be explored.

Gender and Race in Intercollegiate Athletics

The college experiences of student-athletes are distinctly different than those of non-athletes. In addition to the traditional responsibilities and expectations of college students (e.g., attending class, completing assignments and reading, etc.), student-athletes also have responsibilities related to their athletic status. These responsibilities add anywhere between 10 to

20 additional hours of work to their week at any given point of the year (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Time demands create a unique set of challenges, as they may have to miss class, assignments, and/or exams due to athletic responsibilities (Jolly, 2008). However, when gender and race are factored into these experiences, they become even more stratified. Gender and racial identity have implications on what sports a student-athlete will play (Beamon, 2010; Bruening & Borland, 2007; Bruening et al., 2008b) and what they will experience in academic and athletic spaces (Anthony & Swank, 2018; Bruening, 2005; Simiem et al., 2019). CRF describes the ways in which Black women and other women of color's experiences cannot be understood within the confines of exploring a single social identity (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). This section will examine the implications of gender and race on "the student-athlete experience." I begin with an overview of the context which frames women's and Black students' involvement in intercollegiate athletics and conclude this chapter with a review of the existing literature on Black women student-athletes.

Gender in Intercollegiate Athletics

Black women student-athletes' experiences exist along the intersections of gender and race. As discussed in CRF, the intersections of gender and racial identities create a unique set of challenges, and context will have different implications for individuals who hold different intersecting identities (Carter-Francique, 2017; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). When structures of privilege and oppression are taken into consideration, the salience of one's identities is influenced by larger sociohistorical contexts (Jones & Abes, 2013). This section will discuss the sociohistorical context which shapes women athlete's participation in intercollegiate athletics and discuss the lived experiences of women athletes. This context may impact how Black

women student-athletes' experience their identities, particularly in spaces where their marginalization may be amplified from navigating a male-dominated culture.

Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women & The Impact of Title IX

Prior to the passage of Title IX, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was the governing body for women's athletic involvement at the collegiate level. The AIAW prioritized education and conveyed this priority by only allowing member institutions to offer academic and need-based scholarships to student-athletes (Alexander, 1978). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act arrived in 1972. Title IX explained that "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" (Title IX, 1972). Because intercollegiate athletic programs fell within the scope of "education program or activity", athletic programs at colleges and universities receiving federal funds were expected to: 1) provide men and women with equitable opportunities to participate in sports, 2) award athletic scholarships to men's and women's sports at a rate that is proportional to their participation, and 3) ensure that men's and women's sports had equal access to equipment and supplies, facilities, and publicity (NCAA, 2014). After several failed attempts to omit intercollegiate athletics from Title IX's jurisdiction, the NCAA began sponsoring women's sports in the 1978-79 academic year (Alexandar, 1978).

Title IX vs. Brown v. Board of Education

From 1971 to 2000, female of color's participation in intercollegiate athletics increased by 955%, while scholarship funds for this same population increased by 820% (Butler & Lopiano, 2003). However, Title IX had limited implications for Black women's participation in intercollegiate athletics. Dees (2007) argued that *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954)

had a greater impact on Black women college athletes than Title IX did. Brown provided greater access to different sports and opportunities, but prior to and following Title IX's passage, Black women had continued to be overrepresented in basketball and track & field, while few and far between in other sports (Bernhard, 2014). This underrepresentation in Olympic sports can be attributed to a number of reasons, including lack of interest, lack of these sports' availability in urban and predominantly Black/underrepresented high schools, and the overemphasis of sports such as football and basketball throughout socialization (Pickett, Dawkins, Braddock, 2012). Invisibility in basketball and track & field and hypervisibility in other sports has contributed to Black women student-athletes erasure from college sports history, which is likely the reason why many PWIs cannot identify their first Black woman student-athlete, in the same way they can identify the first Black male or first White woman (Mathewson, 2012; Olson, 1990). In summary, Title IX had great implications on women's participation in sport as a whole, but very little change occurred for Black women (Dees, 2007; Mathewson, 1996, 2012; Olson, 1990).

Mathewson (1996) argued that Title IX utilized a "single axis" approach to addressing gender equity, only considering the impact of gender oppression, as opposed to an intersectional one. An intersectional approach would have considered the implications of race, gender, and any other social identity-based subordination (Crenshaw, 1989). This claim is supported by literature which demonstrates that Title IX benefited White women in sport to a greater degree than for Black women and other women of color (Fields, 2008; Mathewson, 2012; Pickett et al., 2012; Theune, 2019). Although Black women and other women of color have taken advantage of access to college sport participation and a subsidized college education, White women still make up 62% of women athletes at Division I PWIs and 29% of student-athletes at Division I PWIs, overall (NCAA, 2020b). These numbers demonstrate the role of race in Black women's access

and opportunities to play college sports. This warrants an exploration of how both gender and race have shaped the experiences of Black women student-athletes.

Lived Experiences

Women student-athletes at Division I institutions graduate at a higher rate than male student-athletes (e.g., 74% v. 61%) (NCAA, 2020a). In regard to academics, women student-athletes' perceptions of their campuses' climate and the climate within their athletic department can influence their academic success (Hoffman et al., 2016; Rankin et al., 2016). When the campus climate is one that is welcoming and supportive of women, women athletes will do better academically (Rankin et al., 2016). This is aligned with prior literature which argued that having positive relationships with professors and a strong support system leads to positive postsecondary outcomes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Museus, 2014). Nonetheless, multiple studies show gender differences among women and male student-athletes in multiple areas of academics. For example, women student-athletes are more academically motivated than male student-athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Lee & Sten, 2017; Simons et al., 1999; Tudor & Ridpath, 2018); women student-athletes report higher levels of academic and athletic success (Rankin et al., 2016); women athletes identify more closely with their gender and student identities than they do their athletic identity (Harrison et al., 2009; Lance, 2004; Sherry & Zeller, 2014). This aligns with prior research which shows that male student-athletes are more socialized in sport than women (Hardin & Greer, 2009) and men take more pride in being a collegiate athlete than women do (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004).

Discrimination and Stereotypes

Role conflict occurs when an individual attempts to navigate the often-conflicting expectations of different roles they hold (Fletcher et al., 2003). For women athletes' this

disconnect may occur between gender identity, which is inherently associated with femininity, and athletic identity, which is inherently associated with masculinity (Fletcher et al., 2003; Lance, 2004). This role conflict also manifests itself as increased instances of gender-based discrimination. Examples include experiencing stereotypes related to their femininity, or lack thereof (Hively & El-Alayli, 2014; Krane et al., 2004; Ross & Shiner, 2008), their sexuality being questioned if they participate in co-ed sports (e.g., basketball) (Fink et al., 2013; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Rayburn et al., 2015), and criticism for displaying behaviors associated with masculinity (e.g., aggressiveness) (Krane et al., 2004; Ross & Shiner, 2008). Furthermore, multiple respondents in Sherry and Zeller's study (2014) noted gendered differences in the ways certain men's programs (e.g., men's basketball and football) are treated and perceived on campus, particularly because those programs are revenue-generating and carry large fanbases. Not only do differences between men's and woman's programs exist in the context of recognition, but the revenue aspect also manifests as differences in resources (NCAA, 2017; Simiyu, 2010). These differences may impact the ways that women engage with the athletic space, and their male counterparts.

As discussed in CRF, anti-essentialism is the rejection of the idea that experiences related to a single social identity are monolithic (e.g., singular "woman" experience) (Grillo, 1995). When women athletes are examined in the aggregate, we may be missing experiences that are raced in a manner that is different than White women and other woman of color. Furthermore, the samples of the studies mentioned in this section were overrepresented with White women. Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015) named such research as unidimensional, or research which examines a single dimension of social identity (e.g., studying women, studying Black people). When the sample of unidimensional studies, such as studies about gender, is overwhelmingly

populated by individuals who hold a particular set of intersecting identities, they are potentially missing stories that may exist along certain intersections of race, gender, and other salient social identities (Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015). Failing to consider intersectionality pushes their stories further along the margins.

Race in Intercollegiate Athletics

Like gender identity, the salience of one's racial identity is greatly shaped by the sociohistorical context in which they are situated. According to CRF, this context plays a large role in determining how a person defines themselves and how others will perceive them (Wing, 2007). This section will discuss the context which has shaped Black athlete's participation in intercollegiate athletics.

When discussing Black athletes who broke color barriers in their respective sports, names such as Jackie Robinson (Major Baseball League), Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton (National Basketball Association), and Kenny Washington (National Football League) are readily available through a simple internet search (Fuhrman, 2008; Lapchick, 2008). Not as much attention is given to those who racially integrated intercollegiate athletics. Lapchick (2008) explained that athletic programs north of the Mason Dixon line integrated much sooner than others in conferences such as the present-day Southeastern Conference (SEC) and the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). This tidbit is significant because the Mason-Dixon line is informally considered the line of demarcation between the free and the slave states (Martin, 2010). High profile athletic programs below the Mason-Dixon line resisted integration. Many schools in the modern-day SEC not only prohibited Black students from participating on athletics teams, but also refused to play against institutions that included Black students on their athletic teams (Lapchick, 2008). States in the deep south, namely Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama, passed laws

to ban interracial sporting competitions at all levels (e.g., collegiate, professional, etc.) (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2015; Lapchick, 2008). The driving force behind integration of intercollegiate athletics was money and competition, two factors that are still presently at play in college football and basketball today (Gayles et al., 2018; Reese, 1998; Sperber, 2011).

Much of the literature on Black student-athletes has documented the experiences of Black men. This is largely due to Black men's overrepresentation in football and basketball, the only two revenue generating sports in intercollegiate athletics (Comeaux, 2018; Harper, 2018). This literature primarily discusses their exploitation in intercollegiate athletics and its implications on their academic experiences (Bimper, 2015; Harrison et al., 2017), identity development (Beamon, 2012; Beamon & Bell, 2006), and life after sports (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). While such literature is warranted, it conversely creates the narrative the Black male athletes are in crisis, while women are just fine. This section discusses two areas of literature which describe Black student-athletes' experiences before they become college athletes and during their time as college athletes: sport socialization and campus climate. This literature sets the context to understand why Black women student-athletes may pursue college sports and the campus environments they are experiencing when they arrive on their college campuses. Most of the studies in the subsequent sections did not include Black women as part of their sample, however, they are discussed because Black women experience's may vary when gender is also considered.

Sport Socialization

In the Black community, college sports are viewed as a means for social and economic mobility, as it can either be a pathway to professional sports, or a free college education (Baker & Hawkins, 2016; Beamon, 2010; Beamon & Bell, 2002; Cooper et al., 2017). In predominantly

Black communities, sports like basketball, football, and track & field are easily accessible and affordable for Black youth, and Black professional athletes are highly visible and often idealized by Black children (Beamon, 2010; Bruening et al., 2005; Bruening et al., 2008a). Thus, these sports are tied to Black racial identity in a unique manner. For Black girls, in particular, sports participation is influenced and encouraged mainly by their parents, but also a number of environmental factors, such as: 1) location/ neighborhood, where the children live, what sports are played amongst kids in the neighborhood and what sporting facilities are available, 2) economic, aligned with neighborhood, socioeconomic status determines whether families could or could not afford for their children to pay certain sports (e.g., Olympic sports), and 3) racist attitudes, particularly racial slurs and incidents that occurred for Black girls who played sports where Black girls are underrepresented (Bruening et al., 2008a; Bruening et al., 2008b).

Although many of the studies on the sport socialization processes of Black athletes have not included women athletes in their sample, it is important to note the implications of this socialization in the college space. Many studies have demonstrated the impact of sport socialization on Black athletes' academic development and success (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Bimper, 2014), athletic identity (Beamon, 2012; Beamon & Bell, 2002; Harrison et al., 2013) and the transition to life after sport (Beamon, 2010; Beamon & Bell, 2006). As more time is spent in spaces that emphasize athletic responsibilities over academic responsibilities, academic performance suffers (Adler & Adler, 1991). This is evidenced by increased instances of academic probation, suspension, and academic ineligibility for Black student-athletes (Beamon & Bell, 2002, 2006). This socialization also has implications on their athletic identity, or the extent to which one identifies with the athletic role and looks to others to affirm this identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Further, an emphasis on sports leads to increased identity salience and role

engagement, an overemphasis on athletic roles and responsibilities at the expense of meaningful exploration of academic identities and interests (Adler & Adler, 1991). With high athletic identity salience, they often do not have the opportunity to develop interests, values, or identities outside of sports (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1991; Beamon, 2012).

Socialization plays a large role in how one sees themselves and how they make sense of their identities (Brown et al., 2017; Davis Tribble et al., 2019; Porter et al., 2019). For Black women student-athletes, socialization may shape the salience of their athletic identities and differing social identities, which will influence how they experience certain spaces such as the classroom, athletic facilities, and the broader campus environment.

Campus Climate

As discussed earlier, campus climate and environment have implications on many student outcomes, including sense of belonging (Hurtado, Alvarado, Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2008) and academic success (Carter, 2006; Hurtado et al., 1999). Like their non-athlete counterparts, Black student-athletes and other student-athletes perceive and experience the campus environment much differently than White student-athletes. Multiple studies have found the Black student-athletes and other student-athletes of color experience a more negative campus climate than White student-athletes (Comeaux, 2012; Oseguera et al., 2018; Rankin et al., 2011) and hold negative perceptions of respect and climate on their campuses (Rankin et al., 2011; Oseguera et al., 2018). Furthermore, Black student-athletes and other student-athletes of color experience higher instances of harassment, such as being deliberately excluded or the target of derogatory remarks, than White student-athletes (Beamon, 2014; Rankin et al., 2011). Such harassment most frequently comes from coaches, fellow student-athletes and fans. These findings suggest that campus climate in the broader campus

environment is often mimicked in the athletic environment. Hostile campus climate most notably impacts student-athletes' experiences in the classroom and is mediated by longstanding stereotypes related to Black intellectual inferiority (Comeaux, 2010, 2012; Simon et al., 2007). The "Black athlete stigma" can be understood as the double stigmas of being both Black and an athlete, two identities which have historically been associated with a lack of intellectual ability (Simons et al., 2007). This stigma causes Black athletes to feel inferior to their classmates and faculty because they perceive that other students believe that they are only in college to play sports and their academics are not a priority (Melendez, 2008).

These stereotypes manifest themselves in the relationships Black student-athletes have with professors on their campus. Black student-athletes have reported feeling marginalized by White faculty and believing that professors do not take them seriously as students (Martin et al., 2010; Perlmutter, 2003), and White professors hold low expectations of Black student-athlete's academic ability in comparison to their White counterparts (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). While professors acknowledge that Black males and female athletes must overcome some obstacles to receive access to higher education and recognize the challenges that come with balancing academic and athletic responsibilities, this does not stop them from having deficit perceptions of how they will perform (Comeaux, 2010, 2011). These deficit perceptions could be a manifestation of implicit bias, in which there are "attitudes or stereotypes that affect [their] understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (Staats et al., 2015, p. 16). This serves as yet another obstacle Black student-athletes must overcome as they make progress toward degree completion. These findings are troubling, as positive interactions with faculty are influential on student-athletes' postgraduate outcomes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007)

To revisit the earlier discussion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism, experiences related to a single identity are not monolithic (Crenshaw, 1989; Grillo, 1995). As such, there is no universal way to experience college as a woman athlete or a Black athlete. While “Black athlete” and “Black male athlete” are not synonymous or interchangeable terms, many of the aforementioned studies included in this section introduced their studies as those that were examining all Black athletes, but only included male athletes in their samples. This exclusion of women in the discussion of Black athletes aligns with the argument that Black women student-athletes have been silenced in literature which discusses the implications of race in intercollegiate athletics (Simien et al., 2019; Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005). Significantly less is known about Black women athletes at PWIs. Thus, assumptions cannot be made solely by exploring a single identity. The final section in this chapter will review the literature which examines the gendered and racialized experiences of Black women student-athletes.

Black Women Student-Athletes

Black women student-athletes’ experiences in sport are often lumped in with the experiences of Black student-athletes and women student-athletes. Majority of these studies fail to consider the diversity within the Black community, which results in Black women’s experiences being silenced or erased all together (Bruening et al., 2005; Patton et al., 2017). This lumping is consistent with dominant anti-racist and feminist discourse which posits all Blacks as men, and all women as White (Hull et al., 1982). The lack of research on Black women student-athletes is one of the ways in which they are silenced, the other two being the lack of research on Black women, in general, and the lack of representation of Black women in sports media

(Bruening, 2005). Although Black women student-athletes share similar college experiences as those of Black women students, athletic participation adds an additional dimension.

Academic Triumphs and Challenges

Historically, researchers have compared the experiences of Black women student-athletes to the experiences of their Black male and White women counterparts. A seminal study on the college experiences of African American² female student-athletes found that African American females had lower SAT scores, high school and college GPAs, and reported more academic difficulties in college than White female student-athletes (Sellers et al., 1997). When compared to African American males, African American females had higher college GPAs, but similar SAT scores and academic difficulties. These findings are particularly significant because they support the assertion that academic measures from high school, as well as racial identity, are predictors of a student-athletes' academic performance and retention in college (Comeaux et al., 2011; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Johnson et al., 2013).

Black women student-athletes have even more unique experiences in the classroom. Whereas literature on Black athletes in the aggregate depicts them as underprepared for college-level curriculum (see Benson, 2000; Ganim, 2014; Hawkins, 2010; Martin et al., 2010), studies on Black women student-athletes have revealed otherwise. In their study examining the key influences in the academic and personal success of Black women student-athletes, Cooper et al. (2016) found that participants felt academically prepared for college level coursework because they were already taking such courses prior to beginning college. A similar study found that African American female athletes were aware that their race and gender impacted their progress

² The terms "Black" and "African American" will be used interchangeably depending on the original source. I recognize that Black refers to racial identity, whereas African American refers to ethnic identity. Additionally, the term Black is preferred as it includes the diverse experiences of people of African descent in the U.S.

toward degree completion, but it did not keep them from graduating (Moody, 2011). These findings challenge prior research that depicts Black student-athletes as underprepared for college level curriculum. The samples of these studies, however, only included participants who excelled academically (e.g., participants who met a certain GPA), or participants who had already completed their degree. When students with less than stellar GPAs are excluded from the sample, we are potentially missing a discussion of what factors might be negatively impacting their academic performance. The present study included current student-athletes, without an explicit limitation on their GPA as long as they are in good academic standing at their institution.

Furthermore, multiple studies have shown that Black women student-athletes receive positive academic messages and feel supported by their coaches and athletic academic advisors, which results in their ability to navigate the academic environment at their institution (Carter & Hart, 2010; Cooper et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2017). Positive relationships with coaches and advisors are essential for academic development, as athletics staff professionals may have an influence over what classes and disciplines a student-athlete will pursue (Davis & Jowett, 2014). Such findings stand in opposition to research on Black student-athletes which explains that coaches and advisors are not always supportive of student-athletes' academic or career aspirations (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Harrison et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2010).

Studies have also found the Black women student-athletes have mixed experiences with faculty. Multiple studies have found the Black women student-athletes develop and maintain positive relationships with faculty (Cooper et al., 2017; Harmon, 2009; Moody, 2011). They leverage these relationships to get substantive feedback on assignments, help with preparing for exams, and career advising support. However, in Harmon's (2009) study, one participant shared a story in which herself and other Black women classmates were discriminated against for being

Black. What these findings may demonstrate is that although Black women student-athletes are intentionally creating positive relationships with professors, they are still susceptible to discrimination and stereotypes. These mixed findings demonstrate a need for more research on Black women student-athletes' experiences and relationships with faculty, for faculty interaction is a critical component of the undergraduate experience (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Social relationships

Isolation is a theme across the literature on Black women student-athletes. This isolation can be attributed to their racial identity and athletic status (Carter & Hawkins, 2011; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). As a member of multiple underrepresented student populations, Black women student-athletes are significantly underrepresented at PWIs (NCAA, 2020b). In addition to being underrepresented in the student population, Black women student-athletes also cite a lack of diversity and representation of Black women in faculty, coaches, and staff as contributors to their isolation (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). This lack of representation makes Black women student-athletes feel as though decisions are made without their best interests in mind and presents limited opportunities for mentorship (Bruening et al., 2005).

Isolation is exacerbated by student-athletes' lack of availability to participate in activities outside of athletics. Athletic involvement hinders Black student-athletes from partaking in the college experience that "extends beyond going to class every day to socializing with research and study groups, participating with student organizations, and attending campus activities apart from athletics" (Hawkins, 1999, p. 8). Research has shown that Black women student-athletes feel they cannot be engaged in activities outside of athletics (e.g., extracurricular activities) due to the time constraints associated with athletic responsibilities (Carter-Francique, 2013; Cooper

& Johnson, 2019; Ferguson, 2016). This is a trend across all student-athletes, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and sport (Gayles & Hu, 2009). This is particularly important for Black students because involvement in cultural organizations “[engages] minority students’ cultural backgrounds and [aids] them in maintaining strong ties with their own cultural heritages while facilitating their socialization into the campus cultures of their PWI” (Museus, 2008, p. 580). This present study adds to this body of literature by exploring how Black women student-athletes navigate different social relationships and build community in predominantly White spaces.

Studies have shown mixed experiences regarding Black women student-athletes’ social relationships, specifically with their teammates. Carter-Francique et al.’s (2011) study reported that Black women student-athletes can feel isolated within their team’s subculture. Isolation sets in for student-athletes who are one of few Black women on their athletic team. For Black women on Olympic sports teams, this underrepresentation is all too common (Bernhard, 2014). Black women student-athletes report racial division within their teams which makes it challenging to move beyond the teammate relationship to actual meaningful friendships, which has possible implications on the team’s performance in competition (Carter-Francique et al., 2011, Harmon, 2009). This finding is corroborated in a later study, in which participants discussed the negative implications of stereotypes on Black women’s ability to form interracial friendships with their teammates (Carter-Francique et al., 2011). Conversely, multiple studies found that teammates are vital sources of social support, helping each other navigate academic and personal challenges (Carter & Hart, 2010; Cooper & Jackson, 2019). More research is needed to understand how team dynamics can influence such social relationships, particularly for those Black women who play Olympic sports.

Experiences with Stereotypes

Stereotype threat or, “the threat that others' judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them” (Steele, 1997, p. 613), has implications on their college experiences. One study found that Black women student-athletes navigated both gendered and racialized stereotypes (Withycombe, 2011), such as stereotypes related to their appearance and intellectual capability. In regard to their appearance, Black women student-athletes often faced comments about their hair (Cooky et al., 2010; Norwood et al., 2014) and physique (Withycombe, 2011). Stereotypes regarding Black people’s “innate physical superiority” are also handed down, particularly by their coaches (Bruening, 2004). Such stereotypes diminish the hard work, effort and discipline necessary to compete at the collegiate level (Simien et al., 2019). Stereotypes are also perpetuated in news media, in which both racism and sexism are reproduced, and Black women are sexualized and silenced (Cooky et al., 2010). Another study found that Black women student-athletes dealt with stereotypes and stereotype threat in a multitude of ways including stress, stereotyping others and changing their own behavior (Ferguson, 2016). Both studies tell us that stereotypes are experienced in both academic and athletic spaces, but present conflicting results on the impact of the stereotypes. More research is needed to understand the implications of gendered racism and what coping strategies this population uses to navigate this.

Navigating Identity

Athletic identity salience is an understudied topic for Black women student-athletes. Carter-Francique, Hawkins, and Crowley (2017) used the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) to examine the athletic identity of African American female student-athletes and found that participants held strong athletic identity, but their self-worth was not contingent upon their athletic status, identity salience did not denote their ability or inability to transition away from

sport, and identity salience was strongest for first and fourth/fifth year student-athletes. These findings, particularly in regard to their ability to transition away from sport, stand in opposition to prior research on athletic identity and Black student-athletes (Beamon, 2012; Bimper, 2014).

Furthermore, participants in Cooper and Jackson's (2019) study attributed athletic participation as the primary reason why they were in college. For the study's participants, the opportunity to play Division I college sports and receiving a scholarship were the deciding factors in the decision to pursue higher education. These findings reflect role engulfment that is similar to Black male student-athletes, in that their athletic identity was the most influential in their college decision-making process. Understanding the salience of athletic identity for Black women student-athletes will provide valuable insight into how the athletic space influences one's understanding of their social identities, as prior literature would suggest that athletic and social identity development often go hand-in-hand (Anthony & Swank, 2018).

Jones and Abes (2013) contended that "an intersectional portrayal of multiple intersecting social identities may show certain social identities on top of one another (for example, race and gender), combining into some new identity form" (p. 159). This quote exemplifies how the identity of "Black woman" is one that warrants its own exploration to better understand the gendered and raced experiences associated with holding these two marginalized identities.

Chapter Summary

Although scholarship which documents the lived experiences of Black women student-athletes has grown significantly in recent years, there are still gaps in our understanding of how Black women student-athletes engage with the predominantly White and male college and athletic space. This literature identified the possible implications of race and gender in intercollegiate athletics, and the distinct gendered and racialized differences in how Black

women student-athletes experience college. Chapter 3 describes the research design I used to explore the college experiences and identity of Black women student-athletes.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experiences and identity of Black women student-athletes at PWIs, specifically within the context of their intersecting social identities and the barriers they may experience within the environment. The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

This chapter will discuss the research design, including data collection and analysis strategies, as well as my positionality as a researcher.

Qualitative research is tasked with understanding the meaning ascribed to human's lived experiences with a social experience or problem. Qualitative researchers employ a "naturalistic" approach, meaning they study participants in their natural settings to understand the phenomenon of study and meaning participants bring to them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research process is a collaborative one, in which the researcher is acting on the researched and vice versa. Using qualitative methods in higher education and student affairs has helped practitioners understand multiple cultural perspectives, similarities and differences (Manning, 1992). The findings of this study will be useful not only for scholar-practitioners who work with and study this population, but also other Black women and girls who hope to make sense of their own experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research is concerned with studying the human experience through the telling and retelling of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Listening and discovering relationships

across one's stories and the stories of others is a daily practice. Narratives can take two forms: as the methodology used in a study or as the phenomenon being studied. As a method, stories are collected, and analyses are employed to analyze and understand these stories. As a phenomenon, a narrative is spoken, or written text is given to recount an event or series of events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study used narrative inquiry as a methodology and employed a counternarrative approach to construct the stories of each participant.

Storytelling is rooted in African Americans' tradition for making sense of their own experiences. Banks-Wallace (2002) explained that

African American storytelling serves a higher purpose than simply conveying information or responding to a question. Stories are a means whereby we gift others and ourselves with words that can be used to enhance life. Story creation and storytelling provide opportunities for us to reexamine difficult periods in our lives, gleaning wisdom and empowerment. (417)

This perspective suggests that narrative inquiry lends itself to be a culturally relevant research methodology. Moreover, Berry and Cook (2019) explained that narrative research for intersectionality should encompass five principles: 1) a focus on social inequality produced by intersecting forms of identity oppression, 2) avoid ranking oppressions, 3) present experiences related to at least one form of intersectionality, 4) center the voices of the multiply burdened, and (5) use counterstorytelling to challenge master narratives and present alternative narratives. The sharing of these stories can not only inform future policies and programming related to underrepresented students, but it also provides a space for students to reflect and make sense of their experience as athletes and as Black women in predominantly White, male-dominated spaces.

Counternarratives

This study specifically employed a counternarrative approach, an approach made possible by what critical race scholars named counterstorytelling (Delgado, 1989). Counterstorytelling was first discussed in the legal space as a tool for sharing the stories and experiences of those whose actual lived experiences are overshadowed by narratives and stereotypes that were created and perpetuated by the dominant racial group (Delgado, 1989). Counterstorytelling bears the potential to empower those whose stories exist along “the margins”, or what Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) describe as “sites of oppression and sites of resistance, empowerment, and transformation” (p. 215). These stories can potentially transform social, political, and cultural structures (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This strategy is often paired with critical theories that consider the lived experiences of marginalized people. For these populations, counterstories are a tool for their liberation (Delgado, 1989).

Counternarratives “talk back” to dominant narratives, stories that have been normalized over time, further marginalizing the stories that exist outside of its outline. Dominant narratives about gender (e.g., women are inferior to men), and race (e.g., every racial group is inferior to White people) create negative stereotypes (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). When people accept these stereotypes as a form of truth, they inform attitudes and behavior toward underrepresented populations (Harper, 2009). However, these stereotypes offer incomplete narratives that make them untrue. Counterstorytelling provides an avenue to challenge these stereotypes, and counternarratives are a product of counterstorytelling. Counternarratives have many pedagogical uses, including challenging the creators of dominant narratives, shedding light on the experiences of the marginalized and open new possibilities, and the capacity to reshape

existing belief systems (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These functions demonstrate that counternarratives bear the power to transform social, political, and cultural structures.

Counternarratives were created using data collected via the photovoice activity and interviews. Although I shared the same racial and gender identity as participants, I was not a student-athlete and that was an experience I could not speak to. Therefore, it was important to solicit their help as I constructed these counternarratives, to ensure that they accurately captured their experiences.

Epistemological Stance

Epistemology is a “system of knowing” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257), which includes an individual’s way of knowing and a process for validating this knowledge. Traditional epistemologies, such as constructivism and postmodernism, draw upon knowledge created through a Eurocentric perspective (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Delgado Bernal (2002) contended that there are critical raced and gendered epistemologies which “offer unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color” (p. 107). These epistemologies position women of color as creators of knowledge whose experiences have something significant to offer educational research and practice. Such epistemologies influence the development of their research questions, research design, how we interact with study participants, and how we go about data collection and analysis.

Black Feminist Epistemology

For the purposes of this study, I adopted a Black feminist epistemology, which is an epistemological framework for understanding and validating the experiences of Black women. Black feminist epistemology was born of Black feminist thought and is an “experiential, material

base... [of] collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that U.S. Black women sustained based on our particular history” (Collins, 2000, p. 256). This framework calls into question narratives that currently pass as truth and challenges the mostly male-generated, Eurocentric ways of knowing and practices of validating knowledge that are embedded in U.S. social institutions and, in this case, traditional approaches to qualitative research (Collins, 2000). Black feminist epistemology posits that Black women create and validate this epistemological stance in four distinct ways: using lived experiences as a criterion for meaning, the use of dialogue as a means of generating and validating knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2000).

Lived Experiences as a Criterion for Meaning

Black women use the knowledge and wisdom generated through their everyday experiences. Because Black women experience the implications of their intersecting identities on a daily basis, they are more believable and credible than people who have simply read or pondered on their experiences (Collins, 2000). As a qualitative researcher, my lived experiences inform the topics I study, as well as the methodologies and theoretical frameworks I use to investigate them. In this study, I trusted and valued participants’ meaning-making processes as they made sense of their own lived experiences (Collins, 2000). Participants were the experts of their own lives.

The Use of Dialogue as a Means of Generating and Validating Knowledge Claims

Black women use conversations with each other to generate and validate knowledge (Collins, 2000). This dimension encompasses the roll of community and connectedness that is foundational within BFT and acknowledges the researcher’s connection to participants, demonstrated by the use of the personal pronouns such as, “we” and “us”, as opposed to

objectifying and distancing language such as “they” and “them”. The value of connectedness and community is incorporated in the data collection strategies which promote authentic conversation amongst participants. As a researcher, I acknowledged my connection to participant’s and their narratives and understood how this connection made me an active participant in the research process (Collins, 2000). This point was of particular significance during the sista circle, as I discussed later in my positionality statement.

The Ethic of Caring

Black feminists believe personal emotions and empathy, or “talking with the heart”, (Collins, 2000, p. 262) are a vital part of the knowledge production process. In research and practice, someone who is objective, or as Collins (2000) named, a “separate knower” will try to separate the participant from their personality and their words under the belief that personality and emotions breed bias. A “connected knower” understands that personality and emotions add to the individual’s experiences and enriches our understanding of the group’s experience (Collins, 2000). As a connected knower, I understood the importance of capturing each participant’s individuality, which is why participants engaged in certain aspects of data analysis, as I discuss later in the data analysis section.

The Ethic of Personal Accountability

As Black women develop knowledge through lived experiences, dialogue, and empathy, they are responsible for validating the credibility of the claims they make (Collins, 2000). One’s knowledge claims and their credibility are inextricably linked. Whereas I explained the purpose of my research and why I was interested in this topic, participants were also interested in knowing the origin of my interests and whether my intentions were genuine. My claims were then validated by further explaining my professional and scholarly background and experiences.

Those whose knowledge claims are rooted in actual experiences or values will be more respected and credible than those whose claims are not (Collins, 2000).

Sampling and Participants

To identify participants, I used a combination of criterion and snowball sampling. The following criteria was used to identify participants: 1) identify as a Black woman, 2) be a current or recent graduate (graduated between the years of 2018 and 2020) of an NCAA-sanctioned, Division I athletic team, and 3) have completed at least one full academic year of coursework at their institution. I employed snowball sampling to identify participants via recommendations from key informants (Mertens, 2019). With the help of my advisor, I shared recruitment materials with faculty and student-athlete development staff within our professional networks and these key informants sent the online screener survey to people they believed were eligible to participate. I then reached out to potential participants who met the criteria and invited them to participate in my study. I continued to solicit recommendations from professional staff and participants throughout data collection.

Nine potential participants completed the screener survey. These nine participants were invited to participate. Two participants did not make their scheduled interviews, or respond to follow-up emails, which left the total participants at seven. Participants in this study were current and former student-athletes who attended institutions that belonged to one of the Power 5 conferences within the NCAA's Division I. Power 5 conferences are identified by NCAA legislation as "autonomy conferences", meaning they are granted financial freedoms in areas such as academic support, career transition programming, and financial aid, as long as these liberties are directly related to enhancing student-athlete well-being at the institution (Ellis, 2014). These universities were optimal sites of inquiry because of their long history of being

both academically and athletically competitive. Furthermore, only 6% of student-athletes in these conferences identify as Black and female (NCAA, 2020b). While I initially strove to have no more than two participants per sport, volleyball athletes were overrepresented in the sample. Demographic information for the participants is included in Table 4.1, however I chose not to disaggregate by institution in an effort to protect participants' confidentiality.

Data Collection

Prior to our virtual data collection, participants completed an online screener survey in which they were asked information such as their name, class standing, major, and sport. Participants were also asked to select the pseudonym they would like to be used throughout my research and in future publications and presentations. The choice to allow participants to select their pseudonym was intentional. Allen and Wiles (2016) explained that “the care and thought with which many participants [choose] their names, and the meanings or links associated with those names, [illuminates] the importance of the process of naming” (p. 145). In this spirit, participants selected pseudonyms that they felt best aligned with their personalities and their stories.

Data collection occurred in three stages. First, participants participated in a photovoice activity, then participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with me. Data collection concluded with two semi-structured sista circles. Six participants participated in a total of two sista circles, with about three participants in each circle. One participant was added to the study following both sista circles and participated in a second individual interview in lieu of a third sista circle. See Figure 3.1 for a conceptual map of how the data were used to address each question.

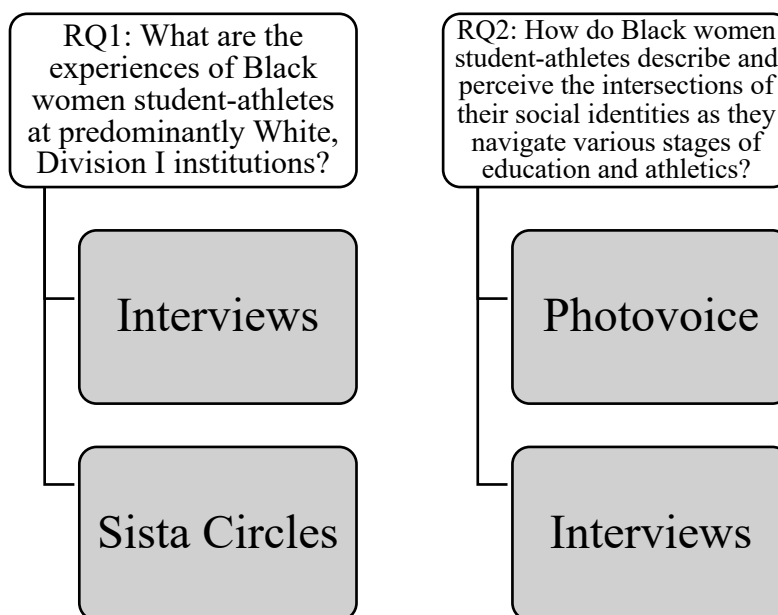


Figure 3.1 Conceptual map of research questions and data collection tools.

Photovoice

Aligned with narrative inquiry's tradition of storytelling, is the importance of understanding the human experience from the participants' unique lens. Participants were sent a prompt to participate in a photovoice activity to be completed before their individual interview. The function of photovoice is threefold: 1) to allow participants to reflect on the status of their lives and communities, 2) to promote critical dialogue about issues in small and large groups, and 3) to bridge gaps between communities and policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997). Paulo Freire (1982) explained that images can be useful for helping communities think critically about the social and political forces that impact their everyday lives. As such, this method was particularly useful for better understanding the experiences of Black women student-athletes because they are marginalized in the college environment, the athletic environment, and in society-at-large.

Employing photovoice presented a number of advantages. Among them include that this method provided the researcher with an opportunity to see the world from participants' eyes, photos affirmed participants' identities and experiences, and were a way to keep participants engaged throughout the research process. My decision to incorporate photovoice was informed by BFT, which stresses the importance of using nontraditional research strategies to understand the lives of Black women (Delgado, 1989; Wing, 1997). Photos can be used to “[communicate] information about the experiences associated with differences, diversity, and prejudice” (Leavy, 2018, p. 10) and confront stereotypes that have disenfranchised communities. Within this narrative study, photos added another “angle of vision” to the data (Bach, 2007, p. 282). Photos presented an opportunity for participants to reflect on what being a Black woman looked like for them, as they were used to capture how they described their identity and how they perceived their identities within the context of college and athletic spaces.

Photovoice was integrated into data collection through photo elicitation, which involved inserting photos into an otherwise traditional research interview (Harper, 2002). The idea behind this was that “images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). As such, questions related to the photovoice activity were weaved throughout the interview protocol. I asked questions that alluded to the acronym **PHOTO**, which stands for describe your **P**icture, what is **H**appening in your picture, why did you take a picture **O**f this, what does this **T**ell us about your life, and how can this picture provide **O**pportunities for us to improve life (Latz, 2017). The photos were helpful for introducing questions related to their identities and some of the experiences they've had as a result of or that have been influenced by the identities they hold. Instructions for the photovoice activity were sent to participants prior to their individual interview. These instructions included directions regarding how to upload their

photos to private confidential Drive folders. I reviewed them in preparation for individual interviews.

Interviews

Participants completed one virtual semi-structured interview. In-depth interviews are instrumental in narrative inquiry, as they “[stimulate] narrative accounts that give dramatic insight into the lives of these socially marginalized...while the participants are empowered through researchers showing a genuine interest in their worlds” (Bleakley, 2005, p. 39). Interviews were a space of active knowledge construction. These interviews captured how participants made sense of their identities and how the context of college and athletic spaces have informed their understanding. Participants were asked open-ended questions, allowing them to share stories of specific experiences. All interviews were completed on Zoom and recorded. Private Zoom links were sent to participants before their scheduled time. The interview protocol was largely informed by the different components of BFT and CRF. Part of this interview functioned as a debrief of the photovoice activity.

Sista Circles

Following the first six individual interviews, two virtual sista circles took place with three participants each. Sista circles are “support groups formed among Black women of the same community, profession, or organization that build upon friendships or networks” (Johnson, 2015, p. 44). Sista circles are the primary method of data collection in sista circle methodology, a culturally relevant, gender specific methodology with allows the researcher the opportunity to simultaneously support and study Black women (Johnson, 2015). As a data collection tool, sista circles have three distinguishing features: 1) communication dynamics, 2) centrality of empowerment and, 3) the researcher as participant (Johnson, 2015). The first feature,

communication dynamics, acknowledges the historically and socially situated verbal and nonverbal expressions used among Black people, specifically Black women. Because the sista circle is meant to foster natural social interactions, such culturally situated communication is essential (Dorsey, 2000; Johnson, 2015). The second feature, centrality of empowerment, contends that the purpose of the sista circle is to provide a supportive space for Black women to come together, and find strength in each other's stories and journeys (Johnson, 2015). The final feature, researcher as participant, signifies a unique departure from the traditional "researcher = facilitator" that defines traditional focus groups. In sista circles, the researcher facilitates, but also engages in the dialogue, and shares knowledge, experience, or wisdom with the participants. This practice encourages reciprocity, which Johnson (2015) defined as "a way to give back to participants and not just take from them" (p. 48).

My decision to incorporate sista circles was informed by BFT, which stresses the use of lived experiences as criterion of meaning and acknowledges that dialogue is a means of generating and validating knowledge (Collins, 2000). Sista circles differ from traditional focus groups in three distinct ways: 1) sista circles provide an open, safe space which embraces the communal nature of Black women, 2) sista circles reduce the power dynamics of the "researcher-researched" relationship, as the researcher herself is also a participant, and 3) sista circles introduce culturally relevant practice that can be sustained beyond the research process (Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, multiple studies have shown that there is a need for Black women college students to have spaces, or counterspaces, in which they can interact and validate each other's experiences (Croom et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2019). Such spaces create "feelings of connectedness, a sense of belonging, and relationships that are an essential aspect of knowledge validation within the Black community" (Porter et al., 2019, p. 10), particularly at PWIs. In this

study, participants used this space to share stories and experiences and discuss what it meant to be a Black woman and student-athlete at an PWI.

After the individual interview, participants were sent a Qualtrics form to submit all the times they were available for sista circles. I selected the times in which most participants were available to hold the sista circles. The sista circles occurred on Zoom and were recorded. Private Zoom links were sent to participants before the scheduled times. The seventh participant joined the study after the conclusion of both sista circles, and instead opted to participate in a second interview in lieu of a third sista circle. At the conclusion of all research activities, all participants received a \$20 electronic gift card via email.

Data Analysis

The units of analysis for this study were the interview and sista circle transcripts and the photos taken by participants. Interview and sista circle data were transcribed and cleaned throughout data collection. Following transcription, transcripts were loaded into NVivo, a qualitative analysis application. Analysis of these data were guided by Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative analysis and analysis of narratives methods. Narrative analysis was employed to construct individual participants' counternarratives. The objective of this method was to synthesize or link data events together to create an explanation that was specifically advanced by a plot or presented in chronological order (Polkinghorne, 1995). This involved an iterative process of going back and forth between parts of and the whole narrative to mark events and happenings that may be connected or serve a larger theme of the story across the person's experience. In this way, I took note of stories and experiences that were related to how my participants came to understand and describe their identities in the context of college and athletics. I produced drafts of the individual counternarratives based on the data collected in

individual interviews. I sent these drafts to participants to solicit their feedback and develop final drafts of each counternarrative.

Similarly, analysis of narratives was used to uncover themes across all participants. The objective of this method was to “[examine] the narrative data to focus on the discovery of common themes or salient constructs in storied data and organize them under several categories using stories as data” (Kim, 2016, p. 196). I constructed themes inductively, or from the data, by conducting three rounds of coding. Open coding was used for the first round of coding. This strategy involved “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 100). Throughout this coding, I took note of emergent themes across the transcripts. In the second round of coding, I employed two coding strategies: thematic coding and subcoding (Saldaña, 2015). Thematic coding involved “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178). As I began establishing themes, I created distinct subcodes, or “a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry” (Saldaña, 2015, p.77). Accordingly, the themes established through thematic coding were the “parent codes”, while the subcodes within each theme were their “child codes” (Saldaña, 2015). Finally, the third round of coding included simultaneous coding. This form of coding involved rereading the transcript and recoding data which “[suggested] multiple meanings that necessitate and justify more than one code” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 80). Simultaneous coding was particularly necessary because “social interaction does not occur in neat, isolated units” (Glesne, 2011, p. 192). A codebook was developed following the coding on the first few transcripts. I used this codebook to analyze the remaining transcripts (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

Analysis of the photos submitted in the photovoice activity occurred in three stages of what Wang and Barris (1997) named participatory analysis. Stage one involved the participants selecting the photo they felt most accurately addressed the prompts. This stage was completed when participants uploaded their photos to confidential Google Drive folders. Stage two involved contextualizing and storytelling, or participants sharing insight about the photos they selected and the significance of these photos. This is best captured in the acronym: **Voice Our Individual and Collective Experience, or VOICE**. This happened by way of the **PHOTO** questions and the questions that followed in the individual interviews. Finally, stage three involved codifying, in which participants' photo elicitation responses were categorized into either of three dimensions: issues, themes, or theories. After the interviews, I coded their photovoice responses and determined which of the three dimensions they aligned with.

Throughout data collection and analysis, BFT and CRF played specific roles. BFT was a positionality and epistemological tool. As a Black woman and scholar-practitioner, I identify as a Black feminist. Thus, I formally adopted a Black feminist epistemology throughout the research process. Furthermore, BFT influenced my methodological choice to use *sista circles*, as opposed to traditional focus groups. Black feminist epistemology emphasizes the significance of conversation and dialogue amongst Black women. Whereas a traditional focus group would have positioned me as just a facilitator, asking participants questions while participants did nothing but respond, *sista circles* allowed me to select topics to discuss and guide conversation, and left the floor open for participants to pose questions to each other, or veer conversation in the direction of their choosing. Additionally, CRF was a critical tool during data analysis. As I coded data, began constructing counternarratives, and developing collective themes, I used CRF as a

lens to unpack how participants described their identities and to understand the role of race and gender in their experiences in various academic and athletic settings.

Ethical Considerations

To protect participants from potential harm, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning my study, and each participant was required to sign two consent forms. Data were stored on a password protected computer which was kept in a secured location throughout the research process. Furthermore, because Black women student-athletes make up such a small proportion of the student-athlete population, extra care was taken to protect their confidentiality and ensure that they were not identifiable. I explained to each participant how the data would be used (e.g., for publications and presentations to potentially large audiences) and who the target audience is. I then allowed them to decide whether they would like to keep their identities intact or change certain details (e.g., sport, year in school, etc.) (Kaiser, 2009). Demographic data were not disaggregated by institution.

Furthermore, because participants shared photos of themselves and student spaces on their campuses, I made participants aware that I may present the photos at conferences across the country and/or publish them in research journals. I asked participants to sign an additional consent form to indicate whether or not they were okay with their photos being used in this way. Additionally, I asked participants to refrain from submitting photos that included third parties. When these photos were included, I either cropped the third parties out of the photos, blurred third parties' faces and other identifiable things in the photos, or described the photo instead of sharing the actual photo.

Establishing validity is important for bolstering a study's trustworthiness and credibility and ensuring participants' words are being respected and represented accurately. I identified

three validity strategies that I used for my study: researcher reflexivity, triangulation, and member checking. Researcher reflexivity involved disclosing personal beliefs, biases, and/or identities which may have influenced the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Prior to the study I made note of my positionality, and how it might have influenced the research process. During the study, I kept a field journal and mind map that I used to jot down reflections and reactions immediately following each interview, emergent themes across the data, and suggestions for future questions and/or probes. Triangulation involved using multiple sources of data or methods of data collection to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I did this by using three different methods of data collection, photovoice, interviews, and sista circles, which produced three kinds of data to triangulate with. Finally, during data analysis I used member checking to involve participants in the construction of their counternarratives and development of themes and build their view into the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I sent each of the participants drafts of their counternarrative and the theme's findings, and encouraged them to provide feedback regarding my interpretation of their stories. Their feedback was incorporated into this final product.

Limitations

Conducting a study on race during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor provided many challenges which led to a few limitations. I initially intended to recruit current student-athletes, but after failing to recruit participants through gatekeeper solicitation and snowball sampling, I opened recruitment to former athletes who graduated no earlier than 2018 and all Division PWIs. After opening the recruitment, reaching out to more gatekeepers, and still struggling to find participants, I reached out to Zee, with whom I had a personal relationship, and invited her to participate. Zee and other

participants from her institution were aware of my connection to a certain staff member in their athletic department. This awareness may have made the women apprehensive about sharing certain details of their experiences, or the mutual respect for this person may have facilitated seamless rapport development and made them more comfortable sharing their experience. Thus, my role as both an insider, in that I was connected with the department, and an outsider, in that I was not a part of the community, may have influenced the data I collected.

Relatedly, sampling relied heavily on gatekeepers and snowballing for participant recommendations. Thus, it is possible that gatekeeper bias may have occurred as they sent participant nominations/ recommendations. Finally, while I initially believed that majority of participants would come from basketball and track & field and planned to have no more than two participants from the same sport, participants who played volleyball were overrepresented in the sample, thus limiting the perspectives of athletes in other sports, particularly predominately Black sports such as basketball and track.

Positionality

I come to this work as a Black, Nigerian woman, daughter of immigrants, and the product of a middle-class household. I began playing basketball in elementary school and continued playing through middle school. Although I gave up playing sports early in life, sports have continued to be a significant part of my life. Two of my siblings continued playing basketball and went onto play at the collegiate level. Thus, I continue to be an avid consumer of college and professional basketball. As an undergraduate, I worked in event management for my institution's athletic department and developed an interest in working in college sports. I entered my masters' program hoping to learn more about the student-athlete experience and work in the athletic environment.

I began my student affairs career in academic services for student-athletes, working with athletes across football, women's basketball and track & field. Outside of teaching them study skills and providing them with a safe space to learn, we would simply talk about life, family, goals, amongst other general topics. My students have taught me a great deal about what it means to have a Black female body in the intercollegiate athletics space and the impact this has on one's academic and personal development. They shared their experiences of navigating relationships with coaches, teammates, and non-athlete peers, and what it is like competing for resources and opportunities when sports such as men's basketball and football command a large amount of attention and resources. These perspectives were starkly different from those of the male student-athletes I supported in the early stages of my career. Their stories led me to do some self-reflection regarding my own experience as a Black woman and sparked my interest in understanding how Black women make sense of their experiences and navigated different academic spaces. I wanted to learn more.

I began taking courses in sociology, which gave me the lens and language to view intercollegiate athletics from a more critical perspective. I was introduced to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, which described how Black women face multiple forms of oppression and subordination within the context of workplace discrimination and domestic violence, as a result of holding multiple subordinate social identities and larger structural barriers. I was introduced to the work of Dr. Patricia Hill-Collins, in which she stressed the importance of understanding and centering the lived experiences of Black women, as having such an understanding is significant not only for Black women, but for all people who have been oppressed in similar ways. Developing this theoretical foundation served as the catalyst to begin asking more critical questions regarding Black women and college sports.

In narrative research for intersectionality, it is important for the researcher to consider their own intersecting identities, the intersecting identities of those who are sharing their stories, and the shared identities of the researcher and the researched (Berry & Cook, 2019). My own identity as a Black woman impacts my perspective on this study. My identity as a Black woman is highly salient for me, and I enjoy hearing how others come to understand their own identities and how it manifests in different academic spaces. This study provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on what being a Black woman has meant for them and how it has shaped their experience, particularly in a White and male dominated space. However, racial and gender congruity do not result in automatic insider status. I was conscious of this throughout the research process and mindful of how my own differing identities might create uneven power dynamics.

I came to this study recognizing that although I shared multiple identities with the participants, our experiences are not identical. During the sista circles, I facilitated discussions, and also contributed my perspectives and experiences in order to encourage and empower participants, from one Black woman to another. BFT reminds us that the Black women's standpoint is heterogenous, and as such we each have something unique to contribute to the collective experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000). In qualitative research "both researchers' and research participants' voices, perspectives, narratives, and counter-narratives are represented in the interpretation and findings of a study...one voice or narrative is not privileged over another" (Milner, 2007, p. 396). I did not have the experience of being a student-athlete, but I believe my personal experiences as a Black woman in higher education, as both a student and practitioner, were valuable in my interpretation of their stories and experiences. My identity as a

Black woman and my professional experiences with student-athletes provided foundational knowledge of how to interpret the data with a unique level of insight.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the qualitative methodology employed to complete this study, specifically a narrative inquiry research design. The strategies for participant selection, data collection and analysis were presented. This chapter also outlined the various strategies that were used to ensure trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis processes, including reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing. In the subsequent chapters, findings are presented in two ways. The first way is through individual counternarratives that were created for each participant and capture how they perceived and described their identities throughout various times in their athletic and academic journeys. These counternarratives are presented in Chapter 4. The second way is through collective themes across all participants. These themes are presented in Chapter 5. See Figure 3.1 for a visual representation of how the data collected were used in each findings chapter.

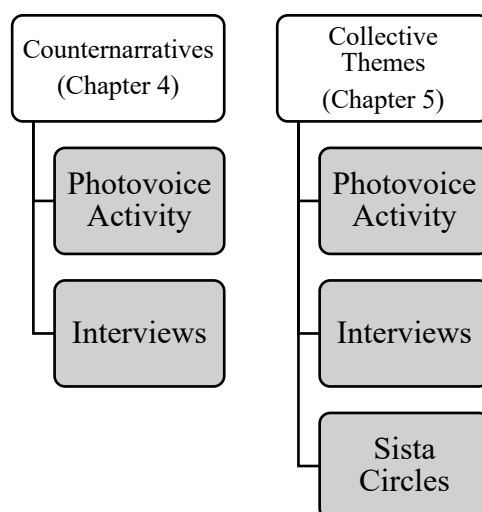


Figure 3.2 Visual representation of how the data collected were used in each findings chapter.

CHAPTER 4: COUNTERNARRATIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

As noted in Collins' (2000) Black feminist thought, Black women's experiences contribute to the collective and while Black women may share similar experiences, they are not homogenous. Thus, in this chapter I share counternarratives of seven current and former Black women student-athletes, which both introduce the participants of this study and share their individual, unique stories. The development of this chapter was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

Counternarratives were created using Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative analysis method which produced counternarratives that marked events and happenings that were connected and/or served as a larger theme of the story across the person's experience. In this way, counternarratives provide a portrait of who each participant is, including their family background, early sporting experiences, and unique stories and experiences related to navigating identity as Black women student-athletes at PWIs. Counternarratives were constructed using data collected through the photovoice activity and individual interviews. Each narrative is presented through five to six themes which highlight various aspects of their journeys.

Participant Overview

Participants were seven current and former student-athletes from multiple Division I PWIs. All participants selected pseudonyms for the purposes of this research. The demographic information for participants is presented in Table 4.1. Three of the participants are current

student-athletes, while the remaining four were recent college graduates. Ethnically, three of the participants identified as African American, three as Nigerian, and one as both African American and White. Four sports were represented in the sample: basketball, gymnastics, track & field, and volleyball.

For context, participants were connected to each other in a few meaningful ways. Andy, Ann, Blu, and Zee were all current or former student-athletes at the same institution. Blu and Zee are former teammates. Melanie and Naomi were current or former student-athletes at the same institution and are former teammates. Each of the following participant narratives feature stories related to participants upbringing and introduction to sport, their high school and college recruitment process, general experiences related to being an athlete, stories of how they navigated identity in college spaces, and a reflection of their experiences. The narratives of former student-athletes, Andy, Blu, Melanie, Zee, features an additional theme which highlight their postgraduate life.

Table 4.1 Participant demographic information.

| Name | Year in School or Graduated | Major | Ethnicity | Sport | First Gen? |
|----------|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------|------------|
| Andy | Alumna (2020) | Communication (B.A.) Interdisciplinary Studies (M.A.) | African American and White | Gymnastics | No |
| Ann | Third Year | Political Science (B.A.) | African American | Basketball | No |
| Blu | Alumna (2019) | Marketing (B.S.) Textiles (M.S.) | African American | Volleyball | No |
| Naomi | Second Year | Kinesiology (B.S.) | Nigerian | Volleyball | No |
| Chinenye | Second Year | Electrical Engineering (B.S.) | Nigerian | Track & Field | No |
| Melanie | Alumna (2020) | English (B.A.) Leadership & Human Resource Development (M.S.) | African American | Volleyball | No |
| Zee | Alumna (2019) | Nutrition (B.S.) | Nigerian | Volleyball | No |

Andy

Andy is a 22-year-old former Division 1 gymnast. Andy was a gymnast at a large, public PWI in the southeastern United States. Andy graduated from her institution in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in communication, with a concentration in public relations. She is now pursuing a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies, with an emphasis in organizational behavior, at the same institution. The 2019-2020 academic year was Andy's final year as a student-athlete.

Early Life, Sport, and Identity: "It's a really expensive sport"

Andy is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She grew up with her older sister and her parents divorced when she was nine years old. Her father is White, and her mother is both Black and White, and Andy herself identifies as biracial. Andy's biracial identity was salient throughout various stages of her life. Growing up as a biracial girl, she reflected on conversations about identity in her household:

My parents never had conversations with us about like, "you know, you are a Black girl growing up in a White world." I didn't have those conversations as a kid and if I had to guess for the two reasons why I didn't is because one I was a female, and that sadly is more times a conversation that happens for Black boys than Black girls. Then two, although my mother is Black, she grew up pretty affluent and her parents assimilated themselves as well into White society.

Nonetheless, her parents raised her to be progressive and politically active, and accepting of others regardless of their identities, and gave her and her sister "constant affirmation that [they were] going to be loved regardless of who [they] are." These values of acceptance and affirmation have stuck with her.

Gymnastics was very much attached to her upbringing, as she got started in the sport at the tender age of 18 months. She explained her parents' decision to put her in the sport in the following way: "You have the kids jumping on the couch and mom wants to put her in a safer place to do it." To this point, she could not recall a time in her life when she was not a gymnast. She noticed the role of race in her sport early on. When asked why gymnastics is a predominantly White sport, she referenced the intersections of race and class, saying, "it's a really expensive sport, kind of like figure skating or those other sports where you really only see White people, honestly." She was fortunate that both of her parents worked hard and had successful careers, and she had access to the sport without financial barriers. Despite gymnastics being predominantly White, she was blessed to train at a diverse gym as she was growing up in the sport:

At a time in my training group, we had more girls of color than we did White girls, which is not common. I don't really know how in the world that happened, but I think it was my blessing in disguise because it gave me the chance to be exposed to other girls in the sport that were Black. I would have otherwise never seen that. Most of the time club gyms have, say in a competitive team, which might be levels 6 through 10 which you could have 40 girls, there'll be like, two Black girls, maybe type of thing...but I had a team of 10.

She credited these teammates for helping her "get a little bit more in touch with some of [her] Blackness." In addition to this, seeing Black gymnasts like Simone Biles and Gabby Douglass find success, as she came of age, was particularly significant in shaping her own identities as a Black woman and an athlete: "That was one of the first times that [she] became aware of the magnitude of what that meant to be any person of color in the sport of gymnastics." The presence

of other young Black women in her sport shaped her expectations of what being a gymnast would look like throughout her career.

Finding the Right Fit: “A diverse team was something that was in my mind”

Andy’s racial awareness was a theme throughout her experiences both in school and in sport. Andy was a freshman in high school when she went through her college recruitment process. She knew she had the grades to get into a good university, and it was important for her to leverage her athletic talents to secure an athletic scholarship: “I knew I had the physical capabilities to earn a full ride. Not to any school I wanted to, but I was not going to let my parents pay for school.” Because she had such a diverse gym growing up, she kept this in mind as she visited prospective schools:

The idea of a diverse team was something that was in my mind. I wasn't even looking so much at the university. I was just always looking at the team. What did the team have? What athletes were currently on it, and maybe who is committed, and might be coming in the future.

She noticed and dismissed schools where the team was predominantly White with minimal gymnasts of color. She noticed and dismissed schools where the team in which the gymnasts lacked geographic diversity. She ultimately chose her institution because she had been developing personal connections with the program since she was seven years old, her head coach at her gym was an alumna of the program, and the team’s makeup aligned with her need for diversity. She mentioned that the team had both racial/ethnic diversity and geographic diversity, and the team felt like, “it was a lot of different girls from very different areas, all coming together and that really interested [her] or made [her] feel better cause not everybody was the same.”

For the most part, Andy was educated in her local public-school system. The exception to this was a brief bout in private school. When discussing her parents' decision to move to public education, she said: "We were going to be the minority and they knew it. It's a very expensive school. We were going to be exposed to a lot of White affluent kids who were very ignorant...they were already experiencing some parental comments being minority parents, too." After this experience, she mostly found herself in schools that were both racially and economically diverse, which she appreciated because "[she] was exposed to more people instead of being in a Whitewashed school where everybody kind of just appeared the same to [her]." Additionally, in formal and informal school settings she found herself being asked to define her racial identity:

Kids would ask you, "are you Black? Are you White?" I would never pick [and] be like, I'm both. Then they would go, "well, if you had to pick one" ...I was always like, I wouldn't answer that question. So, I was that person growing up before you could check all that apply, I would just check other.

It wasn't until she took her college entrance exams that she was finally satisfied with her options for the race/ethnicity demographic questions:

I was taking the ACT or the SAT and that was the first time that I'd ever seen "check all that apply" and it's so crazy to think that a fricking question with some boxes has such a dramatic impact on my life...I felt like I had to deny a part of me...I felt more like myself. I felt like, I am Black. I am African American, yeah, but I am also Caucasian. I am both and I proudly check both now, which is what's really good.

Athlete ≠ Student: “Every single thing that I ever scheduled on my schedule was because of gymnastics.”

Once Andy arrived at her institution, she was immediately expected to make academic decisions to better accommodate her athletic schedule and responsibilities. The first of which was changing her major following a conversation at her college orientation:

He was talking about something with student teaching, which is a component and I already knew that. They were like, “yeah, we do our student teaching in the spring” and my sport is a spring competition sport. When you’re student teaching, you’re supposed to be at school from 8am to 3pm or whatever school you’re at. Normally my practices were going to be from 1 to 5pm and I travel for competitions...So, I just asked them a question and I was like, “you know, we’re in [county her institution is located in] and there’s year-round schools. Would it be possible for me to do my student teaching at a year-round school, say in the summer?” They’re like, no. Well, why not? They’re like, “that’s just not how our program works.” They literally were like, “honestly, the education department is not very student-athlete friendly. So, if you have any other interests, you might as well attend to that.” That’s what I was told my first week of school.

This conversation led to Andy changing her major to communications. Conversations like this also informed the types of classes she took throughout her time as a collegiate athlete. For example, Andy completed majority of her coursework online:

The primary reason why I took so many online classes was to prevent my time of sitting in a classroom before I had to go train, prevent walking around campus, prevent getting in the way of being able to go to treatment for post- or pre-practice, to prevent me

missing class while we were traveling ...Every single thing that I ever scheduled on my schedule was because of gymnastics.

These conflicts continued for the duration of her collegiate athletic career. Because she had taken advanced placement courses in high school and often took an excess of units in fall, spring and summer terms, she entered her junior year of college with only two classes remaining to complete her bachelor's degree. Graduating early was not an option as she could not take her remaining classes until she had senior standing. In order to maintain her athletic eligibility for her senior season she was advised to enroll at her institution as a non-degree student. She was not a fan of this option:

That's stupid. This is a high-quality, expensive education and you guys are gonna pay for me to take classes that don't matter and count towards nothing? Where is the ethical light in that? How is this morally okay? It's not, and that was kind of a dilemma that I had where I was like, this is a waste of resources that could honestly be going to somebody who needs it. People are pinching pennies to try and find a way to pay for school, for things they need, and then I'm just going to sit here and take a waste of space classes, just so I can do gymnastics? Now if I got to do this, I'm going to make the most of it.

Instead, Andy did her own research and found a master's program that aligned with her personal and professional interests. Though she enjoys what she's studying, she admits that going to grad school was yet another decision informed by athletics: "The only reason why I started this program was to be eligible."

Navigating Identity at a PWI: “It was kind of a sea of White with a dabble of color”

As a student-athlete, Andy again navigated being one of few Black women on her team and in her sport. As she talked about the photo she selected to describe what it’s like being a Black woman at her PWI, she said:

You see White, White, White, White, White, White, White. Oh, another Black girl.

White, White, White, White, White all the way through type of thing...whether it would have been in the classroom, as an athlete at [her institution] or just walking through campus, it was kind of a sea of White, with a dabble of color.

Additionally, Andy navigated multiple microaggressions throughout her time at her institution.

One that she experienced multiple times was related to her complexion. She noted that gymnastics is a sport in which many athletes tan. Because of her lighter shade, a result of her biracial identity, her fairer skinned teammates would often express a desire to look like her:

“‘[Andy], I wish I was as tan as you.’ I get it all the time and I used to just kind of throw it under the rug because I knew it was, they were microaggressions, yes, but they were unaware.” She got similar comments from her assistant coaches as well: “After going to the pool over the weekend he would say, ‘wow, [Andy], you’re looking more and more like an Islander every day.’ What do I say in that moment?” In both scenarios, she was encouraged to speak up and correct those who were microaggressing her. With her assistant coach, she did not feel comfortable speaking out because he was a known Trump supporter and the unequal power dynamics of him being one of her coaches. She ultimately notified her head coach of this particular coach’s comments after she graduated. She ultimately attributed these comments to a lack of education and ignorance.

Although Her teammates and coaches were not actively racist, she acknowledged that they may

have been unaware of the harm they were causing by making these comments, particularly because of her biracial identity:

They didn't see the negative implications and what they were saying was wrong because in their mind, I checked the box off as more of a White girl, than a Black girl in their brain. They wouldn't say that to one of my other teammates who was clearly full Black, but to me, who was in that limbo, they would make these comments. So, since then, as I've gotten definitely more in tune with my Blackness or also now saying, you know, I'm a Black woman, but at the same time I am multiracial. I'm very proud of who I am as coming from both.

Instead of letting these incidences tarnish the relationships, she used them as opportunities to make a difference: “Now what I want to do is educate those around me and try to have a positive impact on those people, [be] that person in somebody else's life that chooses to educate them when they otherwise wouldn't have gotten it.” In light of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in 2020, her coaches and teammates reached out to her not only to check on her well-being, but also to acknowledge that they had more to learn. She shared a text she received from a teammate: “I stand with you and support you, always. I love you and let me know if you need anything or just someone to listen. I'm here to learn and I'm here to help.”

A Retrospective: “I made it my mission to change that”

As her time as a student-athlete came to a close, she reflected on the relationships and connections that she held, particularly how these relationships impact the future of Black women in college athletics. In her senior year, she served as the president of the student-athlete advisory committee and created multiple support groups for historically underrepresented populations of student-athletes. With the help of an assistant athletic director, who was a Black woman, she

started a support group for women of color athletes. She developed this group to combat the isolation she felt as a minority on her team and as a way to connect with Black women and women of color in other sports:

These are people that I otherwise wouldn't have been exposed to at all. I literally would have never met any of these girls. It also kind of helped me get a little in touch with my Blackness that I was not getting in my normal day to day life at all and didn't realize in the moment that I was missing it. So, that was really cool... I hope that group and foundation stays as new student-athletes come in.

The development of this support group for Black women and women of color athletes is an example of a significant connection she created with this particular assistant athletic director. She shared the significance of having a Black woman in such a powerful and influential position within the department: “[She’s] literally the rock of this athletic department. Everybody else has come and gone and [she’s] still been here and I just love that. I would love for that to be my career.”

Andy is now a compulsory coach at the gym she grew up in as a young gymnast. The significance of her identity and diversity within the sport is something she continues to emphasize:

I’ve never had a Black coach, which is funny though because I'm a compulsory coach. So, the primary levels I coach, it's me, another Black girl, an Asian girl, and one other White girl, but the two main coaches are both Black and I love it. I love it that we're exposing our whole group of White girls to some Blackness.

As a coach, she teaches her girls to be confident and that they don’t need to “fit in a box.” She defines this box as allowing others to define who they are, such as their personality, values, or

interests because of their racial identity. She used herself as an example, saying: “My personality does not need to be tied to my racial identity in that sense. Just because I like country music does not mean I’m not Black.”

Postgraduate Life and Plans: “I was at the end of my book”

The end of her collegiate career also meant the end of her gymnastics career. Unlike other sports, like basketball and football for example, she noted that gymnastics is not just something she could do casually: “I physically cannot run down the vault runway and do what I did. I will never do that again ... Yeah, I can do a cartwheel and yeah, I'll be able to do a back tuck probably for the rest of my life and do my splits, but what I actually did for my career, I can't.” Her senior season ended abruptly when the NCAA cancelled remaining winter and spring sport seasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As she talked about the photo she selected to describe what it was like being a student-athlete at her institution, she said:

The thing that I said most was that I didn't get to say goodbye. That was the thing for me.

I didn't know that the practice that I had had before when I had an okay bar day and I was like, “all right, I'll do better dismounts on Friday,” I didn't know that that was like my last time doing things.

Despite this, she explained that she was physically and mentally ready to move on from her collegiate career and be a regular student. She described it using the following analogy: “You read a book, you love the book and then you close the book. You go, “alright what's next?” I was at the end of my book.”

Now Andy is in her final year of her graduate studies, studying organizational behavior. She arrived at this topic after doing a lot of research on what graduate program she would enroll

in to maintain her athletic eligibility. She chose organizational behavior after reflecting on the roles she played as an athlete for her athletic department and student at her university:

I was this actor, or I was a component of [institution's] women's gymnastics team, which was a component of [institution's] athletics department, which was a component of [institution], and technically those are all three organizations, right? The team, the department, university, those are all three organizations, and they all function very differently and have different rules that are applied to them. Very different mission and vision and everything in between. I just kinda noticed how I was this component of so many different things, right? I had a different role in all of them and I was really interested in that, and how I became such an active member and how these universities or departments or teams create success.

Although she is still unsure what exactly she'd liked to complete her final project on, she's excited about exploring change management and diversity and inclusion practices within organizations, especially at a time where more organizations are taking steps to diversify their staff and "make some pretty big changes, whether that be in their mission or their vision, or if they understand that they aren't a very diverse corporation...[she] would like to help and aid in those changes."

Ann

Ann is a 20-year-old Division 1 basketball player. She is the member of the women's basketball team at a large, public PWI in the southeastern United States. Ann is currently in her third and final year of undergraduate studies and is majoring in political science.

Early Life and Identity: “I eventually just kind of fell in love with it”

Ann is a native of Suwanee, Georgia, a small city 30-minutes northeast of Downtown Atlanta. She grew up living with her mother and younger sister and has a number of older siblings. As an adolescent, she was very aware of race and racial issues, particularly through stories from her mother and arguments with her younger sister. From her mother, she would hear stories about race in the workplace, namely her mother’s interactions with White coworkers:

There was this one lady at her job who would always kinda do things, you know, kind of make my mom look bad in a way at work. She would do things not let her get a certain amount of sales, I guess... My mom wasn't the type of person to just let that stuff happen. She'd outspokenly say, “okay, you on some racist ass shit. It ain't going to be that, because you got the wrong one today.”

She credited these stories as the reason why she is mindful of her interactions with White people. From her sister, she became increasingly aware of the divisiveness of skin tone. Ann’s sister was a lighter complexion than her, and took every opportunity to remind her of such:

A lot of the time it would come up in arguments. You know, siblings, especially sisters, we were always fighting. Growing up it was just like, “hey man, I'm lighter than you. That means I'm prettier.” She did things like that to get under my skin.

Although Ann is presently comfortable in her skin and understands that she’s beautiful the way she is, these instances had a great impact on her as she grew up at home and in school.

Choosing to Play: “I'm going to go to college, whether I played basketball or not”

Ann began playing basketball at the age of 11. Because of her height, a middle school teacher encouraged her to try the sport. The teacher introduced her to the high school coach and explained that the sport was an “option” for her. Ann started playing and eventually “just kind of

fell in love with it.” She continued playing basketball into high school and eventually began playing for an Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team. Within this team, playing college basketball was always viewed as a viable option:

College coaches are always at the games and us playing is basically kind of getting them there. We'd have our high school coaches saying the “big girl”, which would technically be the bigs on the team, “they're bringing the college coaches and they're doing this for the team.” So, it was just like, I'm going to go to college, whether I played basketball or not, it was just a matter of me going to a college [that's] far away from home or not.

College was always on the table, and Ann sought opportunities to play outside of state. Although she received interest from universities in Georgia, she was more interested in leaving the state for college: “I just wanted to experience something new, because definitely schools in Georgia were trying to recruit me, but I just knew I wanted to get away from home, but not be too far.”

Ann took official visits to three different campuses. During her visit to the second institution, a number of things stood out to her: “I just really enjoyed the coaches. I loved how they were on the girls. They weren't too pushy, but they were pushing them to be the best that they could be, but not in a bad way, and I loved the team as well.” During her recruitment, something happened in her life that caused her to step back from the process and take care of other responsibilities. The reaction of that second institution stood out to her and solidified her decision: “[Institution] was one of those schools that was just kinda like, “Hey, we want you over here and we're still by you. We still stand by you with everything that's going on in your life right now.” These acts, in addition to the institution being not too far from home, ultimately influenced her decision to commit to her institution.

Outside of sport, Ann had a number of experiences in high school that made her more aware of her racial identity. She attended a predominantly White high school and observed many of her White classmates engage in racist behavior. For example, she recalled how her campus reacted following the 2016 presidential election: “All you saw was all these White people with their big trucks, with their big Trump flags. It was just like, *wow*, okay, I feel uncomfortable.” She witnessed many of her Black classmates struggle with their racial identity and fitting in with the predominantly White student body: “I saw a lot of people, Black people in particular, struggle with being themselves or feeling comfortable enough to be themselves, or where they were trying to accommodate to be something that they're not so that they can fit in with White people.” Ann was not interested in being one of these Black students who adapted her personality to fit in, which explains why she stayed to herself and had her predominately Black team as a space of solace.

Embracing an Athletic Identity: “Basketball has helped me in a lot of aspects of my life”

Academically, Ann has had a mostly positive experience. She explained that being a political science major lends itself to many interesting and engaging conversations. She spoke fondly of one professor’s courses in particular:

[Professor] is one of the ones that I really love because his classes are so engaging, and he has so many different political aspects and perspectives come in. I'm in a class that's strictly discussion-based where we're literally talking to people who are either running for political offices or have run. It's just very interesting to me and it's like, okay, I feel comfortable to say my piece.

She also has had fairly positive experiences with other students and described many of the students on her campus as “liberal.” Nonetheless she noted that there are still students that have

very different political views than herself. She as she recalled one politically divisive incident that occurred on her campus, she said:

It's just like, *whoa*, there are racists in our generation who have clearly got that taught to them. One instance where it was Donald Trump's daughter, I think, came to the school... Then you just saw all the guys, frat boys, I'm gonna call them cause that's what they look like, were just going into there, yelling at protestors and it was just like, *wow*, they're really people like that in this school.

She learned to pick her battles in the classroom and not engage with student she felt would not be open to hearing another perspective and/or consider her point of view. When she encounters those who are seemingly close-minded, she disengages: "This is not for me... I'm not really going to participate as much as I should, even though I do love having those little conversations with people who are politically [on the] right." These interactions lead her to take a backseat in class and take more of an observational role rather than speak up.

Basketball is no doubt a hallmark of her college experience. She named the ways in which basketball has impacted her life:

It's definitely helped me with confidence and speaking as well. Whether it's a speech or just talking to someone like we are now... In the early start, I used to feel a lot like an outsider, but then when I entered this world of basketball, it was just like, you're home, you're home and you can feel comfortable here because everyone's just like you.

Ann has completely embraced her athletic identity and her status as an athlete at her institution. She selected a photo that was captured at a practice to describe a space on campus where she felt she belonged. She said:

I feel most comfortable and confident when I'm on the court, you know, with my teammates. So, yeah, that's pretty much what this photo is about, just my teammates and I...we don't want to leave, you know? Like come on, can we have more time to practice? Who says that? I think the place I feel comfortable is on the court and with my teammates.

Ann learned quickly that her athletic and academic responsibilities would intersect in an interesting manner. She recalled how her athletic schedule influenced the ways she selected what courses she would take each term:

Before we even get to choose classes, we have to be like, okay, what time is practice going to be? How much of that block do we need off to where we will be able to go to class? So, certain classes we are not able to take because of that, or the rule where there can't be a certain number of student-athletes in one class. So, then you have to sit back and be like, all right, I guess I can't take that class this semester, but hopefully I'll get it next.

One of the outcomes of this practice is that Ann takes most of her classes online, about three courses each term. Furthermore, she recognizes that being an athlete is both a blessing and a limitation, in that athletes do not have the average student experience. While she described the athlete community at her institution as “very tight knit”, she acknowledged having a community outside of athletics would be very helpful. When discussing how being a student-athletes was limiting, she explained:

I think it kind of hinders us being able to see different people's aspects of life. You're supposed to come to college and see different people from different backgrounds.

Granted, there are a lot of different people with different backgrounds in athletics, but we

don't get a lot of people who are working their ass off day and night to not only be a college student, but also have a job to pay for it because we have the blessing and opportunity to get an education for free. I think that sometimes we as athletes don't understand that because we're just so engrossed into our own population.

Ann also noted that being an athlete had implications on the career development opportunities that are available to them. She acknowledged that some student-athletes, specifically male athletes, aspire to play their sport professionally and need to have time and space to get to know themselves outside of sport. Ann is fortunate to have an idea of who she is and what she wants to be when her athletic career is over.

Navigating identity at a PWI: “Being a Black woman means strength”

Despite many positive experiences in academics and athletics, Ann has had to navigate both race and gender during her time as an athlete. In academic spaces, Ann contends with being the only one in many of her classes. She named the classroom as a space on her campus where she feels she does not belong:

When I'm in a classroom, all I see are White people in there. I've had multiple classes where I'm the only Black person and let alone a woman. So, it's like, *whoa*, cool. So, I don't really feel, you know, as comfortable to speak. When there's race brought up and I'm like, “I know just as much as you, okay?” I think that's one place where I would feel uncomfortable is definitely the classroom. Cause there's been multiple occasions of multiple classes where I am the only one.

She recognized that being the only one is commonplace within the institution as a whole. She explained that it's very rare to see Black students on her campus who are not athletes: “When there's a Black event and we'd go, we're just overwhelmed and I didn't realize there was these

Black people here.” Nonetheless, being an athlete shields her from the effects of being so underrepresented.

In athletics, Ann’s experiences are marked by being on a predominantly Black team. She attributed the demographic makeup of her team as one of the reasons why they are all so close and understood that her friends on predominantly White teams do not have this experience:

We're really tight and I think if I was on a predominantly White sport, let's say tennis, I think I'd be really uncomfortable. I don't, honestly, I don't know. I don't feel bad for those people, but at the same time I do cause it's like, are you even free to really be yourself around that many White people at one time?

Despite her team being predominantly Black, she still finds herself navigating complex situations and conversations about race with coaches and her non-Black teammates. In the past, her coach has been known to make comments about her and her teammates’ hair and makeup choices:

One day we’d come in with weave and then the next we’d be in there with our fros, embracing our hair. He’d say like, “whoa, a full moon is going on over there in the back.” It's like, *whoa*, this is just me. This is my hair, you know? I can't change that. This is the texture of it.

In addition to this she noted that her coaches treat her non-Black teammates differently than herself and her Black teammates. For example, she discussed differences in how her coach communicates with them. She explained that her coach would often go back and forth and eventually concede to her non-Black teammates during moments of conflict, saying things like “I was wrong. You're right”, but did not offer the same benefit of the doubt to herself and her Black teammates, saying things like “Why are you even talking? Just say okay.” Her teammates have learned to adjust to it and move on. This differential treatment is troubling particularly because

non-Black members make up less than 25% of her team, yet they are still treated with a bit more care. Still, Ann recognized the power of being the majority in these situations: “I think just because we are a predominantly Black team, he can't win anything without us, literally. You'd only have two people in the court.”

Amongst her teammates, they often have casual “locker-room conversations” about race. These conversations were taking place before the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, and following these events, the coaches began to get involved. In this time, she's had to explain to her White coaches why the social unrest has gotten to this point. She's had to adjust her approach to make sure that her coaches understands the significance without getting offended:

I've got to break it down to [them] in an intelligent way or else [they] won't get it, because I know for a fact that my other teammate who doesn't really have that background where they can't really say things without making it more understandable for another person, but I do. I had to sit down, and I had to explain to [them] this is why we're doing this, and this was why we're saying this and it's important for us to fight for what we believe in not only as athletes, but as Black student-athletes... [I have to] explicitly explain to the point where they literally have to be speechless.

She admitted that she had become the person on her team that many will go to learn more about race and racial injustice. This takes a toll on her mental health: “Right now I'm just stressed to the max between schoolwork and doing stuff like that.” Ann inadvertently takes on the role of friend and teacher within her team. To this point, she reasoned that being a Black woman means *strength*.

Finally, being that Ann plays a co-ed sport, she also has made a number of observations related to gender. Ann's team has had remarkable success over the last several seasons, having made the Sweet Sixteen multiple times and winning a conference championship. Despite these feats, she finds that the men's basketball team is still afforded many opportunities that the women don't have access to. She recognized that this is how society undervalues women's sports. While her team's success has led to sold out games and a great deal of fan support, she knows that this is not the norm of most college women's basketball programs:

I've been to plenty basketball games in my life. I've gone to women's games and I've gone to men's games. Of course, you see people will always support the male athletes not as much as they support the woman athletes." I think when I see it on social media. They'll do a bad clip of a play that a girls' team has done and then they'll be like, "this is why women shouldn't play sports and no wonder they don't get paid as much." I'm just like, this is one bad clip. Men do this all the time. We do the same thing.

In this particular quote, she captures the role of media in perpetuating the perceived "uninterestingness" of women's sports. Ann named this gender-based differential treatment as one of the factors that shaped her experience as an athlete.

Looking forward: "It makes me want to do things to help the Black community"

On the heels of a conference championship, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly ended Ann's season and halted her team's opportunity to compete for a national championship. Nonetheless, the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor have kept Ann engaged in a significant amount of activism within the athletic community at her institution. She selected a photo from a recent student-athlete protest to capture what it means to

be a student-athlete at her institution. She described this photo as Black student-athletes

“standing up for [their] Blackness.” When discussing the photo and her activism, she said:

It shows unity of the student-athletes here. This was, I guess [an] on campus protest that we had over the summer. That's me to the left, and then a football player, and then two of my teammates, really three of them in the back. I don't know if you can see her, but in the back she's White. It's just like, everything that's been going on amongst the Black community this year has just been [like] *whoa*, and so many people are wanting to learn about our experiences. It's just been really great to me. What this says to me is hey, we're not alone. As Black student-athletes, we're not alone. We have staff and teammates who really support us.

She noted that staff and administrators have been increasingly supportive of the activism that is currently taking place. This is particularly true in the cases of protecting students from donors and fans who are in opposition of the ways the student-athletes have spoken out in support of Black Lives Matter. Fans have also been critical of her athletic community's activism, pushing a “shut up and play” narrative. These reactions made her believe that some fans viewed student-athletes in the following way: “You're literally just a means for our entertainment. We don't see you as an American citizen, which is part of who you are, or Black person cause that's a part of who I am as well.” Despite these poor interactions with unsupportive fans, she noted that there are many who support their work and defend them against internet trolls. This work has seemingly paid off, as she and her teammates will now be wearing Black Lives Matter on the back of their jerseys and kneeling during the national anthem during their upcoming season.

Ann noted that the moment in racial injustice has presented the opportunity to bring her race and athletic identities together: “It's been kind of intertwined because me as a student-

athlete, I'm so vocal about certain things and then off the court, I'm vocal about certain things.”

This work also overlaps with her professional aspirations to pursue a career in law. She is currently on track to complete her undergraduate degree in three years, pursue a graduate degree with her remaining two years of athletic eligibility, and eventually go to law school and help children and families. She had not initially planned to graduate in three years, but came to the decision after realizing that she only had a few credits left. She felt that it would be the best use of her eligibility:

Use it the best way you can, because these people are getting all this money out of you and you're not, you know? We're getting some, but we're not getting as much as we're bringing, but yeah. I'm gonna get what I can out of this... To get two degrees out of a college experience, especially in a world where having that master's degree is now so important. I was just like, that's what I'm going to do.

Ultimately, in light of recent racial injustice, Ann’s work on and off the court serves a certain purpose: “It makes me want to do things to help the Black community.”

Blu

Blu is a 24-year-old former Division 1 volleyball player. Blu played volleyball at two institutions during her time as a collegiate athlete. Her first institution was a midsize, private institution located in the southeastern region of the United States. Blu completed her bachelor’s degree in marketing in 2017, and subsequently transferred to a large, public institution in southeastern United States to pursue her master’s degree in textiles. At the latter institution she completed her final year of athletic eligibility and graduated with her masters in 2019. The 2018-2019 academic year was Blu’s final year as a student-athlete. Since graduating she played professional volleyball in Switzerland and is currently working in her hometown.

Early Life and Identity: “Growing up, I just loved school”

Blu was raised in Spartanburg, South Carolina, a small town an hour outside of Columbia, South Carolina. Blu grew up on the south side of town, which she described as “not the greatest.” She was raised by a single mom, and an older sister who is twelve years older than her. She described her upbringing as synonymous with growing up as an only child. Although she is not a super family-oriented person, she credited her mother for teaching her to be an independent person and to always defend herself, two traits that came in handy as people made comments related to her height and physical appearance. For example, she often got comments about what sport she played because of her height:

Everybody thinks that I play basketball. I definitely think it's just because I'm Black. If I was White and tall, I don't think I would have got basketball. Definitely think I would have got volleyball. I don't know, long distance or something... Whenever I'm with my other Black volleyball friends, they think [men ask], “y'all wanna play 5 on 5? Y'all want to do this?” We don't know a thing about basketball. I couldn't even tell you how to dribble a ball to be quite honest.

Additionally, she regularly heard comments alluding to the idea that being tall and attractive was unnatural: “I feel like people associate good looks with people who are 5' and under. You know the song, ‘5'5”, you fine, blah, blah, blah’, whatever. Who the hell is 5'2”, anyway nowadays? So, that was also a thing. But I never really thought about it like that.”

Being in “not the greatest” area of Spartanburg, she had very few school options. When discussing the quality of the primary and secondary schools in her area she said, “those schools do not have the high ratings like, two-star type thing.” Nonetheless, she grew up loving school. She explained that her mom fostered this love for school as a direct result of not living in the

best school district. She described her high school as diverse, but having two extreme demographics:

It was the really preppy White people and then it was, I'm not going to call them ghetto, but you know what I mean? Then there's people that were kind of in the middle, but cause I'm Black I associated with them on occasion.

Majority of the schoolteachers and leadership were White, and she did not recall any negative experiences with teachers because of her race, although she acknowledged that this was not the norm for Black youth:

Our school wasn't the greatest, but I don't think our teachers, not to my knowledge or that I can recollect, they said anything in regard to academics and me being Black. I think I was lucky to not have that though, because I know a lot of people that have had those kinds of comments where they tell them that they can't do this field.

Becoming an Athlete: “Volleyball was very last minute for me”

Blu got what she described as a late start in playing volleyball. She started playing in her final year of high school, after being introduced to the sport by a friend:

Volleyball was very last minute for me. I started when I was 17, late high school, very last minute. I've always been tall, so people are like, don't waste your height, as they say. So, I just tried it...I was terrible when I first started. I was. Just no coordination. I was just tall, lanky. It was bad, but considering the fact that I was tall, and I had a decent vertical, they were like, “okay, we can use you”, pretty much. I don't know what possessed me to continue doing something that I was no good at that the time. But I continued doing it.

Despite this late start, volleyball and being an athlete continued to be a thread in her life beyond her high school years.

Blu continued playing high school volleyball and was eventually approached by a university to play college volleyball. This institution was the first to offer her a full ride scholarship and explained that they made a plan to help her develop as a player. However, her decision was influenced by a number of things:

I automatically kind of felt pressured at the moment because I was like, there's no way my mom would be able to pay for school. We don't have the money for that. So, they're like, full ride? I'm like, oh yes, let me sign the paper ASAP before I mess around and I wait.

Ultimately, the choice made sense for many reasons. In addition to getting a full scholarship, the school was also close to home, and she felt fortunate to have the offer considering she had only been playing volleyball for a year and a half. The latter part sweetened the deal:

That's the main reason why I [played], initially was just because it was fun competition. I'm in a sport, now my final year of high school, and then I was like I can get money for this? Cause I mean, I was smart, but I wasn't that smart for me to get a full ride to go to a decent college and not be in any debt. So, that came along. I felt like that was just an opportunity I needed to take, regardless of the university itself.

Unfamiliar Territory as a Student-Athlete: “Being Black there, it was just very evident that I was an athlete at that school.”

As Blu began her journey at her first institution, she found herself navigating unfamiliar territory in multiple ways. On the court, her team’s performance was not great. In addition to

this, Blu was constantly reminded of her status as a racial minority on campus, and on her team.

Within the broader campus community, she said:

Being Black there was just, it was just very evident that I was an athlete at that school. Maybe if I went to [institution 2], maybe they would've guessed, and I would've been like “nah I just go here” and they be like, “oh okay.” But if I was Black and not an athlete at [institution 1] we'd be like, why are you here? So, I'm not going to lie. If I just saw some random Black people at [institution 1], I'd be like, “You're not an athlete, what?” Maybe if you got a full scholarship maybe I could understand, but being Black at [institution 1] was just kind of, it wasn't a racist vibe. It was just something I feel like Black people wouldn't be comfortable in for a long period of time. It just didn't really, the diversity there was not the greatest amongst regular students.

She explained that most of the Black students she encountered at institution 1 were athletes and being an athlete insulated her from the lack of Black students in the general population. Thus, she felt like the lack of diversity did not affect her experience as a Black student:

Being a regular student at [institution 1] and being Black, that would have made my college experience very weird. I would've left, definitely. I just would've felt awkward or felt like my identity would have been shifted to some crazy ass shit I wouldn't like if I were to stay there. But being an athlete, I was always around African American people that played sports and that's who I hung out with. So, it's just like my experience felt like, we had our own little university in a sense. It was just us.

The Re-Up: “I ran into the perfect opportunity”

Blu graduated from institution 1 in three years. Despite graduating early, she knew her journey in higher education was not over yet. With a year and a half of athletic eligibility

remaining, she contemplated staying at institution 1 and pursuing a Master of Business Administration degree. Staying at institution 1 would also mean taking out a small loan to cover the difference from what was left of her athletic scholarship. She considered transferring schools but said that for student-athletes “transferring [was] just a hard thing, it's complicated.” A conversation with her coach, shifted her trajectory:

Our team was just not good there and my coach was just something else. He was a sweet man, but he was just something else. Right before I graduated, he was like, “I just don't think that you're going to be happy here next year.” So, he gave me my release. He's pretty much telling me he wants me to leave. He was like, “I think you could play somewhere better. I know you're not [happy]”, because that year I know I was all types of stressed and it showed on the court. I would get annoyed because we're not doing good. He was like, “You're not going to be happy your last year, go somewhere else. You already graduated.”

After being released from institution 1 she began searching for institutions that were both athletically competitive and had a graduate program that would set her up to pursue a career in fashion. She recalled looking at a school in the Midwest, but changed her mind after considering what it would be like to live in the town the school was in:

[Potential institution] which was like, [power 5 conference], top notch, but that's all the way in [the Midwest]. I got nervous about being in [the Midwest] and being Black. So, I don't know how I feel about being all the way at [potential institution], and they had maybe two Black girls on the team.

Blu ultimately decided to transfer to an institution closer to home, which was both in a power 5 conference, had a graduate program which aligned with her specific professional interests and

whose volleyball team had several Black women. The decision to transfer to institution 2 made academic, athletic, and social sense.

Blu quickly found community and belonging at institution 2. While she acknowledged that she naturally gravitated toward other Black women on her team, she still felt close to all of her teammates. As she talked about the photo she selected to describe what it was like being a Black woman at a PWI, she said:

Being Black at [institution 2], our team was, I would say it was a lot of Black people for a PWI and we all got along well. I think our team for the most part...we had our moments, but we all enjoyed each other's company and I just felt like this kind of gave a glimpse of what our team was like...Being a part of my team, I didn't feel like my race was a factor or a deterrent.

Academically, Blu found her stride quickly. The photo she selected to describe her sense of belonging at institution 2 featured her on her first day of graduate school. When talking about this experience, she said:

I was just super excited. Oh, my gosh, I'm in this master's program for textiles. I was just super happy. This is something I want to do. I guess I could say I felt safe here because it was like, this is something I love. There's a lot of athletes that come to the university, and they're like, "oh, I'm going into communications" or something, just to slide by. But this was something I was really interested in and I was always happy to be in my classes, because I know that this was what I want to do with my life in the future. So, being able to become more knowledgeable about these topics, knowing that I'm going to use them in a future, was just perfect. I ran into the perfect opportunity. Here I am playing volleyball in a Power 5 conference, in a fashion master's program. Couldn't get any better.

Navigating Identity at Both Institutions: “I feel like if you were an athlete, you're Black”

At both institutions, Blu found herself navigating various aspects of her social identities in unique ways. At institution 1, this meant coming to terms with being one of few Black students:

At [institution 1] I feel like if you were an athlete, you're Black. It was a school that Black people wouldn't go to... I think a very high percentage of our athletic program at [institution 1] was Black. The volleyball team still had a lot of White people on it, though, because volleyball, but if you were Black and you were kind of good, you probably went to a different university. You wouldn't want to go to [institution 1].

At institution 2, she felt that her race, gender, and height were a factor in her tumultuous relationship with her coach. She noted that her personality often clashed with that of her head coach, and this was exacerbated because she was uncertain of what the coach expected from her:

They have this idea like, “okay, you're the tall, Black girl. You're about to...do some damage.” So, when you don't do the damage, they're looking at you like, “this is not what we expected.”... It put a damper on me...having this expectation and maybe not being able to meet it...It was pressure, because they have this expectation for me because I am Black and athletic and not meeting it. It just like, what a waste.

This dynamic with her coach reinforced the business aspects of college sports, specifically as it related to being disposable talent: “They love to say that we try to find people who will fit the team. But are you gonna produce? Like I said, it's a business. You know what I mean? They don't really care like that.”

Identity and Postgraduate Life: “I’m microaggressed by the people I work with”

Now on the other side of her collegiate athletic experience, Blu still identifies strongly with being an athlete. Although she does not have a strong athletic identity, being an athlete is still an important aspect of who she is:

I feel like some things that I have now are just from being an athlete and I can't just disregard the fact that and be like “I'm competitive” and then not give the recognition for me being an athlete as to why I'm competitive. So, it's not something where I'm feeling like being an athlete is something that's making me or I need to necessarily have it... I'm using it more like, this is a steppingstone of my life. I've played for several years doing volleyball. I can't just be like, all right, cool it was fun while it lasted. It's attached to me at this point and I'm still finding ways to remain active.

Immediately following graduation she got an agent and went to Switzerland to play professional volleyball. She recalled getting weird looks and being sexualized by White man during her time in Switzerland. She attributed this to being a tall Black woman, with a half-shaved head. She recalled an example of this:

One time this guy in Europe made a comment. I asked, “you want to play sand volleyball with me” and he asked me if I asked him because I thought he was Black, because he was tan. I was like, “No, I just asked because you were 6’3””, and I just needed somebody to play with”, you know? Then he was like, “oh that's okay because I like chocolate” or some weird ass comment like that.

Blu’s time in Switzerland was short lived due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the number of cases began to increase in Europe the team decided to send her back to Spartanburg. Since returning, she has been working as a spin instructor and as a hostess at a local restaurant to

keep herself busy while she searches for a full-time position in fashion. Being back in her hometown has meant that she runs into her old high school classmates, counselors and teachers.

During these run-ins, she's noticed a trend:

They're like, "Oh, so is this what you're doing now? Is this your job?" I was like no. I'm just here cause of corona... They didn't ask me anything about school and I'm like, "no actually I got my masters and I was in Europe, for your information." I feel like I have to explain myself sometimes just so they don't look at me and be like, "okay, typical African-American female in Spartanburg."

These are subtle microaggressions she experiences in both of her positions now. Nonetheless, Blu is still committed to pursuing a career in fashion, especially considering the way Black creatives are treated in the industry:

If I don't have a super deep connection, I think that they definitely would look over me because I'm Black. It's just something you don't see in those fields nowadays. Except in some of the designer roles, but that's just because they want to steal Black people's creative minds. But whatever, I'm not going to take it there. For positions like me, just a normal marketing position they're like, "okay, we can find Susan to do it, but we need somebody to come with the Black creativity. This what y'all wear? Cool. Let me take you it and, modify it for White folks." But, hey, that's what I did. My master's thesis was on streetwear in luxury brands. So, that's what I did and it was great. I wanna get my PhD and go more into depth about African American culture and luxury brands, all this stuff. I just don't know how that's gonna work.

Chinenye

Chinenye is a 19-year-old Division 1 student athlete. She is a member of the track & field team at a large, public PWI in the southeastern, mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Chinenye is currently in her sophomore, or second year of undergraduate studies and is majoring in chemical engineering.

Early Life and Sport: “We always dabbled into different sports”

Chinenye is a native of Houston, Texas and is of Nigerian heritage. She grew up with her parents and is the youngest of four children. Growing up, her parents always emphasized academics to her and her siblings. She attributed her parents emphasis on academics to her cultural background, saying: “Growing up in an African household, academics were always the first thing that [came] to mind.” This emphasis was even more significant because all of her siblings were very active in sports. She said since elementary school, they “always dabbled into different sports.” Chinenye, herself, was active in sports like swimming, track & field, soccer, and tennis. She continued basketball, track and swimming into middle school.

Chinenye began developing her academic and professional interests at an early age. She always enjoyed building things:

I [was] always creating things or solving problems, even if it was like untangling

Christmas lights, stuff like that. If it was like Christmas presents, I always made presents instead of buying presents. So, I always used cardboard or I would always collect things and try to make something shake with what I had.

She attributed this love of making gifts to being the youngest sibling and an overall generous person. She developed an interest in engineering at an early age, but was unsure of what type of engineering she wanted to pursue. As we discussed how she developed an interest in building

things and engineering, she mentioned that she was unsure whether her parents influenced her STEM interest, but acknowledged that many Nigerian parents encourage their kids to become doctors, lawyers, or engineers.

Finding the Right Fit: “We can't really make something shake with that”

Chinenye continued to narrow her academic focus as she moved into high school. Although she was initially interested in engineering, she was not looking forward to all the math required to complete the degree. Not wanting to take extra math courses led her to shift her interest to journalism, a decision that did not go over well with her parents:

My parents were like, “there's no money with that, yada, yada, yada. You'd be a disgrace, yada, yada, yada.” So, that was such a power struggle because I was like, I mean, it's *my* major. I should be able to choose what I want to do. So, it made living in the house very stressful because [they were] like, “not journalism, no. You're going to be a failure. You're going to embarrass the family.”

Her parents were adamant about her pursuing a career with a bit more financial security and stability, which sent her back to the drawing board. She started doing research on different types of engineering. As she researched, she developed an interest in a specific sub-field of engineering:

My senior year I guess I started to take having natural hair more seriously. Then I was like, how do you make hair products? That's what I'm interested in. So, then I realized that I want to major in cosmetics or chemical engineering or chemistry, one of those. Then obviously chemical engineers make more money out of the three. That's why I chose that. But I think it really was my research that a chemical engineer made sticky notes. I didn't think it was that serious for a chemical engineer, so that's when I was like maybe

chemical engineering is interesting and I really liked chemistry in high school too. So, I was like, I'll deal with the math if I can do chemical engineering.

As she continued receiving pressure from her parents to focus on school, she was forced to choose one sport to continue playing. She chose to continue track and got serious about competing in college during her sophomore year of high school. Because Texas was a “big track state” she had to be persistent in her college recruitment pursuits. In order to attract the attention of schools out of state, she created an online profile to get noticed. Her decision to pursue schools out of state was fueled by her desire to be independent from her parents and she wanted to get “the experience of living in a completely different climate, knowing completely different people.” Her parents were initially supportive of her recruitment process. Chinenye attracted the attention of large programs, including some ivy league institutions. However, universities were turned off by her intention to major in chemical engineering:

It was like, “since you're doing chemical engineering, we can't really make something shake with that.” So, especially [an ivy league institution] was saying, “if you major in anything besides engineering, we'd love to have you”, but I really wanted to do engineering. So, I had to pass up on [an ivy league institution] of all schools.”

Chinenye's eventual institution was interested in her joining the program because of her athletic ability, but she wanted to go to the institution for academic reasons. Her parents were not supportive of her doing both school and athletics because “they felt like [she] couldn't balance the two” as a college student. She ultimately decided to walk onto the track & field team at her institution.

Juggling Responsibilities: “That power struggle... being a STEM major and an athlete”

Chinenye tried out and made the track & field team at her institution. As she discussed the photo she selected to describe what it’s like being a student-athlete at her institution she said: “If you're seen with that [athletics] bag it’s like, praise you... it's just such a cool thing being an athlete here.” Upon making the team she quickly noticed the notable dynamics between the scholarship athletes, recruited the walk ons, and the selected walk ons:

I would see the scholarship athletes talking about the recruited walk on saying “[Chinenye] you're faster than her. I don't even know why she's here, yada, yada, she's so slow”... it was the upperclassmen that were saying those things and they do have a lot of pull when it comes to my coach. They're always in the coach's office saying, “yeah, I think this and that. I think we should do this and that.” So, it's not hard for them to say I think you should kick blah blah blah off the team.

Furthermore, as a walk on she felt like she had to prove herself to her teammates, more than to her coaches. She recalled a time in which she was forced to miss practice due to a legitimate roommate issue:

My teammates were like, “how could you miss practice? We're trying to be [conference] champs this year and you're missing practice. We need people that [are] serious.”

Everybody in the group chat, just getting on me, getting on me. They're like, “it doesn't matter what personal things you have going on in your life. This is a professional sport.

We need everybody on their, A game, yada, yada, yada, don't you think I have things I'm going through, but I don't miss practice... honestly we don't really care why you miss practice.” I don't want to get into [the reason why she missed practice] too much because

I mean, look at how they're acting. So, I didn't want to tell my personal information when clearly they don't care.

After this instance she retreated from the larger team community and created a smaller community within the team.

Chinenye's academic obligations also create some interesting power dynamics. She explained that sometimes her class schedule and practice schedules were typically tight, which led to her leaving class or practice early, or being late to one or the other. Her team would react to her tardiness in the following ways: "There was even a time where I had to leave practice a little bit early, just so I can make my test. My teammates would be like 'hm look at her leaving practice early. She even showed up late to practice.' All that little chatter." In her classes, she received similar comments or looks regarding her status as an athlete. Because of this, she avoided associating with her athletic identity in the classroom:

I wouldn't want to wear things that really scream I'm an athlete here because it just feels like people look at me like I'm less than, obviously. Cause being here, if you're an athlete, you're praised. But if I'm in my STEM classes, I don't want to wear those things because then now I'm looked at like, "oh, she's only here because she's an athlete."

Chinenye called this dynamic between her athletic identity and STEM identity a "power struggle." Despite this struggle, she found solace in her relationship with her coach, who looked out for her because he understood the challenge she was taking on as a STEM major and athlete. When discussing her relationship with her coach, she said:

My coach was saying, "Oh, maybe you need to take a break from the team and come back next season. We'll regroup." That was hard. I was like, track is my life, but I don't want to quit track. Cause then it's like, what do I have? I guess he's seeing it from a

different perspective and he doesn't want track to be the thing that I hate because my grades are slipping.

Navigating Identity at a PWI: “I really have to make sure that these people know I belong”

Although Chinenye has only been at her institution for about a year and a half, she has had several instances in both classroom and athletic spaces that have reminded her that she’s a minority at her institution. In the classroom, she recalled several instances when she’s been the only one: “I’ll walk in and be like, as I expected. Especially not even just being a Black woman, but being a woman. So, to even see another girl is like, *wow, that’s crazy*. But I would never see another Black girl.” Being the only one has lent itself to several experiences that Chinenye attributed to both her race and gender. For example, to capture what it’s like being a Black woman at her institution, she shared a photo of herself and her classmates on a group field trip to an engineering plant. Majority of the people in the image were White men:

As you can see it's not hard to spot where I am and so that's why I try to make sure I'm in the middle. So, it was like, “Hey, here's a Black girl that's in engineering.” It's actually on the website. I got this picture from the website. I'm pretty sure they're like, “yeah, here's this Black girl, diversity.” I think it's crazy how we are constantly used as like, “oh, we have diversity. There's a lot of Black people here. We try to include them”... When we're going to the plant, we took a bus or no, not a bus, but I'll say a minivan. So, I got into the minivan first... I was the first one to get in the middle section and then everybody started filing into the back. Then the last person, was kind of like, “I guess I'll sit next to the Black girl.” Literally, I heard the whisper. I was like, *wow*, I'm not even going to try it today. I'm just going to pop my headphones in, mind my business. I'm just gonna make this an educational trip because I don't want to be the angry Black woman. So, I just have

to mind my business, but it just really made me understand. That is really how it is being not only a Black woman, but Black woman in STEM.

This is just one example of an instance in which Chinenye was made to feel as though she did not belong in the STEM environment or at her institution. This story captured how Chinenye has been made to feel about her belonging at her institution, saying:

I really have to make sure that these people know I belong. So, that'll be making sure I'm on time for class every day. Other people, they can skip class, but being the only Black girl in class it's going to be very noticeable if I'm not there. I'm always answering questions that the professor asks, just making sure that people know that I'm here.

In athletic spaces, Chinenye does have the luxury of being on a predominantly Black team. She explained that being with her team is one of the spaces in which it doesn't feel like she attends a PWI. While hard conversations about race were not typically commonplace on her team, they still understood the significance of being Black at her institution: It's like, "we're Black and there's a lot of racism here. We got to stick together. It was more like, it seems normal."

Nonetheless, she has been in different athletic settings in which White student-athletes will change their behavior when she and her teammates walk in the room. When this happens, she says "that makes [them] look like [they're] animals", as if they have no control over their own behavior and emotions.

Despite these scenarios, Chinenye reminds herself that she's not in a position to give up. She recognizes the struggles of those who came before her and who she needs to continue this journey for:

I'm pretty sure five years ago there was probably a much lesser amount of Black people here. So, it makes me understand, the people who I look up to that were in my major years

ago, they probably had a harder time dealing with diversity and inclusion. So, it makes me understand that the place I'm in now, there's probably some little girl in high school that maybe toured the campus and saw me, or saw me speaking at some event and wanted to be like me or be in my role. So, anytime I'm in my classes and I don't understand something or I'm like "bruh, I want to drop out" or anything like that if I get any mindset like that, I just always remind myself that there's some little girl that wants to be where I am and stuff. Seeing more people like me, I have to stick it through for the younger generation.

Looking Forward: "Inclusion is really important to me"

Chinenye named inclusion as something that is very important to her, saying:

If someone is being left out or if we're doing a group discussion and I noticed that one person's not really talking I'll say, "hey, do you have anything to share?" I try to make people feel included because if anything, I would hate to feel like a third wheel or be left out. So, I wouldn't want people to feel like that.

As such, the recent incidences of racism in America have showcased the ways in which her institution has fallen short, like having buildings named after known KKK members. Since the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, her athletic department has taken strides to have more conversations about the importance of diversity and inclusion. She reflected on a recent "town hall" style conversation within the athletic department:

They call it city council meetings just for athletes. So, we've had meetings saying, we had, I guess, a space to share the incidents that we've had on campus or our experiences. I guess it was a space for the White coaches, the White student-athletes to really hear us. A lot of them came to us after the meeting saying, "no, we didn't know it was like this." I

mean, I don't know how they didn't know, but they're like, "this is really helpful. Now that we realized, we're going to try to do better in the future and really try to stop other White people from treating you guys this way." So, I don't know if things have changed because COVID makes things, not better in a sense, but better in the way that we don't have access to having those bad experiences anymore. So, I wouldn't be able to really gauge that things have changed based on having those discussions with other White student-athletes so they can really see what's happening on campus and other White coaches too, but it's good that they really tried to have those discussions or opportunities for us to share our experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made connecting and having these conversations with other student-athletes difficult. Fortunately, she has been able to remain connected to the Black student-athletes community through group chats.

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected her season. Because she did not compete indoor in the previous fall and outdoor was canceled due to the pandemic, she did not compete during her first year. Rather than feel bad for herself, her heart hurt most for the seniors on her team:

Some of our seniors, they were getting ready to go to Olympic trials cause the Olympics [were] supposed to be this year. They were ready to go to the Olympic trials. They were ready to make their mark their senior season. So, to have it canceled and to see the little sadness that they had it was like, it sucked. I feel bad for them.

We discussed whether she anticipated competing this year and she expressed uncertainty. Her greatest concern is for her safety and the safety of all student-athletes: "Yeah, we love our sport, but this is a serious pandemic. Our sport doesn't get that serious in comparison to a pandemic."

Melanie

Melanie is a 21-year-old former Division I volleyball player. Melanie played volleyball at a large, public PWI in southern United States. After completing her bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in rhetoric, writing and culture, in three years in 2019, Melanie began her graduate studies in leadership and human resources and will complete her master's degree in the fall of 2020. The 2019-2020 academic year was Melanie's final year as a student-athlete.

Early Life and Sport: “Oh, wait, I can be good at this”

Melanie is a native of Long Beach, California. She grew up in a blended family, as her parents divorced when she was three years old. She lived with her mom and stepdad and has half-siblings on both her mom and dad's sides. She credited her mom and her older sister for being major role models in her life. Specifically, her mom was influential in teaching her about race at an early age, saying:

If I didn't see that there was a difference between maybe me and a White classmate, she definitely found a way to tell me. For example, she would say something like, “you have to work twice as hard.” You know what I'm saying? To get what this person will get and even then probably a little bit harder to be seen on the, on an equal level, you know? She would tell me things like that and that really helped, but it wasn't something that I necessarily took to heart when I was younger.

She reflected on this, saying she was “jaded” in her youth and believed she received the same benefits and opportunities as her White counterparts.

Her older sister was instrumental in introducing her to volleyball. Melanie observed as her sister, who is nine years older, was recruited to play volleyball herself. She talked about supporting her sister alongside her mom at different tournaments, saying, “my mom dragged me

probably around the country to every single qualifier, sat me down with my toys and went to go cheer her on.” Her sister eventually received an athletic scholarship to play at a school in Florida. Melanie started playing the sport at nine years old, largely because her mom stressed the importance of having a hobby. Her mom explained: “You have to do something. You have to have a hobby; you have to have an interest. You have to have something that keeps you busy. You cannot just be in this house going to school and coming home.” Playing volleyball made the most sense because it was already integrated into her life, by way of her sister’s involvement. Volleyball was not something she enjoyed immediately, but she eventually grew to love it:

I didn't really start to enjoy it until I was about 12 and I put in some work and I realized, oh wait, I can be good at this. As I kept going, I really enjoyed that feeling of winning, so I just kept working at it. Then I figured I'm already doing this, so let's just see where it goes on the scholarship track.

Choosing to Play: “I would have to get a scholarship for it”

As Melanie became more invested in volleyball, she became invested in training and getting better. She credited her mom for investing in her and moving her career along:

My mom worked extremely hard to be able to pay for all my club seasons, to pay for the travel, pay for everything that I essentially needed in order to get better. So, that meant the extra jump classes, the extra strength and conditioning courses, because I was a very skinny kid and very undersized for the volleyball court. So, she definitely invested in me. This financial investment was necessary, as Melanie described volleyball as a “a predominantly White sport because it costs so much money to be able to travel and have a season in the first place.” Nonetheless, she continued playing volleyball and learned early on how to balance being a student and improving as an athlete.

During this time, Melanie also became seriously invested in playing her sport at the collegiate level. In order to ensure that she was able to attend and play for the college of her choice, she struck a deal with her parents. They explained:

If you want to go to a local college, that's fine, but if I want it to go to a college [at] a place that I would say I preferred, or a different place I actually wanted to go to, my own dream school, then I would have to get a scholarship for it.

When it came time to choose where she would attend high school, she and her mom made what she called a “business decision.” She had two options: a school with an established program and another with a less established program. They decided to go with the less established program because they reasoned she would “probably have a better chance of being successful, but also be a standout player on [her high school’s] team.” This move was ultimately a tactic that helped get Melanie noticed by a variety of universities. She eventually selected her institution because of the relationship she developed with the coach during the recruitment process. She noted that in many recruitment calls, coaches were only interested in talking about volleyball, not her academic interests or even who she was as a person. Her calls with her eventual college coach were very different: “I felt like my coach did a good job of asking me, what do you want to do in the future? Or what steps were you thinking of taking to get there? Very goal oriented and just super comforting over the phone.” These conversations led her to commit to her university without taking a visit or doing much research on the school.

Outside of volleyball, Melanie navigated being at a diverse, but racially segregated high school. She explained that this segregation played a role in how she performed her identity during high school:

I understood conversations and concepts, but I probably didn't feel comfortable relating to other Black girls. I don't know, I just didn't, I felt like I wasn't fitting in. I wasn't fitting in with them and I wasn't with White girls or White people either. So, it was just kind of be acceptable to both. So, I built my personality around that to understand these concepts over here and like, ha ha we can bond over that. Great. Then over here also understand what they're into and what they like, and then understand how to relate to them.

She described herself as a “social floater.” As she transitioned to college and learned more about herself and her identity, she’s grew more comfortable in her racial identity, and more comfortable having conversations about race.

Balancing Act: “That's what I'm at school to do, get a degree, play your sport”

Melanie grew up loving to read books, a hobby that influenced her decision to major in English. When she arrived at her institution, Melanie approached college with certain goals in mind. Among them were to become a starter on her team and use her years of athletic eligibility to complete both a bachelor’s and master’s degree. She put the latter goal into place almost immediately after she arrived at her institution: “I went to be academic advisor and I was like ‘I want a master's.’ She was like, ‘okay, why don't you get your undergrad first?’” The idea to get a master’s degree right away came from her mother, who said: “[Melanie], you want a master's. That will make you so much more valuable when you start applying for jobs and also just as a Black woman with a master's, that will help even the field a lot.” Her athletic academic advisor, who was a Black woman who had earned a master’s degree herself, was supportive of this goal. Each semester they would plan what classes Melanie would take, email professors to gain entry into certain classes, and discuss substitute classes when what was offered did not align with her

athletic schedule. She described balancing her academic and athletic responsibilities in the following way:

You just needed to be where you needed to be at that certain time. You know what I'm saying? Just going throughout your schedule and then if you had homework to do, just getting it done. I don't think I struggled very much with the balance. During my time I found it relatively easy because I just kept it in the forefront of my mind. That's what I'm at school to do, get a degree, play your sport. You know what I'm saying? Those are your priorities. Anything else is secondary.

This balancing act resulted in Melanie completing her bachelor's degree in three years. When describing the photo she selected as her self-portrait, she named graduating early as her "largest success", not only because she completed this while being a student-athlete, but also because it made her one of few women in her family to have more than one degree.

Athletically, Melanie struggled to find her footing. She admitted that she came into college confident, but found that her athletic ability was not being affirmed on her college team. As she described her first year, she explained:

I doubted so much of everything in the past and I got into my head, and my confidence spiraled. My head was just not where it needed to be. I think I was just trying so, so, so hard. Every time, trying hard, but I was too weak to do this, or I'm too slow, or [I'm] not hitting the ball hard enough, or it was always something that I was just not reaching.

Always some kind of physical requirement that I just was not able to touch on. Actually, by the end of my freshman year and I remember too, there had been games where I was just petrified. I'm literally on the court shaking.

Her struggles on the court cumulated in an exit interview with her coach at the end of her first season, in which her coach explained that she needed to get better or the coach would “transfer [her].” Melanie named this as the “most pivotal moment” of her collegiate career, a moment which prompted her to turn to an unexpected avenue for support: God. She credited the relationship that she formed with God as the reason why she worked hard to meet her coach’s demands and why she began seeking opportunities to get involved on her campus outside of volleyball. When discussing why she began looking for opportunities outside of playing, she said:

I felt like I was going through a process of still finding value in what I could do and what I could bring to the table when I didn't feel like I was bringing value to my team. So, that's why it was kind of that leader image that I had was built because I needed a way to be sure of myself in different situations because we see ourselves as athletes and it depends on what you do with your team. Are you playing? are you a starter? There are those, all those pageant aspects of the game and I wasn't getting those.

Melanie became involved in the Christian student-athlete organization within the athletic department, the student-athlete advisory committee, and was even nominated to receive an award which recognized the Black student-athlete that “helps bring out the potential in their other classmates’ teammates, their peers.” Melanie described herself as an ambassador for her school and was the “go-to student-athlete” at her institution. This is no surprise, as it was always her goal to leave her mark at her institution: “I want my name on one of these buildings. I want to be able to have that. I wanna be able to contribute to the school that much where you know who I was.”

Navigating Identity at a PWI: “I also think it is that lack of intersectionality”

Throughout her time at her institution, Melanie was reminded that she attended a predominantly White institution in a number of subtle ways. In the classroom, comments from other students called attention to where she was geographically and the state of race in America. For example, Melanie discussed exchanges in her political science classes: “A classmate would be like, ‘obviously if they maybe went to school more, or if they just stopped killing one another, why don't we talk about Black-on-Black crime?’” She labeled such comments as student’s attempts to play “devil’s advocate”, a direct response to 45’s rhetoric, and just living in the South. She talked about class discussions about race, saying:

Oh gosh, race relations are a much bigger thing, especially in the South. Seeing some of your classmates come out when they answer those open-ended questions and you're kind of like, oh, you sounded a little racist. You can't really say anything about it. Also, just feeling like I had to mind my conscience, what I was saying when I answer questions.

Feeling that hesitation before calling out another student or feeling that hesitation to share an experience or having everyone look at you like you're supposed to share an experience because you're Black and you're going to be our token champion answer.

She also admitted that there was a lot she needed to learn about race and being Black in America. She took African American studies courses to educate herself and get more comfortable having these conversations.

She was also reminded of her race in athletic settings. She noticed that there were only a few Black woman on her team, and one of her Black teammates casually brought them together to help foster community amongst each other. Melanie later realized the intention behind this community building:

It wasn't till later we found out that she was like, “no, let's hang out together. Let's catch up with one another. Let's make a group chat.” So, she brought us all together and I'd say that was when I probably got a lot more exposure to conversations that Black women have, you know what I'm saying? Just being able to relate more to the culture and understand it.

After some time, it became a thing within their team that “the Black girls stick together.” this group often sat together and had their own table. During her last season, she noticed the remaining Black freshman were sticking together in a similar way and noted that seeing this gave her “hope.”

The community among the Black women was also a safe space when she had issues with her coach. Melanie recalled multiple situations in which her coach publicly berated her in front of her team, in a manner that she did not with other teammates. She reached her breaking point during her senior year and was called in to have a conversation with her coach after a practice ended poorly. As she recalled this conversation, she said:

I just had to tell her. I was like, “you don't talk to anyone else the way that you talk to me and I feel like I've just had to put up with it so long”, and this is what she told me. She was like, “you just seem like the type of player that needed tough love” and “we had our banter and stuff and you'd sometimes give me smart ass responses.” I was like, *banter?* You're my coach. I don't banter with my coach.

Because of the language her coach used during this conversation, Melanie believed that her coach may have been projecting the “strong Black woman” stereotype onto her, to justify speaking to her in that manner.

Despite having these experiences with race, Melanie noted a disdain with the lack of discussion on topics of race in the athletic space, saying: “That lack of intersectionality that just can have anyone out here feeling like they can be oblivious to things that are going on because it's just in their mind, not affecting them because they don't think about their identity and how it affects the things that they do.” As an example of this lack of attention to intersectionality, she recalled attending programs related to being a female student-athlete, in which they did not discuss “the difference between [herself] and [her] teammate who's blonde, blue eyed... that could possibly be harmful now that [she reflects] on it.” She named this lack of intersectionality as the reason why she felt she did not have defining moments as a Black woman student-athlete. It didn't give her the opportunity to reflect on the fact that she was “Black and doing this” and she didn't have the “chance to really embrace who [she] could be” in regard to race.

A Retrospective: “I don't need an apology. We need things fixed”

Now in a space of reflection, Melanie sees the ways in which conversations about race were not commonplace within athletics. When discussing the lack of attention to race, Melanie explained, “We just did not talk about race. We shouldn't discuss it. You kind of act like it's not a factor and you act like it's not a thing. The second you do start to talk about it, everyone is looking for the quickest way out of the conversation.” To demonstrate her athletic department's approach toward conversations on race and social issues, she recalled a time when an unarmed, Black man was killed by the police in the city where she attended college:

I remember my coach had pulled us aside as a team and was just like, “Hey guys, try not to go out this weekend. There will be protests. Things might get crazy. People are upset and we want you guys to be safe.” She also told us, “I understand if you guys need someone to talk to you, come talk to us coaches. Try not to post on social media, try not

to say anything about it. If someone asks you just, no comment.” Now that I'm working with this new administration, because we have a new athletic director, I'm thinking the reasoning behind that was partially because they didn't know how to navigate it, the coaches and the school, but also, we didn't have the freedom of expression as student-athletes. So, we were told, don't say anything. Don't act on that. Don't retweet that. Don't share that. Don't like that. If you're gonna kneel, be careful. Let us know beforehand, let's talk this through. That kind of thing.

These instructions left a culture of mistrust between the athletes and administration, one in which the administration stayed silent on social issues, and athletes refrained from speaking up due to fear of repercussion. Recently, her coaches reached out to check on her following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. She noted that her coaches were “waking up”, becoming more aware, and apologizing for the state of race relations. However, Melanie wants more action and conversations about next steps:

I felt like there was this whole process of apologies. “I'm so sorry. It should have been better”, and stuff like that. Okay, that's great, but we still have this bad guy over here that we need to defeat first. Let's talk about the systemic racism. Let's talk about what you can do to help us out. Let's talk about those things first, before we get in to the “I'm so sorry.” You know what I'm saying? I don't need an apology. We need things fixed, cause we've been living years without apology.

Now with a new administration in the athletic department, she recognizes that the leadership is prioritizing diversity and inclusion. The administrators are now encouraging student-athletes to speak up and taking steps to educate themselves. She said:

I also feel like my coaches and administration have done a good job of becoming aware of their privilege and White fragility. So, the administration actually read books on White fragility and stuff like that and become more aware of not becoming defensive.

Understanding their privilege and stuff like that. So, I think it's good to just get educated. Continue to educate themselves. Continue to get in those resources or books, movies, all kinds of stuff, festivals, marches. So, seeing people actively participate makes me comfortable.

Postgraduate Life and Plans: “No, I’m young. I want to be successful”

Now Melanie is on the heels of completing her master’s degree and excited about the different opportunities that lie ahead. She pursued a degree in leadership and human resources out of curiosity with the topic and had been exploring the different opportunities that come with having a human resources degree. She noted that with the current Black-led “social justice reckoning”, employers are placing a greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion initiatives and will likely be looking for Black candidates to fill certain positions. She welcomes this opportunity to prove that she can break the mold and show how she’s an asset to any company:

Even if going into a position meant for a Black woman, I'd love to do that. Not only that, but I'd love to show up everyone else that you have at this company. Now at this point I'm categorized...I feel like there's just that implicit, “oh, this is for a minority employee.” I want to break out of that mold. This is not something that you're just taking me on or you're helping me out. No, I'm young. I want to be successful. I'm not gonna let your label tell me where I can go and where I can't go.

As she discussed the lack of Black women in leadership roles at her institution, she noted that she used to look at the athletic administration building and think there weren’t any “any career

opportunities open for me because there aren't very many Black women that are in that building.” She attributed this reasoning to why she believed she probably would not work at a university. Now a graduate student, she presently interns in the athletic administration office of her institution working with the executive athletic director, who is also a Black woman.

Naomi

Naomi is a 19-year-old Division I volleyball player. Naomi plays volleyball at a large, public PWI in southern United States. She is currently in her sophomore, or second year of undergraduate studies and is majoring in Kinesiology, with a concentration in pre-physician’s assistant.

Early Life, Sport and Identity: “I feel like we progressed in life”

Naomi is a native of Houston, Texas. Both of her parents immigrated from Nigeria before she was born. She is the youngest of three children and is the only girl amongst her siblings. She described her family as “middle class” because over time their living situation progressed from an apartment, to a townhome, and now they own their own home. As she spoke about growing up as the only girl, she said, “I always wanted a little sibling but growing up I had my mom and mom was kinda like my sister too.” Her Nigerian heritage influenced her upbringing in a number of ways. Firstly, gender roles came along with being the only girl in the house:

Growing up the only girl, my mom was really on me to be in the kitchen and learn how to cook, be able to clean. Do a lot. Women are supposed to do literally everything in the house and I felt that was wrong, especially my the generation. I think she was living in her generation...No, everyone should learn how to cook and clean.

Nonetheless, she felt that her gender did not limit the way she was treated or the opportunities she took advantage of growing up. Secondly, she described Houston as a very diverse city, and

described where she grew up as a “predominantly Hispanic area.” She also noted that there is a huge African population in the city. As a result, Naomi grew up very much involved in the Nigerian community in her church and in school: “[I’d] been really comfortable...I grew up in the same church. I’ve known the same people all my life.”

Naomi started playing volleyball and basketball as extracurricular activities in middle and early high school. She continued volleyball as a member of the freshman team but received the opportunity to move to the junior varsity team after someone’s departure. Although she described herself as “horrible, but...really tall,” the JV team had an immediate need for her and trained her to compete at that level. She continued to casually play and train with friends, until she caught the attention of a coach who encouraged her to take her game to the next level.

Becoming an Athlete: “This is where God wants me to go”

While casually training at the gym with friends, Naomi was approached about joining a club volleyball team. Naomi was interested, but had one big concern: money. She recalled her initial reaction to the idea of playing club: “My parents...don’t have extra change on the side to start paying a thousand dollars a month for club volleyball.” Despite this, the coach explained that he would work with her family on the finances. Her next obstacle was convincing her parents to invest in her playing a sport at this level. Naomi had never expressed interest in playing a sport seriously, her brothers had not, and her father was concerned for her health and safety. It took some convincing from the coach and another family friend to finally convince her dad that she should give it a shot. Nonetheless, she noted that convincing her parents to invest in her volleyball career was one of the biggest challenges of her time in the sport:

I know my parents they didn’t grow up like, “oh, our daughter is going to be a volleyball player from this time to this time. So, we can save money and prepare.” It kind of came

out of the blue and I'm so grateful that I was able to show [them], especially my dad, that this is going to be my, this is where God wants me to go. This is my pathway. I need to execute it. I have to. For my dad to see [me] that really helped me too because he was the one that was paying for stuff.

Her club coach retired at the end of her first club season, which meant Naomi and her friend had to find a new club. As they were training and “club-hopping,” Naomi again caught the attention of a coach from one of the largest, most popular clubs in Houston. She had the same concern about the cost of playing with such a large club, but fortunately they worked with her family, and she relied on her friend to provide transportation to and from different practices and competitions.

By her junior year, Naomi had begun attracting the attention of college coaches, but noted that she was behind in the recruitment process: “Most volleyball players are committed by their junior year to a college coach, or even earlier. So, I was definitely behind because I [hadn't] even had a conversation with a coach yet.” She attributed her late recruitment, to her late start in club volleyball. In addition to the stress associated with being a high school junior (e.g., SATs, preparing to apply for college, etc.), Naomi decided to focus on getting recruited, and ended her junior year with a list of her top five schools. After her junior year, she tried out for and made the junior national volleyball team and had the opportunity to travel internationally and play teams like Cuba and Mexico. She finally, committed to a college at the beginning of her senior year. She talked about why she selected her program, saying:

They were the only school I was able to visit to be honest, and I just liked the atmosphere. My head coach was the first coach I had a conversation with on the phone, first person to call me. She was really nice, calming. I was actually really comfortable

around her. Of course, I was nervous cause it's the first time I met her, but I was able to get comfortable around her really quickly and the relationship we grew before she even became my coach was really important to me... I'm comfortable if I'm able to text my coach and not be nervous to text her or call her for help and I definitely [wanted] that.

She also considered the proximity to home in her decision and how accessible the university would be to her family:

If they ever wanted to come visit me, [institution] was a four-hour drive, which isn't [as bad as] going to Florida, which would have been, a 12 to 15-hour drive and I don't want them to go on a plane or anything. So, it was really good. The campus in general, the girls on the team, it was a no brainer for me.

Outside of volleyball, Naomi enjoyed the perks of being in a diverse community. When discussing the diversity of her high school, she said:

I can literally count on my hands how many White people were at my school and it was probably less than five. Everyone else was Hispanic, Asian. Africans [were] a huge, huge percentage in that area too... So, I'm super comfortable in my skin. Okay, we're all Nigerian. We all understand each other. We all get each other. I can talk in an accent and crack inside jokes, and they would understand what I'm saying.

Being in this environment made Naomi feel comfortable expressing different aspects of her racial and ethnic identities, not only because she was familiar with her community, but because they shared similar experiences and cultures. This is a stark contrast to what she has experienced at her predominantly White university.

Embracing an Athletic Identity: “I found myself in volleyball”

Naomi arrived on her campus in 2019 and is now in her second year of school. In her first year and a half on campus, she learned a lot about what it meant to be a collegiate athlete. One aspect of being an athlete that is very important to her is having and projecting a positive self-image. Maintaining this image is often a topic of discussion on her team:

What we do can affect others and who's watching us, and we have so many fans that watch us and stuff. I know growing up, I had people I looked up to and I think it's really important for someone to always have someone to look up to and they want to be like...As an athlete, I know I'm not super famous or anything, but there's people that do look up to us and I think it's really important that we put that together... using a pattern, a really good self-image, doing the right things, being respectful, being able to help in the community, being able to show what being a nice person is and showing good values.

Being a collegiate athlete means that young people will look up to her, especially because she is at a larger institution and thus, a very large stage. In addition to maintaining a positive image, she has embraced her athletic identity in many ways. When discussing the photo she selected to describe her sense of belonging, she explained:

I definitely feel like I belong in most places. Everywhere is really welcoming. From my gym to our buildings, the stadium, the nutrition center, the library. Yeah, I definitely feel like I belong. I never felt like I didn't belong. If I didn't, then I would make myself belong ... I feel like I belong [here] 100% because it's an athletic space and I'm an athlete. So, it was made for me.

For Naomi, there has been a lot of synergy between her personality and her identity as an athlete. She explained that these pieces align well: “I think who I am and my role as a student-athlete, I

personally feel goes together really well. I think my personality and who I am don't have to change.” This synergy can likely be attributed to Naomi’s late start as a volleyball player, a sport which has provided her with nothing but new and interesting opportunities since she started playing. She believed that playing volleyball and being a student-athlete has helped her learn more about herself:

I definitely think being a student-athlete has helped me understand myself a lot, in knowing my personality and finding my identity, finding who I am just through my relationship with my teammates, coaches, experiences that I've had, just finding out who my true self is, who I'm comfortable being because volleyball is like, I found myself in volleyball...I grew up playing volleyball, but if I didn't like playing volleyball that I wouldn't be playing volleyball...Of course you might not love it every day, but do you still love the sport? Do you still want to play? I think volleyball has really shown [me], I do love this sport and I do really enjoy playing it and the people I've met through it.

Although she has been a collegiate athlete for a short time, her time at her institution has been marked with positive experiences. Her first and second years have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has left a lot of uncertainty about what the academic year and the season will look like for her team. As she pondered what will happen next, she expressed both uncertainty and excitement: “It's definitely going to be a different, experience and yeah, I'm honestly excited. I don't like change, but this is very interesting to me. So, I'm very intrigued on how it is going to play out.”

Navigating Identity at a PWI: “I have to watch what I do”

Despite having positive experiences during her first year, upon arriving at her institution Naomi was immediately confronted with the “PWI-ness” of her school. She described not

knowing anyone and only having her teammates as a support system and being in a predominantly White area as a “new chapter” for her, very different from how she grew up. She immediately noticed that she would be one of few in her classes, saying: “[I’ve been] transitioning to college where it was predominantly White and there’s probably negative Africans here. It’s been really different because, you enter a classroom and, yes, there were some Black people, but it was predominantly White and you’re like, okay, *this is different*.” This also meant that Naomi had to be more conscious of how she presented herself and “performed” her identity in certain spaces. In her classes she was often the only Black student and in group projects, for example, she had to perform a certain way: “I had to adjust and know how I talk to them is not the same way I talked to my friends back at home... I have to know what I say and be more cautious of how I act around people.”

Naomi built great relationships with her teammates, but also noted that she had to perform a certain way with them as well, particularly in regard to her ethnic identity. She recalled an instance in which she got “too comfortable”:

I get frustrated sometimes when I play and when I get frustrated, I would start talking in my [Nigerian] accent and stuff. My best friend was on my high school team, so me and her would always talk in our accents when we would get angry on the court and we’ll be talking about people with the accent too. It was so funny, but I think when I first came here in open gym, I got irritated and I started [saying], “this is stupid.” I was just saying stuff and they were looking at me. I was like, “oh, it’s just an accent.” I was like, “don’t mind me.” I had to play it off like. They were definitely looking at me like, “okay, girl.”

Naomi explained that her teammates reactions likely had more to do with their unfamiliarity with Nigerian people and culture, and she assumed people would understand because she was used to

people understanding in the past. Although this particular misunderstanding no longer occurs, she still gets questions and confusion about her heritage because of social media. She shared this example:

There are things on Tik Tok, and someone from Ghana would do something and then someone would be like, “oh my God, they're Nigerian” and I'm like, no, they literally said they're from Ghana, you know? It's not the same place. So, definitely clarification has been a thing. Just because someone is African doesn't mean they're Nigerian. African [and] Nigerian are not the same thing. There are so many different countries in Africa.

On a more positive note, Naomi found an outlet where she could express her ethnic identity when she was assigned a teaching assistant of African descent for her psychology class: “That was a person I could talk to in that manner, because I know she would understand me more.” Having this TA made her feel like her campus was more welcoming of African students and it made her feel more comfortable. She looked forward to going to these sessions so she could connect with her.

Ultimately, she concluded that being a Black woman at a PWI meant having to watch what she did in certain spaces. It also meant defining her own sense of identity so others would not stereotype or try to label her as just another Black student on her team or on her campus:

I don't want to be known as, “oh, that other Black girl on the team.” I mean that's Naomi, “Oh yeah that's her. I know her because of her personality because of her identity, who she is” ... I think in one of her interviews someone was like, Viola Davis is the “Black Meryl Streep” and she was like, “no, I'm Viola Davis, there's no Black, [insert name here].” She's her own. I don't want to be looked at as “the Black this person”, or the other,

and I don't want people to compare me to someone and make me the little person that is like them. I want to be myself, “Oh, that's Naomi.”

Looking Forward: “A Black presence is powerful”

Naomi is in the midst of her second year of college. The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent instances of violence against Black people have shaped the end of her first year and beginning of her second in several ways. She noted that her season has been impacted greatly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Her team trains less often a week and her coaches are more lenient as a result. Although it's frustrating, most of her concern lies with the coaches:

It's frustrating for them because they're so used to planning stuff and so used to having stuff ready. I know they're worried about us and how we feel and stuff, but also for them.

They have family to think about and all that too when they come into the gym with us.

As a result, she learned to be more thoughtful and patient with her coaches and the situation. She explained that the uncertainty has taught her to be more resilient, thoughtful and understanding.

Additionally, the recent murders of unarmed Black people and #BlackLivesMatter activity have made Naomi very aware of race in college sports. She noted that as an athlete, people may support her and her fellow Black athletes in competitions, but nowhere else:

I've seen so many athletes say, “if you're not going to support me off the court, don't support me on the court” and that's really huge, because I feel like so many people support athletes on the court, especially football. They're like, “Oh yes, we won” and this team is predominantly Black. But then they're racist and they hate Black people. I feel like they're colorblind when it comes to sport and they're like, “yeah, well, we won, [another institution] won, [another institution] won, [her institution] won” because the team won, but then you come down to race and they're like, “oh no, I don't like Black

people.” I'm like, oh, well you're supporting a predominantly Black team. So, what sense does that make?

This is particularly true for her being that she is an athlete at a large Southern, Power 5 institution, playing in a conference that is notorious for its football success. The movement also made her aware of the lack of Black coaches at her institutions. Although, she noted that this lack of representation does not impact her experiences personally, she recognized that having Black coaches helps the athletes feel that there is a member of their staff that can relate to and support their experience more, especially on predominantly Black teams:

I definitely think a Black presence is powerful and I definitely think they can be useful on a team, especially if you have a predominantly Black team...I think for males it's important, not saying it's not important to females, but I definitely feel for males... [In] football you're surrounded by so many people, but if you're able to have someone on your staff that you can relate to, not saying you can't relate to White people, but on that level, I think that's super important.

Zee

Zee is a 22-year-old former Division 1 volleyball player. Zee played volleyball at a large, public PWI in southeastern United States. After graduating from her institution in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in nutrition, she went onto pharmacy school to pursue a Doctor of Pharmacy degree and is now in her second year. The 2018-2019 academic year was Zee's final year as a student-athlete.

Early Life and Identity: “I always grew up never feeling like I was the minority in any way”

Zee was born in Nigeria and raised in Prince George’s, or P.G., County, Maryland. While Maryland was diverse, Zee described P.G. County, which includes cities such as Baltimore, as an area in Maryland that was “densely populated with Black people.” Because Black people were so concentrated in the areas in which she grew up, Zee never felt like a racial minority in anyway, explaining that there were always African Americans and Africans in her communities. Zee was raised by her mother, who she described as a “traditional African mother.” While in elementary school, Zee recalled her mom’s pursuits of education, particularly the sacrifices she made to provide for her. She said:

During the weekdays, I was staying at my aunt’s and my mom would go to school to be a nurse. As a child, I’m just like, I don’t know what my mom is doing. I just want to be with my mom. I just want to be at home and the only time I was with my mom was on the weekend. She’ll pick me up on Friday and drop me back off on Sunday so I could stay at my aunt’s, cause my aunt lived right next to the school. So, I would walk to school and back to the house. It just made me realize that my mom did all this stuff so she could put herself in a better position to support me.”

As an adult, Zee reflects on her mother’s sacrifices and how it has shaped her their present-day relationship with her mother, and her intimate relationships with peers and significant others.

Her upbringing was also marked by a number of identity negotiations that shaped how she identifies today. She described growing up in the following way:

There was a shift between being Black (e.g., being African American) versus being African because when I was younger, I was so annoyed because I kept getting called

stupid names and people kept making fun of my name. Then when I came to high school, everyone wanted to be African so bad, with the Kente cloth and all this. I was just like, where'd this come from? Y'all were the same ones I went to elementary school calling me African booty scratcher.

The implication of this dynamic is still present in Zee's life, but for other reasons, particularly as they relate to race relations in America. Zee acknowledged that the average person walking down the street would describe her as Black, African American or "whatever euphemism the White man wants to use." However, when describing her identities, she explained: "I wouldn't say I'm Black, I am Nigerian, get it? Because they're not synonymous. They're not interchangeable."

Throughout her life, her identity as a Christian and relationship with God have been immensely salient. She had struggled in this relationship, saying: "I'm not seeing the full picture yet. I'm so eager to be like 'God what do you have in store' and instead he's like, 'I'm giving you these little seeds. Just reap your little seeds.'" Despite this, she continues to look to God for guidance and affirmation as she navigates the different journeys she takes throughout life and attributed her faith as the reason why she has made it this far.

Becoming an Athlete: "You have so much potential, you're so raw"

Basketball was actually Zee's first sport growing up. During her freshman year of high school, she played on the freshman basketball team and believed she would play college basketball and eventually play in the Women's National Basketball Association. After that year, however, Zee left the team because the coach was "crazy." When the coach asked if she would be joining the team again next year she simply explained, "I was like, 'yeah,' and I never came back." Following the season, her former teammate approached her about going out for the

volleyball team instead, saying, “it's not as aggressive, you don't have to be as big and you can still be you.” She tried out for the team the following fall and the coach described her ability as “natural” and “raw” and noted her potential in the sport. The coach encouraged her to join a club volleyball team. She eventually joined an inexpensive club team and began competing with them. Zee quickly began to notice the differences between playing on her high school team and club team, especially the racial composition of the teams.

Being in a predominantly Black county, and thus school system, Zee had Black teammates throughout her early sporting experiences. As she described this revelation, Zee said, “I'm playing a sport that in high school, my team was all Black, but [on] my travel team I was the only Black girl.” Further, Zee began traveling with her travel team and made an important realization about the world around her stating, “I started to see more parts of Maryland, I started seeing Virginia, I started seeing Pennsylvania, I started seeing these places on the East Coast and I was like, the world doesn't look like P.G. County.” Both of these realizations marked important observations that would stay with her as she got deeper into the world of competitive volleyball. Being the only one or one of few shaped the way she perceived her “place” in volleyball and her identity: “It's like, *wow*, I *am* the minority, you know what I mean? I'm starting to see myself as the girl that I was. A six-foot Black girl who could jump, and getting subtle microaggressions as I went along.”

Despite these realizations, Zee continued on in club volleyball and met a teammate who she believes was placed in her life by God. Zee credited this teammate and their family for getting her to and from club team competitions and getting her through volleyball. After learning that Zee wanted to play college volleyball, this teammate encouraged Zee to try out for a popular volleyball club in Maryland that was affiliated with the USA Volleyball Association. She played

with this club for two years and continued traveling with this teammates' family to and from competition. Eventually, Zee attracted the attention of colleges through a mutual connection.

When discussing her recruitment, she said:

I ended up getting a full ride to [institution] because the [club team] coordinator knew the assistant coach [at the institution] and the assistant coach was watching me play some random day. It was a small tournament, too. He was like, "Oh, my gosh, she's so raw. Come for a visit to [institution]." I was just like, "Okay." Then I went and [met] the head coach. He was interesting, to say the least, but I mean, whatever it is what it is. The only reason why I went there was because the assistant coach was so, so sweet. He genuinely wanted me to succeed. The [club team] coach and him genuinely wanted me to go to college regardless of where it was.

Zee would go on to attend this institution. She redshirted her first year in an effort to learn the volleyball fundamentals and went on to start for the team through her senior year.

Being a Student and Athlete: "I don't want people to paint me as being an athlete"

Upon initially enrolling at her institution, Zee was again confronted with being the only one or one of few. She said:

First two years of volleyball, me and this other girl that I knew were the only Black people on the team. I was just like, "how did you do this for a year? No B.S., how did you do this?" Because right now I'm forced in this situation. With club, I could leave. I could go home. Here, I'm living with these people. These are people are I have to interact with. These are people that I never thought I would relate to on any type of level.

She eventually opened up to teammates, got to know them, have difficult conversations about race and their differences, and become close to them. Examples of these conversations included

discussions about hair, in which her White teammates would say things like, “How did they attach the braids?” ‘How did they sew in the weave? How are you able to do this different stuff?’ Saying stuff like, ‘Oh, your hair is like a sponge’ and stuff, like subtle. I know that they didn't mean any harm.” These conversations helped them better understand and relate to each other.

Zee was also dealing with the effects of athlete stigma, wherein professors and non-athlete peers used the “dumb jock” stereotype to question student-athletes’ academic abilities and their place at their institution (Simons et al., 2007). When she went to class, she would take certain steps to avoid being identified as an athlete. Examples included adapting pieces of her class introductions to omit that she was an athlete at the institution and not wearing athletic gear to her classes. She did these things because she didn’t want her peers to paint her in a different light: “I just felt weird about it because I felt like people look at you a different way if you boast about it in such a great light, in a big light. That's who I am and it's a part of who I am, but being an athlete was never who I was.” She knew that while being an athlete was an aspect of her identity, it was not her entire identity.

Navigating Identity at a PWI: “They were just looking for a reason for you to look out of place here”

Throughout her time at her institution, Zee was either conscious or reminded of her identity as a Black woman in various academic and athletic settings. In academic settings, Zee felt the need to always avoid being labelled as an “angry Black woman.” As she talked about the photo she selected to describe what it’s like being a Black woman at a PWI, she said:

I chose this photo specifically because I felt as a Black woman, I have to sit and be pretty and you can't see that there's so much more within, you know what I mean? I don't want to have the stigma... “Oh, she's just loud because she's Black. She has long nails. She's

ghetto or this or that.” My hair is up. You can't see how long my nails, or my hair is. My makeup is done. I'm trying to look as pristine as I am, as posh as possible so that no one has this assumption of what a Black woman is. I feel like at a PWI, you have to be on your P's and Q's because sometimes I feel like they were just looking for a reason for you to look out of place here.

She expressed frustration with this, especially as she recognized how versatile Black women are, noting former first lady, Michella Obama and rapper Cardi B as two Black women who are strong and influential in their own ways.

Her racial identity also manifested itself in different team settings. She specifically recalled a difficult conversation that occurred amongst the team during her sophomore year in 2016. Shortly after Colin Kaepernick first took a knee at an NFL game, college athletes began following suit. After a volleyball player in their conference took a knee prior to a game, her coach sat the team down to discuss what was happening, as it was getting “closer to home.” Recalling the conversation, she explained that her teammates were sharing their various perspectives on the topic, saying:

I was crying during the meeting and I remember saying, “can you imagine what it's like being a Black man in America right now?” Everyone was dead silent, and I was like, “right, you can't because you've never had to”, you know what I mean? Then the setter, she was just like, “I just think it's so disrespectful. You're disrespecting America” and all this stuff and I'm just like, “but you're missing the point.” This is during a time when there was only two Black people on the team, maybe three at this point, three or four. I was just like, “You're missing the point. It's not about disrespecting America. It's about America not listening and this is getting your attention.”

Although the larger conversation pretty much ended after her statement, she recalled overhearing a smaller conversation between two White teammates who did not know she was within ear shot:

My locker was in the corner. You couldn't see it. If you open the door and come in you couldn't see me because I would be behind it, changing or whatever. So, I'm behind it and [her teammate] walks in. She was just like, "If you don't like being in America so bad, just go back to where you came from." I came back from around the corner and I said, "You're very lucky we're teammates because if we weren't, I would beat your ass" and I walked out.

Zee was disappointed with her teammates and surprised with them because they knew she was not born in America. Even without this fact, she was also shocked that her teammates could feel this way after having and being in community with their Black teammates, and disappointed they were not taking the time to understand their Black teammates' experiences and perspectives.

Conversations and incidences like these explain how and why Zee felt she belonged in very specific social and athletic spaces. To illustrate what it's like being a Black woman student-athlete at a PWI, she selected a photo of herself and other Black women volleyball players at her institution. She explained that being the only Black woman student-athletes "gravitated [them] towards each other", saying: "So, what it looks like to be a Black woman is just, at a PWI you have to stick together because you will get lost and you have to smile so that people don't think that something's wrong." To further demonstrate the sense of community she felt with these women, she described them as a site of belonging for her: "These are the girls that I met at [institution], and even if I wasn't with all three of them at the same time, if I was just with one, I still was in such a space of safety and security."

Lessons Learned – A retrospective: “You only see me as being a product”

Now that Zee has graduated and is a few years removed from undergraduate, she reflects on her time as a college athlete and grapples with many realizations about the state of race in higher education and college athletics. She no longer identifies as an athlete herself and tries to avoid mentioning it as part of who she is: “I don't identify as being an athlete anymore, because that's not who I am in my day to day now...that part of my life was the beginning and I'm living so many different experiences...You don't want to be that person who's always talking about it.” Nonetheless, she recognized that there are some Black athletes, particularly in sports like basketball and football, who grapple with athletic identity and athletic transition struggles. This was a glaring observation she made as she graduated: “I was one of three other Black women to graduate. No Black men were in my class who graduated and I'm like, that put me on another tangent of just, *oh my God, what is this saying?*” This was just one of Zee's observations of race in college athletics.

Along similar lines, Zee noticed the relationship between race and the business aspects of college sports. Zee reflected on the impact of the recent murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and how they may affect Black student-athletes. She said:

Do you see me as a commodity? Are you seeing me as a person? You're not seeing me as a human. You're not even seeing me as a Black person in America. You're seeing me as what I can do for you. Can I win your national championship? Can I win you a [conference] title, you know? Can I freakin' pay your paycheck? This is your job.

Furthermore, she offered similar critiques of her alma mater's response to incidences of systemic racism and the COVID-19 pandemic. She said:

Especially with COVID, and this stupid president, and #BlackLivesMatter movement and it's just like *wow*. It took how long for these universities to make statements about your athletes. Excuse me? Let's look at the board. Let's look at how many athletes are present. How many athletes are African American and you're just now releasing [a statement]? It just made me, solidified that like, *wow*. I was only what I could produce for you, you know? I was I was only a product for you. I'm a check. It's sad for it to be that way because now when it comes to issues that matters, #Blacklivesmatter, and COVID pandemic, I'm still a check for you. You get what I'm saying? They're still pushing for a season when you know you shouldn't because there's a pandemic going on.

She continued to describe and express concern for the mental health and safety of student-athletes during this time. She stressed the importance of education, especially for teammates, coaches, and staff who are support Black athletes.

Zee expressed concern for the state of racial representation in academic and athletic leadership positions. She noticed the lack of Black students in her STEM courses during undergraduate: "I kept getting a lot of side looks because I was one of probably two Black people, let alone women in the class." This disdain with the lack of diversity was exacerbated as she observed the greater campus community:

[Her institution] claims to be diverse... Oh my gosh, it pisses me off. They have all these posters of this diverse community. My first year there, my second year there, what? I could count the number of Black people on my hand. When I tell you, all of them played a sport? No joke. It wasn't until my junior and senior year when I'm seeing all these Black people.

She noticed the lack of Black professors at her institution: “I didn't have any Black professors. I had one Black professor and he wasn't even a professor. He was a T.A that took over the class because something happened to the professor.” Conversely, the presence of Black women in athletics was both inspiring and frustrating: “When I see people like [an assistant athletic director at her institution] that put us together, you know? She is in a higher stature... she’s not just an academic adviser and she's more than that. It's like, *wow*, Black people are in these more pristine categories and it’s like, why but not more?”

Aspirations Beyond The Game: “There's not a lot of people in the industry and I want it to look different”

These aforementioned observations fueled her own decision to pursue a career in pharmacy immediately following the completion of her undergraduate degree:

It kind of [drives me] to be in the pharmaceutical industry even more because I want to break the limit of what it looks like. I'm going to be a Black pharmacist. There are many Black pharmacists, but there's not a lot of people in the industry and I want it to look different. I don't want to be just a generic pill pusher. There's so many of us that I want it to look different.

Although she sees the same issues of underrepresentation, and a lack of effort in regard to diversity and inclusion at her graduate institution, she remains optimistic that she can change the way her field looks, and hopes the Black students at PWIs will continue to push the limit of what it means to a Black professional:

Yes, they do succeed. Black lawyers, Black doctors, we are succeeding. We are doing these things. It’s just like, why isn't there more? These Black engineers, why aren't there

more? It just makes me realize this isn't good enough. Yes, they're present. Give me more. This is the energy I need. Give me more of it.

Narrative Summary

As demonstrated in these narratives, participants shared robust stories which highlighted the ways in which they navigated various periods of education and sports participation. To highlight some differences across these narratives, participants began playing their sport across all ages of their youth, with participants like Andy and Melanie growing up in their sports, and participants like Naomi, Chinenye, and Blu starting much later in high school. Blu was the only participant who had transferred institutions during her time as a student-athlete, and Chinenye was the only participant who was a walk-on student-athlete. Despite these different pathways in and through sports and education, their stories were similar in that their Black womanhood affected how they moved, were perceived, and treated in different academic and athletic settings at their institutions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of participants' individual counternarratives of identity as it related to being a Black woman and a student-athlete. These counternarratives speak to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

These counternarratives presented experiences, perspectives, and identity negotiation that occurred before, during, and after their time as student-athletes at their PWIs. These

counternarratives highlight the ways in which Black women student-athletes are unique and how their individual identities and experiences are shaped by context. Chapter 5 will present the emergent themes across all participants, which can be understood as the collective experiences of Black women student-athletes at PWIs.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This narrative study analyzed both the individual and collective experiences of seven current and former Black women student-athletes at PWIs. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how identity, particularly race and gender, manifest and impact the lived experiences of Black women student-athletes in academic, athletic, and social settings. While prior studies have explored their experiences academically (Cooper et al., 2016; Moody, 2011), in different athletic spaces (Carter-Francique et al., 2011), or how they contended with stereotypes (Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2016), few studies have specifically explored how Black women make sense of their identities within the context of athletic participation, be it racial, gender, or athletic identity. The following research questions guided this study and the development of these findings:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

This chapter will present themes across all participants. These findings weave together data collected in the photovoice activity, individual interviews, and sista circles. Analysis of these data uncovered four themes: “*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*”, which captured participants’ experiences of being an athlete in the classroom, “*I’m not like a normal person*”, which captured participants’ experiences related to being a collegiate athlete at their institution, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, which captured participants’ experiences navigating different relationships and creating community within the athletic space, and “*I’ll be the only Black girl?*”, which captured participants’ experiences and perceptions of how being a

Black women athlete shaped their experiences. These themes can be understood as the collective experiences of Black women student-athletes at PWIs. See Table 5.1 for a visual representation of these themes and their subsequent sub-themes.

Table 5.1 Summary of themes and sub-themes.

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| “They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice”: Being an athlete in the classroom | Academic Decision-Making |
| | Classroom Interactions |
| | Planning for Postgraduate Life |
| “I’m not like a normal person”: Being an athlete on the playing field | Professional Growth and Development |
| | Accomplishments and Setbacks |
| | Surveillance and Policing |
| | Athletes as Public Figures |
| | All Work, Minimal Pay |
| “Aren't you here to help me?": Navigating relationships and creating community | Coaches |
| | Teammates and Athletic Community |
| | Creating Community |
| “I'll be the only Black girl?": Black + women + athlete ≠ Black women athlete | Advisors |
| | Underrepresentation |
| | Identity Performance |
| | Stereotypes and Microaggressions |
| | Differences Across Sports |

“They care about GPA, but it can’t conflict with practice”: Being an athlete in the classroom

This theme highlights participants’ experiences navigating the academic terrain of college life and responsibilities related to being a college student. Each of the participants discussed how they experienced the *student* aspects of college life. This process included typical academic concerns and stressors such as completing assignments, studying for exams, and planning for life after college. In addition, their classroom lives were impacted by athletic duties that dictated

when they scheduled their classes and other academic decisions, the relationships that they built with non-athlete classmates and professors, and navigating academic aspirations. Three subthemes emerged: academic decision-making, classroom interactions, and planning for postgraduate life.

Academic Decision-Making

All participants noted that their athletic schedules significantly impacted the ways in which they interacted and engaged with the academic aspects of college. Multiple participants discussed how their practice schedules impacted their course decision making processes. For example, Blu described what it was like coordinating her athletic and academic schedules, saying: “It was a lot trying to figure out the schedule compared to the game times and practice times and I ended up taking some classes I didn’t want to take in undergrad, just because of volleyball.” She went on to explain that most fall sport athletes at her first institution were on a similar academic schedule, so many of the students in her classes her first couple years were also athletes. Andy also ran into a number of challenges as she registered for classes, including having limited course options:

When you're registering for classes, they give you your practice schedule, your lift schedule, and you have to pick your classes around that. You cannot pick anything during that time period. So, when you are picking your classes, you put in your practice time into your schedule, and then you click on this button and it only shows offerings that don't conflict with your calendar. I only saw classes that didn't conflict with it. If I had a class conflict, I had to meet with my athletic academic advisor, and we had to find any possible class that could meet the requirement, then talk to my academic advisor and get them to override the system and say, you can take this class instead of this class. For my

major, I was supposed to take [English 1]. I ended up taking [English 2] because it was online and all of the [English 1] offerings were during practice.

Andy went on to describe her other intentions for choosing to take online courses, including how she factored in distance from training facilities into how she scheduled her classes, saying she wanted to prevent walking around campus, missing pre-practice treatments, or missing class when she traveled for meets. Ann held a similar experience, in which her athletic schedule forced her to take the majority of her courses online:

Before we even get to choose classes, we have to be like, okay, what time is practice going to be and how much of that block do we need off to where we will be able to go to class? So, certain classes we are not able to take because of that ,or the rule where there can't be a certain amount of student-athletes in one class. So, then you have to sit back and be like, all right, I guess I can't take that class this semester, but hopefully, I'll get it next [semester].

These examples demonstrate how participants' athletic schedules seemingly took precedent over their academic schedules, and even their academic interests. While enrollment in credit-bearing college courses that advanced their progression toward degree completion was supposed to be a priority, they were frequently expected to prioritize their athletic schedule rather than the other way around. Furthermore, Ann introduced the role of institutional policy in shaping how student-athletes selected their schedule. In order to prevent occurrences of cheating and "clustering", which is the over-saturation of student-athletes in certain classes and/or majors (Case et al., 2017; Fountain & Finley, 2009; Paule-Koba, 2019), many institutions have policies that cap the number of student-athletes that can be enrolled in a course at a single time. These policies, however, can have adverse effects on students who need to take a course during a certain term.

Related to this disconnect between prioritizing athletic duties and responsibilities over academics, Andy said:

They say academics come first and they really do care about academics, but if you really want to take a class and you know it's going to benefit your educational experience, but it's in the middle of practice time, you can't take it. Get something else. So, you have to take something that is not as beneficial, kind of a waste of your time, but it doesn't get in the way of practice and it meets that credit requirement. So, they care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice, which is disheartening.

Situations like this cause confusion for how student-athletes are expected to engage with the academic environment. Such limited time to engage outside of athletics also restricts the manner in which they can be present within the classroom.

Classroom Interactions

Due to limited opportunities to engage with aspects of their campus outside of playing their sport, many participants noted that their interactions with professors and non-athlete classmates were minimal. Melanie shared reflections about her interactions with professors once she disclosed to them that she was an athlete:

Professors were probably the ones that might've been a little bit skeptical about receiving a travel schedule at the beginning of the year, or just might've had lower expectations in terms of the kind of work [that was] being turned in and stuff like that. So, I feel like, their overall reflection of student [athlete] performance might've rubbed off on me, whether I overperformed or underperformed, if that makes sense. They had kind of already made their mind up.

Melanie's comments reflect the athlete stigma, wherein professors and non-athlete peers used the "dumb jock" stereotype to question student-athletes' academic abilities and their place at their institution (Simons et al., 2007). However, most participants found that this stigma impacted their relationships with classmates more than it did with professors. Most participants noted that they had positive interactions with faculty. Blu and Zee mentioned that they had professors who helped them move through challenging courses. For Blu, it was a professor who allowed her to take an incomplete and supported her throughout the remaining assignments, which resulted in a passing grade. For Zee, it was a professor whose support was instrumental in her postgraduate plans and extended into the academic environment:

He was a Godsend as well and he wrote me recommendation letters. He truly wanted me to succeed. I was in his office, not even kidding, every single day after class and not even the days that we had class. I was just like 'listen, sir, you got to help me out', and he would bring his kids to the volleyball games. He was God sent. That man was God sent.

Blu's and Zee's experiences demonstrate how athletes were able to develop positive relationships with their professors. These relationships were fostered by attending office hours and asking for support, going the extra mile. This was not an option for students like Ann, whose basketball schedule often prevented her from being engaged in this way. Ann noticed the long-term ramifications of this limited engagement as she began considering her postgraduate options, in regard to finding professors to support her application:

I'm pretty sure I need a professor on there. I don't have too many. I just go to class and I get the work done and I know that that's on me, but I just don't really build those connections. That just made me realize how much I don't do that. I'm just like, I gotta start doing that especially in these next couple of months coming up, because I'm going

to need those recommendation letters to get into graduate school. I'm just like, oh, *wow*.

Okay. But, you know, it's life and I'll figure it out.

Ann went onto explain her regret about not forming these relationships and being engaged outside of athletics in a meaningful way, saying “athletes don't have the answer to everything...I do think that we are definitely crutched by ourselves.”

To Ann’s point about having relationships with peers outside of sport, Zee, Blu and Chinenye noted that they preferred to keep their athletic and academic lives and relationships separate. This was largely because of the different schedules and interests outside of the classroom. Nonetheless, relationships with classmates were tricky. Zee and Chinenye, both STEM majors, shared how they avoided being labeled as an athlete. Chinenye said:

I wouldn't want to wear things that really scream I'm an athlete here because now it just makes it feel like people look at me like I'm less than, obviously. Cause being here, if you're an athlete, you're praised. But if I'm in my STEM classes, I don't want to wear those things because then now I'm looked at like, “oh, she's only here because she's an athlete.”

Zee echoed similar sentiments. It’s possible that these women were hyper-aware of how they presented themselves because of the negative stigma associated with being a student-athlete. As a result, they did not want their non-athlete peers to think they did not value academics because of this. In addition to athlete stigma, Zee and Chinenye were likely also contending with the hostile environment that is often present for Black women in STEM disciplines (Gibson & Espino, 2016; McGee & Bentley, 2017; Morton & Parsons, 2018). Nonetheless, Ann shared a similar perspective and suggested that this stigma is another reason why it’s important for

student-athletes to build relationships with faculty/staff outside of sports, as well as with non-athletes.

Postgraduate Life and Aspirations

Despite the challenges that being an athlete presented for their academic lives, participants used their career aspirations as sources of academic and athletic motivation. Melanie, Andy, and Ann's aspirations resulted in them planning to graduate early and immediately enrolling in graduate school. Melanie entered college with the full intention of completing her bachelor's and master's degrees during her time at her institution, a seed that was planted by her mom. She accomplished this goal and immediately enrolled in graduate school while she completed her final year of eligibility. She described this accomplishment by saying:

I take a lot of pride in the fact that I was able to graduate early and be a student-athlete and become one of the women in my family that will have more than one degree by the time that I finish. That's a really big deal for me as well because I'm pretty sure in my immediate family I will be the only woman with a master's degree. So, if there's any way to kind of elevate that or to be able to bring something new to us, you know, as a group of women, my sister and my mom, aunts, then I would love to do that. Especially to be able to show my kids one day, "hey, this is possible. Your mom's educated"...that was really important to me.

Similarly, Ann, who was in her third and final year of undergraduate study, decided to graduate early later in her journey. She talked about getting a graduate degree in the context of making her time as a student-athlete mutually beneficial for herself and the athletic department:

These people are getting all this money out of you and you're not, you know? We're getting some, but we're not getting as much as we're bringing, but yeah. I'm just like, I'm

gonna get what I can out of this... I think at first it wasn't even in my mind. I was like, all right, I'm gonna do my four years here and then eventually go to law school. I was just like, I'm doing pretty well as an athlete and I was just taking on more classes, especially in the summertime, to the point where now I'm left with like, eight credits. I could definitely do that in a semester and a half. Then I can go ahead and get my graduate degree in the two years that I've got left. Come on now... To get two degrees out of a college experience, especially in a world where having that master's degree is now so important? I was just like, that's what I'm going to do.

Both participants recognized the importance of having a graduate degree and how they could take advantage of the free education provided to them. These aspirations ultimately guided how they planned out their academics throughout their time as a student-athlete.

Blu and Zee both talked about how their academic and professional aspirations influenced how they planned their academic life. Zee, who is currently in pharmacy school, mentioned that she took additional courses to satisfy the prerequisites for pharmacy school. Blu's, who is pursuing a career in fashion, academic aspirations was one of the reasons why she decided to transfer to a school with a graduate program that more closely aligned with her interests. These instances of participants setting their own goals in regard to their academic and professional futures highlight a narrative that may be unique to Black women student-athletes, athletes from certain backgrounds, and/or athletes in certain sports.

“I’m not like a normal person”: Being an athlete on the playing field

This theme highlights participants’ experiences as athletes at their institutions and different opportunities, challenges and obstacles associated with having athlete status. Each of the participants discussed how they experienced the athletic aspects of college life. They shared

the beneficial aspects of being an athlete, such as networking, having fans, and the accomplishments they achieved as an athlete. They also discussed the challenging aspects, including dealing with mental health, the business aspects of college sports, and navigating social issues. Five subthemes emerged: professional growth and development, accomplishments and setbacks, surveillance and policing, athletes as public figures, and all work, minimal play.

In this section, I intentionally use the terms “collegiate athlete” and “student-athlete” to mean different things. The use of “collegiate athlete” centers their status as athletes, public figures, and often local celebrities in some contexts. The use of “student-athletes” centers the idea of amateurism and being “employees”, in a way that their student status is seemingly constructed to restrict access to certain perks of being a public figure (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). This distinction is also noteworthy because scholars have argued that the NCAA “invented” the term “student-athlete” to dismiss the employer-employee relationship, wherein universities would be responsible for providing compensation and benefits to their athletes (McCormick & McCormick, 2006).

Professional Growth and Development

Many participants discussed the rewards of being a student-athlete, namely professional networking, involvement opportunities and access to academic support. Ann, Melanie, and Andy were very involved in the student-athlete advisory committee (SAAC) at their respective institutions, and they all served in leadership roles at a point during their time in the organization. For these participants, being involved afforded them opportunities to develop close relationships with athletic leadership in their departments and athletic conferences. Melanie explained that being involved was informed by her mother’s encouragement to make the institution work for her:

My mom had always explained to me in the past, a school when they pay for you to come, they hire you. They work you like it's a job, but as much as they take from you, you can also take from them. I think knowing that, hearing that when I was young, it was not a problem for me to eventually join these councils, but then realize where the pockets of opportunity were. How do I wiggle into this spot? Eventually, when I left I was able to be president of SAAC. I was able to meet the [conference] commissioner. I was able to eventually recognize these people because it was just like, I'm here and I don't see anyone else doing it. I'm going to get this done.

Andy shared a similar sentiment, in which she echoed that there were so many opportunities of which other athletes were not taking advantage of. She noted that these opportunities made her feel that the department valued her as more than an athlete, and she decided to figure out how best she could “take advantage of that connection and those opportunities.” Furthermore, following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, Naomi and Ann got involved with Black student-athlete organizations in their respective departments. Although these organizations were developed in the wake of violence against the Black community and social unrest, Naomi was hopeful about the opportunities and conversations that were coming from this work:

We just had our first meeting a couple of days ago and stuff. It has also been really good just to see how many people are interested and I'm really excited to see how that goes.

Also, just seeing the things that are being done, things that are coming in place. The football team just did a protest the other day and they're supposed to be doing like a walk tomorrow on my campus. So yeah. [There are] things that's going on and it's really exciting to see that people are not asleep. After four months, [that] doesn't mean racism

has ended. It's still going on and it's really heartwarming to know that people are still mindful of that.

Similarly, Ann expressed that being involved in this organization had allowed her to merge her athletic and racial identities to move toward change in her communities, whereas before the social unrest, she says that she was just expected to “shut up and play.”

In addition to networking and opportunities to get involved, some participants also noted the availability of academic support as one of the positives of being an athlete. Melanie and Naomi both expressed an appreciation for having these resources. Melanie said the following about how these resources helped her:

I actually thought that there were a lot of academic resources that we could use to further our academics and stuff. We had the study hall, but also learning specialists, the tutoring center, special tutoring for math. In our math lab and [instructional] sessions there were a lot of things that we could use. So, that kind of gave me confidence in doing the academic side. I think I actually really liked the academic side, honestly. Maybe that makes me a nerd, but I enjoyed being in classes and hearing perspectives and everything like that.

Similarly, Andy again explained that many student-athletes did not take advantage of these resources, which led to them struggling in their classes. These positive aspects of being a student-athlete aligned with and spoke to opportunities that are also typically available to non-athlete students. A key difference is that it seems that athletes benefit from more personalized and targeted support than non-athletes, namely in that athletics personnel closely monitored student-athletes progress toward degree completion.

Accomplishments and Setbacks

Participants noted the accomplishments and obstacles they experienced during their time as student-athletes. Many of the stories shared in the previous section reflected the accomplishments that made participants' proud. Ann, Andy, and Melanie were all involved in the SAAC at their respective institutions and held leadership positions at one point. Melanie was also a leader of her institution's Christian student-athlete student organization and an "ambassador for her school", in that she was the "go-to athlete." This meant that "if [they] needed a representative, if [they] needed someone to interview, [they] need someone to talk, [they] need someone to be filmed, [she] was that person." This was Melanie's way of leaving her mark at her institution. Ann named a few accomplishments that made her proud. She had been named to the student-athlete honor roll multiple times, and thus recognized for her academic accolades at a number of sporting events. Ann also discussed her engagement in activism and commitment to social justice, and how this commitment was reflected in her work within her athletic department. She selected a photo from a recent student-athlete protest that took place on her campus to describe what it's like being a student-athlete at her institution. She selected this particular photo for the following reason:

It shows unity of the student-athletes here. This was, I guess [an] on campus protest that we had over the summer. That's me to the left, and then a football player, and then two of my teammates, really three of them in the back. I don't know if you can see her, but in the back she's White. It's just like, everything that's been going on amongst the Black community this year has just been [like] *whoa*, and so many people are wanting to learn about our experiences. It's just been really great to me. What this says to me is hey, we're

not alone. As Black student-athletes, we're not alone. We have staff and teammates who really support us.

One of the things her activism has accomplished was advocating for her team to take a knee during the playing of the national anthem during their upcoming season, as a form of silent protest to the violence against the Black community.

Where there are accomplishments, there are also obstacles that may affect one's ability to achieve certain things and/or perform to the best of their ability. Multiple participants noted the psychological strain that being an athlete and performing at a high level placed on their mental health. For example, they described being stressed by coaches' expectations of how they should perform. Blu explained that these expectations were an unnecessary source of stress, saying: "I guess it would help you prepare for the real world. I just feel like that's something that they shouldn't really do. It puts a mental strain on athletes at such a young age and you don't really need it." Melanie, who had a similar relationship with her coach, echoed these sentiments and described how the stress made her feel and behave:

I'd be stressed to go down to the gym. I would be stressed going home when I had to work out. I would be stressed going up to the offices. I always felt like I had to be very performative because internally, I was just never sure about my progress and where I was and whether or not I was good.

To cope with the psychological strain, Melanie sought opportunities to engage outside of playing, as she no longer believed she was getting the support and validation she needed within her sport. Ann also described stress related to being "mentally drained" by her athletic and academic responsibilities.

Finally, participants also expressed disappointment from missed opportunities to participate in traditional activities for career development. Although Andy felt prepared to walk away from her sport and pursue a career that did not involve competing, she noted that this was not the case for all athletes:

You think about your sport and the whole time it's sport, sport, sport, sport sport, and then you graduate and you go, all right, what's next? Then you just kind of look around and they're like, "well, you're done with us. You're not our responsibility anymore", but you don't have a really strong foundation, honestly, for the working world in that sense. You don't have this experience. So, then it's hard to find a job sometimes for some people. I know I have some teammates where they finish and "they're like, I don't know what I want to do with my life. All I've done is my sport."

Andy's statement highlights the peril of athletic identity foreclosure in a manner that hinders the development of an identity that does not revolve around playing sports. Similarly, Ann described the ways in which being an athlete placed them at a disadvantage on the job market, making them less competitive than non-athletes who have held internships, for example:

We don't really get too much real-world experience, whether it's getting a job or something like that. I've never had a job in my entire life, and I think about how will I compete with someone who has this many internships and this much work experience when I've done none of that? I'm just an athlete.

Furthermore, both Ann and Blu noted that this struggle is more pronounced for male student-athletes than it is for women. Blu said:

Black men athletes were definitely praised in college and [it's] definitely way different than the outside world, honestly...As a Black, African American woman, I just feel

prepared in all aspects of a lot of things. My identity, who I am, how I'm moving about certain situations, how I'm looking going into jobs and all this good stuff. I think [this] is a positive for me, but I think that's why men, when they're athletes, they are just like “oh I wanna play this sport forever,” because I think they're just on this high. Knowing that, once it's done, it's just like “all right so what did I really gain from this?”

In this quote, Blu makes an observation between the different levels of athletic identity salience across gender and sport, and attributes her career preparedness to being a Black woman. These accomplishments and obstacles demonstrated the rewarding and taxing aspects of being a student-athlete and highlight areas in which athletes may need more support and consideration from athletics staff.

Surveillance and Policing

Many participants described experiences related to feeling as if their actions and behavior were being surveilled and policed by athletics staff, particularly their coaches. Zee attributed this “hyper-surveillance” to collegiate athletes being placed on a “higher pedestal” than other groups of students:

I couldn't retweet this on Twitter. I couldn't post this picture. I couldn't have a drink in my hand in this picture. Stuff like that, that it's just like, you know, you could be made into a PowerPoint [and be] walking into practice blindsided, like oh okay so you do know what I did this weekend? It's just stuff like that. Those experiences shaped how I carry myself, that I'm not like a normal person.

As a result, Zee felt as though she could not be her authentic self on her social media platforms and showcase the versatility of athletes and Black women as a whole. For Melanie and Ann, this hyper-surveillance was particularly bothersome in moments of social unrest in the wake of police

brutality and social injustice against the Black community. Ann shared a recent example in which her coach called out a teammate for a comment on Twitter:

He'd be like, one of my teammates, be on her about what she likes [on Twitter] and what she likes is more about Black stuff. Just for an example, she liked a tweet that said all Black student-athletes should go and transfer to HBCUs and he like really harped on her for that. He was like, "why would you do that? A lot of people look up to you. What you say, what you do is always in the public eye." We're just sitting around like, what? So, you're telling us what we can and can't do, which I get. A lot of little girls do look up to us, but about this, no. You can't really control that.

Melanie's example was similar in that coaches asked athletes not to comment on the murder of an unarmed Black man on social media or participate in local demonstrations related to the incident. She speculated on her departments' rationale behind this ask, saying: "[The coaches and the school] didn't know how to navigate it...but also we didn't have the freedom of expression as student-athletes." What Melanie may have been alluding to was that the institution didn't know how to balance their athletes' desire to speak out about social justice and their wealthy donors whose political values did not align with interests of social justice. Her reference to student-athletes' lack of freedom of expression also reinforces how collegiate athletes are considered public figures when they are sources of entertainment, but not when they would like to use their platform to speak out on potentially divisive social issues.

The common thread in these examples is that it seemed that athletics personnel were not in favor of their athletes speaking up in a manner that cast the university in a certain light, or in a manner that would give consumers and fans the impression that the athlete was a representative of the athletic department. Whether intentional or not, athletics personnel projected "shut up and

play” narratives onto their athletes, in which athletes were expected to show up and perform in their respective playing fields and remain silent on social issues and other issues not related to sports. Being vocal would seemingly affirm their personhood outside of sport in a manner that required the athletic department to also affirm their personhood as more than an athlete.

Athletes as Public Figures

Much of the experiences unpacked in the former subtheme highlight the ways in which collegiate athletes are public figures. In addition to these stories, many participants discussed how they experienced celebrity status both on and off campus. Melanie described what it was like being a student-athlete at her institution:

I do think that being a student-athlete at [institution] is glamorous. The amount of recognition that you get, the places that you get to go, you know what I'm saying? You're traveling, you get to order whatever you want on the menus. So, it's kinda like that whole aspect of you get well taken care of as you go along. It was nice to wear [institution] stuff in the airport, and to see someone you don't even know be like, “Go [mascot]!” and you're like, “*Oh yeah*, go [mascot]!” To have that kind of pride and prestige of being able to walk with your shoulders back and your chin up and just be like, “wow, yeah, I am a student-athlete at this institution and it's a great school”... So, that is basically what it did feel like externally when people asked, “how are you doing? how's [institution]?” It felt so [luxurious]. Felt nice.

Melanie’s perspective lends insight into the lavish aspects of being a collegiate athlete. This glamorous-ness is no doubt informed by their visibility and status as public figures. On campus, Chinenye described a sense of pride associated with being a student-athlete, noting how athletes are regarded around campus: “We all have a specific bag that we wear, every single athlete and if

you're seen with that bag it's like, '*praise* you'. Everybody just acts like it's just such a cool thing of being an athlete here." Chinenye's reflection is significant considering the stories she shared regarding her treatment in the classroom as a STEM major, which will be discussed more later. This dynamic is particularly interesting because of the prior examples of how athletes are negatively perceived in academic settings. Furthermore, they exemplify how the campus environment often values their athletic capabilities and responsibilities more than their academic ones.

Additionally, many participants discussed being public figures in the context of having fans and young athletes who looked up to them as role models. Zee shared a photo from a past volleyball meet in which you could see fans, dressed in her school's colors, cheering on the team in the background. When describing this atmosphere, she said:

You have all the people in the crowd and stuff. They're all dressed in [school colors] and it goes back to the fan base. It's bigger than just you. Yes, it's me individually, but you see the two people coming towards me and there's still three other people in the court who are screaming as well. We are all a part of this together. Everyone is wearing red. It's so cultish, but it's cool. I love it. Even for volleyball, I feel like this is so small compared to bigger, bigger other Power 5 conferences who are good, or Top 25 teams and they have such huge fan bases, or different sports like basketball or football, what else? Track. Huge, huge fan bases, baseball. It's like, *wow* these kids, these adults devoting time and paying money out of their own pocket. Like what, season tickets? You bought one?

That's crazy. Stuff like that.

Zee's story further demonstrates the idea of collegiate athletes as local celebrities, placing them in an interesting position as contributors to the athletic department in which they are competitors

and entertainers, but also supposedly members of the general student body. Blu held a similar experience, but in the context of developing and sustaining individual connections with young fans. Blu recalled an interaction with one fan in particular:

She was the one that was really persistent, and she was super shy at first, but she was just really persistent at all my games and her family was like, we went out to dinner and all this fun stuff. It's just a special moment. It just shows what an athlete lives for in the sense of playing a collegiate sport. Having these fans and having somebody look up to you and wanting to take this picture...They took it on their phone so, they get to have this forever, "like this was my favorite player when I was twelve." [When] she looks back on this twelve years later, when she is graduating from college and is like this was my favorite player. So, it's just kind of crazy to think about 10 years from now.

Both Blu and Naomi discussed being a collegiate athlete in this way, particularly the idea of being a role model. Naomi acknowledged that young girls may be looking up to her and it's important to set a good example and have a positive self-image, saying: "A really good self-image, do the right things like being respectful, being able to help in the community, being able to show what being a nice person is like, showing good values." These fan dynamics again reinforce the collegiate athlete as a public figure.

The fan dynamic is also noteworthy for a number of reasons. One, as Ann noted, women's sports are often undervalued, underpromoted, and under supported because "not many people support women's sports like that." Zee, Blu, and Naomi's experiences with fans can likely be attributed to the sport of volleyball, which has historically been associated with women. Although Ann plays a co-ed sport, basketball, her team's success over the years has resulted in a larger fan base than most women's basketball teams in her conference. This vocal and supportive

fan base, however, has its drawbacks. Ann described how some fans reacted to her team's vocal responses to the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. While most fans had been supportive, she explained that some fans essentially said, "I'm going to drop you because I'm racist so I'm not with it." These negative experiences ultimately function to remind student-athletes that they are a source of entertainment for some people, a point which Naomi and Zee also mentioned. Ann stated:

They'll say leave sports out of politics and it's like, hold on, hold on. We're also human beings who have rights in America and we have the right to say what we want, just like you do. So, when did athletes not become humans or, just a means for your entertainment?

It seems that the campus environment, the athletic department, and fans are only satisfied with student-athletes when it serves two interests: being entertained and making money. These final reflections introduce the business aspects of being a collegiate athlete.

All Work, Minimal Play

College sports often function as a business, in which revenue drives decision-making. In this landscape collegiate athletes put in a lot of hard work, and there's minimal room for play, as in one wrong move and their status as an athlete as in jeopardy. Many participants likened being a student-athlete to being an employee of the athletic department. Ann explained that being both a student and athlete felt like she was "doing two things that are supposed to be full time", essentially likening being a student-athlete to having two full-time jobs. Ann, Blu, and Zee also explained that the business aspects of college sports guided the behavior of their coaches. Blu explained:

They love to say that we try to find people who will fit the team. But it's like are you gonna produce? Like I said, it's a business. They don't really care like that. If I come over here and I'm the biggest asshole on this earth, but I'm scoring all the points, getting the blocks, they will find a way to make it work... It's a business and I just feel like if it's gonna be that then okay, you know? If that's what you're going to do, but at least find a way to make sure everybody is mentally healthy and other good stuff. We don't need to be spoiled.

Blu's comment sheds light on coaches' mindset during recruitment and gets to the idea of the disposability of collegiate athletes, particularly in that they are replaceable if they do not meet coaches' expectations and/or perform a certain way. Ann noticed that this was one of the biggest and unexpected differences between high school sports and college sports, saying "if you're not performing, you're not playing... You can definitely tell that there's a bunch of politics." Ann's reference of the "politics" further demonstrates how college sports, a function and extension of higher education, are run more like a business. Zee also described the ways in which the academic side serves the business aspects. She shared that advisors often encouraged her to take certain classes and/or switch her major, saying: "You're trying to make it as easy for this business to succeed and that's communications [major]. That's me [having] all these online classes during travel, during season. That's me doing all of that because it's easier for the business instead of my life, you know?" Zee's story is particularly significant because she was a STEM major, a discipline that is widely regarded as a hostile environment for Black women, and an uncommon major for student-athletes.

Furthermore, the idea of collegiate athletes being employees and thus representatives of their athletic departments was exacerbated by the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery,

and Breonna Taylor As mentioned earlier, Ann noticed that her team lost fan support after her team shared statements against police brutality and racial injustice in the country on their social media accounts. This response reinforced her belief that consumers viewed her solely as an entertainer who worked in service of the organization they were rooting for. Naomi furthered developed this argument, explaining that's some fans may operate under the following logic: "I don't like Black people, but [they're] going to help [my team] go to a championship." Both responses reflect a level of dehumanization, or the act of "[reducing] empathy for others through the ongoing denial of their humanity (at its core, their 'human-ness'), (Haslerig et al., 2020, p. 275) that takes place during sports consumption. Consumers dismiss athletes' "human-ness" outside of sports in order to enjoy the sporting event without regard to the social or political implications. Additionally, Ann and Naomi's comments are informed by "cancel culture" in popular culture, in which public figures are "cancelled", or ostracized, for behavior that is viewed as offensive to a group of people. In sports "cancel culture", fans cancel an athlete or sports organization by withdrawing support from social media platforms and during sports competitions.

These insights provide a glimpse into the good, the bad, and the ugly of being student- and collegiate athletes. In short, the term "student-athlete" can be best used to describe the positive and/of beneficial aspects of being an athlete, and to some extent the accomplishments and obstacles of this role. Conversely, the term "collegiate athlete" can be best used to describe the role of the athletes as a fundamental component in college athletics business, such as being a public figure, being under surveillance, and the student-athlete as an employee of a sports organization.

“Aren't you here to help me?”: Navigating relationships and creating community

This theme highlights participants' experiences navigating different relationships in academic and athletic spaces, and ultimately establishing community. Most participants discussed the intricacies of developing and maintaining relationships with three groups in particular: coaches, teammates, and academic advisors. This section will also detail the ways in which participants race and gender identities affected these relationships. Four subthemes emerged: coaches, teammates and athletic community, creating community, and advisors.

Coaches

Coaches are amongst the first college relationships that student-athletes develop. This relationship often begins before they ever step foot on their campus, during their recruitment process. Coaches are responsible for recruiting the best athletes across the country and, for some sports, the world. Once they arrived on campus, participants found that the coach-player relationship varied from ones of supports to ones reaped with challenges.

Coaches as source of support

Many participants described their relationship with coaches as spaces of support throughout various stages of their collegiate career. Participants explained that the relationships they developed with their coaches during their recruitment were what ultimately swayed them to choose their institution. For example, Melanie sought a relationship with her coach in which she would “not be nervous to text [coaches] or call [coaches] for help.” Chinenye fondly spoke about her relationship with her sprint coach. She and her coach would have regular “checkups” and he would constantly look out for her academically. She recalled the following conversation:

My grades were starting to slip. My coach was saying, “Oh, maybe you need to take a break from the team and come back next season. We'll regroup.” That was hard. I was

like, track is my life, but I don't want to quit track. Cause then it's like, what do I have? I guess he's seeing it from a different perspective and he doesn't want track to be the thing that I hate because my grades are slipping. That was real good looking out. Usually a coach would be like, “you know what, you're not making the times, get out of here and I'm going to replace you. Everybody's replaceable.” So, I didn't do indoor ... Even when he was recruiting me, he was like, “this is probably going to be one of the hardest things you've ever done. You sure you ready for this?” I was like, “oh, of course.” He knew I didn't really know what I was getting myself into, which is why he was always like, “meet with me. come to this office, just for checkups.”

Chinenye's example demonstrates the role of her coach not only pushing her athletically, but also recognizing her needs academically and making recommendations that will support her growth in both areas. This exemplifies the role of a coach as an advisor and mentor both within and outside of athletics.

Coaches as source of contention

Participants also described the challenges that existed with their relationships with coaches. While most coach relationships began positively, participants quickly learned that the dynamics of these relationships would be tricky. Melanie, Blu, and Zee discussed what it looked like to navigate their coaches verbal and nonverbal expectations of them. Melanie recalled one example in which her coach criticized her performance after her freshman season, and told her she was at-risk of being left behind:

My coach was just like, she kind of gives you list of all the things that you need to work on for the next semester and what their goal would be for you during spring training. So, she told me to just go work on the fundamentals. She was like, “I thought that you'd be

able to pass for us, but you pass more balls to the bleachers than you do to our setter. We thought that you might be able to hit for us as well, but you're not where you need to be.” Basically, saying I needed more physical strength to actually play my position and just everything, need to do some work. She was like, “I’ll be honest. I don’t know if I’m the right coach for everyone. Because of that, I’ll see where I can get you in the spring. We have about 14, 15 weeks to actually work on those skills. Hopefully we see some improvement. If you do improve to a good enough place, then we can work with that if you’re slightly improving. If you don’t improve, then we might be having a different conversation come spring”, which is basically saying we’re going to transfer you.

This conversation left Melanie feeling unsure about her place on the team and the university and demotivated to spend times in athletic spaces. This led her to seek support and affirmation from other sources. This example demonstrates the negative aspects of coaches having full control over their athletes’ future, in ways that can affect their ability to complete their education. It also reaffirms the idea of collegiate athlete disposability that was discussed in Theme 2. Similarly, Blu, Zee, and their teammates had a contentious relationship with their coach, so much so that the problems begun showing up during matches. Blu believed that her coach had certain expectations of her performance because she was a “tall Black girl.” However, these expectations were never communicated to her. Blu recalled a few times in which snide comments from her coach affected her performance during team practices:

I had a whole meeting before practice, and she was really coming for my life, telling me I was victimizing myself and all that other good stuff. I was hot. Right? Of course. Then I’m petty, not gonna lie to you. I came into practice and I put that I was happy on the board, like put the little green on the board for a good day. I think I had a pretty okay

practice, and she was like, “I wish you could practice like this all the time” and I'm like, you know, I don't like you. I really don't. I was never a fan. Then one time I did put on the board that I was not having a good day. I don't even know what happened. So, my practice was kind of booty. Cause you know, mentally it's really not as easy as they say to leave all that stuff at the door, then on the court thinking like, “oh my gosh, volleyball is life. It makes me the happiest person on this earth.” I'm literally jumping 500 times in two and a half hours. So, to do that, then I was having a crappy practice. I can't remember what she said to me. She said something out of pocket. I think I got kicked out of that practice, actually.

Both Blu and Zee went on to explain that most of their teammates had similar issues with this coach, Zee saying that the coach did not know how to “compartmentalize”, the personal and business aspects of the coach-athlete relationship. Zee recalled a time in which the team held a meeting with the coach, a meeting which ended up as more of a “roast” than a constructive feedback session:

Have you ever seen those little reality TV shows and one person's in the hot seat and everybody's just roasting that person? They usually do it for celebrities and it's like a fundraiser. So, basically, that's what we were doing to her. Well she starts crying and I'm like, *okay?* Nobody sitting in the hot seat is going to be happy about it. Let me relax. She's still a human being, you know? Then two of our teammates are crying with this lady and then go upstairs to her office and apologize. I'm like this literally reverses everything that we were saying that she needs to fix. She wants us to be able to have a solid relationship with her and it's just mind blowing. You guys expect us to just be athletes and we expect them to be coaches. Now the lines are getting blurred because you

guys are making it a very personal thing when at the end of the day, it's a business...

Lady, you're missing the point. I don't even want to do this anymore. I'm just going to go to practice. It just came to that point. Everyone just kept their mouth shut. They're like, you know what F it, I'm just going to keep my head down and just play volleyball...I played better the rest of that season and I think after that we won like six games in a row, I don't know. We just stopped talking and she was like, "this is how we should have been playing." We're like, the problem was you.

Here, Zee found that silence was the best way to navigate the relationship with her coach.

Similar to Melanie's, Blu and Zee's examples demonstrate how the temperament of the coach-athlete relationship can greatly impact how student-athletes interact with the athletic space, and how they see themselves as athletes and people.

Finally, some participants noticed bouts of their coaches' preferential treatment toward non-Black teammates. Melanie and Naomi, who were teammates at one point, noted that some of the "lingo" or language coaches used with them, was different from the language they used with non-Black teammates. For example, coaches would use vernacular like "yaaaaas" and "what's up girl", colloquial phrases that originated in predominantly Black and Latinx drag communities and are commonly used amongst Black women. They felt that the coaches used this language in an attempt to relate to them, but it fell short and actually changed the ways the participants perceived them. Additionally, Ann noted that her coach gave non-Black teammates certain courtesies that he would not extend to her Black teammates. She presented this example:

If [Black teammates] say something or see something wrong, it's "you're wrong, you can't be right." If [non-Black teammates] do, it's not you're wrong. No. He'll actually go back and forth with them compared to us, which is something that I've noticed... It'd be like,

when she'd say something, they'd go back and forth and he'd be like, "oh, I was wrong. You're right." Whereas like us, a lot of the time, he's like, "why are you even talking? Just say okay." I think a lot of us feel like if we just say okay, and get over it, we'll be fine, but that's how we feel. You just gotta say okay and, let it go because if you don't, he's going to just literally keep attacking until you're clearly wrong to him. I think we've gone through that a lot where we're just like, "I think that's wrong, but I'm not even gonna say anything because I don't feel like going back and forth with him."

Similar to Zee's example earlier, Ann found that silence was the best path forward. Her observation, in particular, was interesting because her team is predominantly Black and she only has three non-Black teammates. While she could not explain why the coach treated her non-Black teammates differently, she did acknowledge the power she and her Black teammates had over the performance of the team, saying: "He can't win anything without us, literally. You'd only have two people in the court." This power is definitely a unique benefit of being on a team in which most of the team looks like you, an opportunity many participants were not afforded.

Teammates and Athletic Community

For most student-athletes, teammates and other student-athletes are their primary sources of community within their institution. Participants also detailed their complex relationships with their teammates. Andy mentioned that she had certain expectations of what being on a collegiate team would be like and what it actually was:

I thought it was going to be this big sisterhood in the sense. I was really excited for that aspect of it. You're gonna have 20 girls that were going to be like your best friends.

You're gonna do everything together...you're not going to be best friends with 20 girls at all.

Here, Andy grappled with her expectations of what her team's community would look like and realized it would not be this way. Furthermore, Zee described being taken aback by the lack of diversity on her team when she first joined and noted the differences between collegiate and club volleyball: "With club I could leave. I could go home. Here, I'm living with these people. These are people I have to interact with. These are people that I never thought I would relate to on any type of level." She went on to question how other Black teammates coped and survived.

Nonetheless, many participants described their teammates as their primary source of community. As she discussed the photo she submitted to described where she felt she belonged, Melanie said:

The place where I belonged, I felt was with my teammates...The way that we're embracing each other, I felt like I was walking into just a nice sisterhood. So, they really did keep me going, and I guess the only thing sometimes I think about is that in those moments, I wasn't able to fully embrace just how much they meant to me. I was just so busy thinking about other things. But I say they helped me feel like I belong. They became my family.

Like Melanie, others felt that their teammates were a space of solace in times of crisis and provided a space in which they felt secure.

Despite describing their teammates as "family" and their primary sources of support, some participants also recalled situations in which their non-Black teammates lacked an understanding of race and racial issues and how close these issues hit home. For example, Zee recalled a situation that occurred shortly after Colin Kaepernick began taking a knee in protest of police brutality and systemic violence against Black people. Her coach attempted to create a space to discuss why Kaepernick was taking such action because another athlete in their

conference had begun protesting in a similar way. Zee was one of only two to three Black players on the team and recalled the following:

I was crying during the meeting and I remember saying, “can you imagine what it's like being a Black man in America right now?” Everyone was dead silent, and I was like, “right, you can't because you've never had to”, you know what I mean? Then the setter, she was just like, “I just think it's so disrespectful. You're disrespecting America” and all this stuff and I'm just like, “but you're missing the point.” This is during a time when there was only two Black people on the team, maybe three at this point, three or four. I was just like, “You're missing the point. It's not about disrespecting America. It's about America not listening and this is getting your attention.”

Following this situation, she overheard the same teammate say “if you don't like being in America so bad, just go back to where you came from” to which Zee responded “you're very lucky we're teammates because if we weren't, I would beat your ass.” For Zee, this situation showed her how much her teammates did not understand about what it's like to be Black in America. She later detailed that she had to force herself to have difficult conversations and foster understanding in order to feel more comfortable around her team. Similarly, Ann discussed the mixed reactions she received from her non-Black teammates regarding her activism and the ongoing violence against the Black community. Although some were supportive, she noted that others demonstrated an unwillingness to learn more about the issues:

One of my teammates, for example, she didn't really understand. A lot of people love to say, “I don't say anything because I don't understand.” Well, what do we do when we don't understand something? We go out and we learn about it. So, I just kinda have to explain like, “yeah, you don't understand, but go educate yourself.” Whether it's between

talking to me or someone else who is of a different color than you, to just try to explain to you this is why we feel the way we do.

Here, Ann acknowledged that a fundamental part of understanding someone's struggle involves taking steps to educate oneself. Similarly, Naomi recalled an instance in which her non-Black teammates confused her ethnic background, saying:

There are things on Tik Tok, and someone from Ghana would do something and then someone would be like, "Oh my God, they're Nigerian" and I'm like, no, they literally said they're from Ghana, you know? It's not the same place. So, definitely clarification has been a thing, just clarifying, just because someone is African doesn't mean they're Nigerian. African [and] Nigerian is not the same thing. There are so many different countries in Africa.

Though most participants understood that their teammates' ignorance came from a lack of understanding and not malice, these examples demonstrate the importance of understanding and empathy in developing different relationships, particularly as they are building relationships with people who are different from them in a meaningful way. Nonetheless, the time and energy must be expended on both ends in order to move past such differences.

Finally, multiple participants shared stories about times in which their teammates and/or other peers in the athletic community used language they had no business using, namely the word "nigga." Zee shared a story of one occurrence which took place within her first year on her team:

They were just in the room taking a Snapchat cause we're all about to go get dinner or something. I can't remember where we're going, but we were all dressed up. We're literally about to leave the dorm and they were waiting on me cause I was talking to

somebody and then we were going to walk to the car. Then I walked into the room and she's making a Snapchat of the four of them, the five of them, cause I was six, the five of them. She was like, "what's up my N words" in this Snapchat video. I literally was like, *what?* I was so perplexed. I was like "don't ever again in your life ever use that word in that context, in any context and in lyrics in songs. I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it." I was just like, this has made me question you even more. When I was talking to her, I was just like, "this makes me question even more do you say this when Black people are not around? I wasn't around, how often have you been saying this?" She was like, "no, I swear. This was like my first time saying, like, I don't even say it." This is like my second week here, my third week here. I'm like, I need to go back to Maryland. I need to go back. I was so confused.

Zee went on to explain that she does not use the "n word" because she does not want other non-Black people to think it's okay for them to use. In this quote, Zee not only expressed surprise and confusion as to why her non-Black teammates thought this was appropriate, but also that it made her lose trust in her teammates. Her quote also speaks to the lack of belonging this incident fostered, so much so that she wanted to return home. Similarly, Chinenye had a situation in which another non-Black student-athlete was using this word:

We have this thing, called [dining room], where student-athletes get free food basically. So, this is where all different athletes from different sports hang out. So, one time me and my teammates finished practice and we're coming in and we saw like a mix of the cheerleaders and I think some of the swimmers and some people from the dance group, they were already in line. So, when we started to approach, they were like "shh the Black people are coming in." So, one of my teammates, she doesn't handle any, you know, BS

like that. So, she goes, “what are y'all saying? What are y'all saying?” Then they're like, “we were just, um, uh, yeah.” I guess there was a Black person, but she's, light-skinned so it's like, is she Black or not? I knew her, so I knew she was Black, but I guess to other races, she could pass off as White. So, she was sitting at the table and she was like, “Oh, they were saying the N word.” I can't really remember who specifically they're talking about, but I think they're talking about these rappers or some artists. So, basically they're saying the N word and us walking in, they're like “the Black people are coming in and you know, let's not say it anymore.”

Chinenye recognized that non-Black athletes were not only using the word frivolously, but they were also aware that they should not be using the word at all, as evidenced by their effort to be quiet as Black athletes approached them. Andy shared a similar occurrence, saying:

I remember it was like my first week of freshman year and it was a girl who didn't even make it through the team freshman year. We were in the car and a song was playing and it said the N word. I was like, “hey, by the way, don't say that. Just don't say it or better yet just don't say it around me.” She didn't after that.

In all of these examples, non-Black athletes seemingly tell on themselves by revealing how comfortable they are using the word when no Black people are present. In sum, these examples demonstrate the type of ignorance Black women student-athletes face as they navigate relationships with teammates and other peers in the athletic community.

Creating Community

Given these varying team dynamics, creating community, and thus belonging, was unique for each for participants. Many participants discussed what it looked like establishing their communities and developing relationships with their peers. Some participants found that being

one of few Black athletes on their team made it challenging to build community at first, especially having come from a diverse or predominantly Black environment prior to college. Blu and Zee both noted that despite their team being like a “family”, they still found that they “gravitated towards each other” and their other Black teammates. Zee described the community that she created with her Black teammates as a space of “safety and security” because these women had seen her at her most vulnerable. Similarly, as Blu was looking to transfer schools, she was mindful of what her community might look like:

I don't know how I feel about being all the way at [potential institution], and they had like maybe two Black girls on the team. Another reason why I chose [her second institution] was the program, Power 5 conference. I saw the team, and there was a lot of Black girls. Okay, great. It's a good mix. I'd feel comfortable. Then another thing is that at [her first institution], all my friends were graduating. Me and my best friend graduated together. It was just me and her, we were the only, I think there was another girl she was mixed, but we were the only Black girls on the team. There had been one girl that was a freshman, but you know, me trying to be like super cool with a freshman was just not it. So, I was like, okay, well, I guess this is a great opportunity for me to transfer.

For Blu, it was important to have representation on her new team, as it gave Blu insight into the type of environment and community she was entering. Additionally, Melanie was fortunate to have older Black women on her team, who worked to facilitate community:

There were a few Black girls on my team and one of my Black teammates actually brought us all together and brought us closer. She intentionally did that. It wasn't till later we found out that she was like, “No, let's hang out together. Let's catch up with one another. Let's make a group chat.”

Melanie mentioned that being in community with her Black teammates exposed her to “conversations that Black women have”, and on her team it was known that the Black players “sat together and [they] had [their] own table.” Being that Melanie was an athlete in a predominantly White sport, it would be safe to assume that Melanie would not have had this experience had it not been for her older teammates who felt the detrimental effects of not having that support.

Finally, most of the participants discussed the ways in which they had been siloed in the athletic community. Ann was most critical of this fact, saying that the isolation from the general student body “crutched” them, saying:

I think it kind of hinders us being able to see different people's aspects of life. You're supposed to come to college and see different people from different backgrounds.

Granted, there are a lot of different people with different backgrounds in athletics, but we don't get a lot of people who are working their ass off day and night to not only be a college student, but also have a job to pay for it because we have the blessing and opportunity to get an education for free. I think that sometimes we as athletes don't understand that because we're just so engrossed into our own population.

Although she acknowledged that there are diverse perspectives amongst the student-athlete population, she recognized that student-athletes don't have all the answers. This speaks to the missed opportunities for engagement that student-athletes face. Furthermore, feelings of isolation are also present within the athletic community. Being on her predominantly White team, Andy recognized that she felt a sense of isolation from Black women in other sports, saying: “I felt like I didn't know them. I felt like they didn't know me. I didn't know about their experiences on their teams. Were they the same as mine? Were they different?” To combat this isolation, she worked

with an administrator in student-athlete development, who was also a Black woman, to create a support group for women of color athletes. Like Melanie, Andy explained that being in community with this group of women “helped [her] get a little in touch with [her] Blackness, that [she] was not getting in [her] normal day to day life at all and [she] didn't really realize in the moment that [she] was missing it.” These examples present the impact that isolation and lack of community had on participants, but also the ways in which community can be facilitated and developed through relationships and partnerships with other students and staff.

Conversely, community looked very different for sports in which Black athletes are more represented, basketball and track & field. Ann, who plays basketball, and Chinenye, who runs track, both shared examples of how they benefitted from being on a predominantly Black team. Ann explained that her team was “really tight”, and expressed sympathy for peers in predominantly White sports, saying: “I do have some friends who are in an all-White sport and they're kind of hindered by being able to say what they want, or they let their teammates get away with certain things.” Similarly, Chinenye explained that being on a predominantly Black team, there were unspoken expectations of the relationships:

We were around each other so much...that was like the one space where I had that didn't really seem like I was at a PWI. Yeah. So, I guess it didn't, it didn't really come up too much. It's like, “we're Black and there's a lot of racism here. We got to stick together. It was more like, it seems normal.”

Although the team did support each other in this way, Chinenye still felt as though she did not have a community that was supportive of all her identities. As discussed in Theme 2, Chinenye faced many obstacles being a STEM major and athlete. She often found that her athletic community was not supportive of her STEM identity and vice versa. These unique experiences

again highlight the challenges associated with playing two incredibly demanding roles as both a student and athlete, and the impact this has on one's ability to develop community.

Advisors

The role of the academic advisor is to help students select courses and academic majors that align with their career interests and goals. Participants had varied relationships with academic advisors both within and outside of athletics. In both settings, advisors were responsible for assisting students in selecting the appropriate courses that lead to progress toward students' degree completion. Advisors were also expected to support students in selecting majors and/or deciding what they would like to do post-graduation. In this section, I make the distinction between university advisors, meaning academic advisors who worked across the university and served the general student population, and athletic advisors, meaning academic advisors who only served the student-athlete population and are indirectly responsible for ensuring student-athletes remained academically eligible to play their sport. As noted in Zee's story in Theme 2, sometimes athletic advisors acted in service of the business and not student-athletes.

Like Zee, Ann found that her athletic advisors were encouraging her to enroll in classes that did not align with her interests, despite their being several other options available to satisfy a specific course requirement:

I took anthropology and I was like, why the hell am I in this class? I don't give a rat's ass about this. Then after my freshman year was over, I looked at all the different options that I could have taken. I was like, what the fuck? Are you kidding me? You put me in this class that you thought was going to be easy. I'm not interested in it. It's not going to be easy for me because I don't care.

After this instance, Ann began doing her own research for course registration and selecting classes without the help of her athletics advisor. When Ann had other academic concerns, it seemed like her athletics advisor was absent, affirming what she believed about the role of this advisor:

It feels like they're just trying to make you pass. So, they're just trying to make sure you're passing so that you can play, more than you trying to do this and that. It's like, "No. You're passing, I don't really care. I'll call you occasionally if you have a bad grade somewhere, but that's about it."

Ann's story further demonstrates the ways in which athletics advisors prioritize maintaining eligibility, over honoring students' academic interests, thus complicating a relationship that is important for student success. Furthermore, Melanie noted that she "made it a point" not to go to the academic center for support because she observed how her teammates were being treated:

For some of my Black teammates that were in there, they just were surveyed so often, monitored. You know what I'm saying? "Did you turn this in, and to do this, and did you get a bad grade? Well now, you know we can't get that kind of grade." Like bro, you know, like let it go. You don't talk to the others like that. We don't have to be hounding over them like that. I don't see that same energy that you would give for someone else.

Although Melanie was the only one to explicitly state that race informed how academic support staff treated Black athletes, her reflection is significant as it speaks to the idea of surveillance and policing that was discussed in Theme 2. The combination of these experiences with athletic advisors closely monitoring and prioritizing academic eligibility speak to what surveillance looks like in the academic space.

Similarly, Andy and Zee recalled being advised to change their long-term academic pursuits to maintain their eligibility. After realizing that she was just a few credits short of completing her degree and would not have enough courses to remain eligible, her athletic advisor encouraged her to enroll as a non-degree student. Andy found that doing this would be “a waste of resources that could honestly be going to somebody who needs it” and teetered the line of what’s ethical in education. Instead, she did her own research and entered a graduate program at her institution. Zee, a STEM major, had a similar experience and she recalled multiple times in which her athletic advisor told her “maybe [she] should do communications...a lot of athletes do communications.” These same advisors also refused to provide her with the tutoring services she needed to be successful in her STEM classes. This led Zee to believe that athletic advisors were dismissing the goals that she had set for herself:

You're wasting my time because I'm still sitting here confused, but whatever not the point. Telling me "[to switch] majors", and “this class is really hard, take it in the summer.” Thinking about it I'm like, okay, maybe they were looking out for me and my best interests, but reflecting on it, it's just like were they? Were you really? I don't know. That's a conversation with them. I definitely had crappy situations and I'm just like, aren't you here to help me? Why are you putting me in this situation where I feel like I'm uneasy that I'm even supposed to be where I am? No, I'm telling you my goals. I'm telling you my plans. You are supposed to help me achieve these plans.

In each of these aforementioned incidences, participants noted that their athletic advisors were White women. Chinenye, also a STEM major, also recalled being encouraged to change her major, this time by a White male advisor. This advisor expressed disbelief when Chinenye was admitted into her major, which was disappointing for her: “Clearly that was terrible. You would

think an academic advisor would be a little bit more supportive than that, but no.” This dynamic of the student-athlete/athletic advisor relationship exemplifies how the academic aspects of being a student-athlete can function in concert with the business aspects of college sports.

Despite these seemingly shady observations and experiences, some participants had positive interactions with academic advisors, both in and out of athletics. Melanie had developed a strong relationship with her athletics advisor, who also happened to be a Black woman, upon arriving at her institution, as mentioned in Theme 2, Melanie entered undergraduate with every intention of graduating in three years and getting a graduate degree. Melanie believed that her advisor was supportive of this because she had a master’s degree herself and understood the value of having a graduate degree as a Black woman. Similarly, Ann had multiple positive interactions with a university advisor, after several failed attempts to get in touch with the athletic advisor. She met with her university advisor, who also happened to be a Black woman, and noticed some stark differences in these interactions: “It just seemed like she cared so much like, “oh, well, you need to take this and this class. What do you want to do with it?” I was like, *oh my God*, you care about my future.” Both Melanie and Ann felt it was necessary to indicate that their helpful advisors also happened to be Black women, possibly suggesting that they believed this shared identity contributed to the ways in which they were supported on their academic journeys. This point introduces an interesting discussion about the role of representation in higher education and student success, a point which will be unpacked further in Theme 4.

Despite these complex relationships with others, most participants noted that their non-Black teammates and coaches reached out after the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, offered their support, asked how they could be better support systems, and

expressed an interest in understanding their experiences as Black people more in-depth. For many, this was a positive step in the right direction.

“I’ll be the only Black girl?”: Black + women + athlete ≠ Black women athlete

The final theme highlights the ways in which participants’ social identities, namely race and gender shaped their experience as a student-athlete at their institutions. Participants discussed the challenges of underrepresentation in academic and athletic spaces, dealing with stereotypes and microaggressions, and identity performance. This theme is also marked by how identity is experienced differently based on the sport. Four subthemes emerged:

underrepresentation, identity performance, stereotypes and microaggressions, and differences across sports.

The subtitle of this theme is a nod to Dr. Lisa Bowleg’s 2009 article titled, “When Black+ lesbian+ woman ≠ Black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research”, which rejects the notion that social identities, and thus the experiences and oppression associated with them, are separate entities that can be understood in isolation of each other and called for an intersectional approach to qualitative and quantitative research.

Underrepresentation

As discussed in earlier sections, Black women student-athletes make up a small proportion of student-athletes across all divisions of the NCAA and Black students, in general, and are notably underrepresented at PWIs (NCAA, 2020b). This underrepresentation was significant for participants, as they all talked about what it was like to be “the only one” in academic and athletic settings. Some participants noted that they expected college to be much more diverse than it actually was. When describing her expectations of the athletic side of college, Blu said:

You know on those movies where the football players got that clique of everybody being real cool and it's diverse? You got the Black guy, the Asian guy that's the quarterback or something, and then you got Timmy from over there that's the kicker. I honestly thought that's what it was going to be like in each sport itself. Then I got to school, and I think it was me and maybe two other people that were Black and it was automatically cliqued off.

Blu went on to describe how she believed that her team was unintentionally segregated by race and she was one of only two to three Black athletes on the team. Academically, Chinenye went into college familiar with the term “PWI” and was aware that there would be few Black students, saying: “When they say there's 4% Black people on this campus, they meant 4% ... my expectations were that, okay, there's probably not going to be that much Black people, but then when I got here, I was like, oh, it really wasn't that much Black people. She acknowledged that being in the African American living and learning program and a member of the track team kept her from realizing how bad the lack of diversity was.

In the classroom, participants were faced with being one of few Black students in their classes. Naomi talked about what her classroom experiences were like, particularly when being asked to work in group settings. She said:

You enter a classroom and yes, there were some Black people, but it was like predominantly [White] and you're like, okay, this is different. Just the interactions I've had has really shown me. like I've had to do group projects and literally my whole group was White and I had to adjust and know how I talk to them.

Naomi's case introduces the interesting concept of having to “perform” a certain way in front of White students. She may have found that such a performance was necessary to prevent her group members from stereotyping her and/or perceiving her in a negative manner. Similarly, Zee and

Chinenye navigated being the only Black women in their STEM classes. In these classes, Zee noticed that she “kept getting a lot of side looks because [she] was one of probably like two Black people, let alone women in the class.” Chinenye shared several troubling stories about how she was treated in her classes with navigating both athlete and racial stigmas. She described what it was like walking into one of her first large lecture courses:

My first class ever in college was calculus. I looked around. I said, yeah maybe this is calculus. In my chemistry class, my chemistry class is literally 300 people. I said, not a single thing? That is crazy, and then my engineering class looked around not a single one, I said so in all my classes I'll be the only Black girl? How did I get so unlucky with this section? Because it's like, within the class itself, the whole entirety of the class, obviously there's going to be some Black people in the class, but why is it that in my specific section of the class, I was the only Black person every single time? I was like, man, I can't win.

Despite these environments' lack of diversity, both Chinenye and Zee remained encouraged by the fact that their persistence in their majors may lead to more Black women entering the STEM field in the future.

In summary, participants had no choice, but to adjust to being the only one in their classroom. Being the only one ultimately affected how they engaged in the classroom. Ann summed this up by explaining that the classroom was the one space on her campus where she felt she did not belong, saying:

When I'm in a classroom, all I see are White people in there. I've had multiple classes where I'm the only Black person and let alone a woman. So, it's like, *whoa*, cool. Okay. So, I don't really feel as comfortable to speak. When there's race brought up, I'm like, I

know just as much as you, okay? I think that's one place where I would feel uncomfortable is definitely the classroom. Cause there's been multiple occasions in multiple classes where I am the only one.

Underrepresentation was also marked in athletic spaces, in the underrepresentation of Black people on their teams and in staff. Andy was a student-athlete in the predominantly White sport of gymnastics. As discussed in her narrative, she had grown accustomed to being the only Black woman on her teams. She selected a team photo to capture what it was like being a Black woman at her institution and said:

I feel like you can probably tell what's it like being a Black student at [her institution] is minority. You see White, White, White, White, White, White, White, White. Oh, another Black girl. White, White, White, White, White all the way through type of thing. Similar to the university as well. [Institution] is a huge PWI. It's the first land grant institution in the state. Literally their primary purpose was for agriculture and technology in the early 1900s. I'm sorry, at that point, it was all White farmers. So, it's not a shock to me.

This lack of diversity was a common occurrence for participants who played predominantly White sports like gymnastics and volleyball. Andy, Melanie, and Naomi concluded that their sports were predominantly White because of the expenses to join club teams and train, a fact that speaks directly to issues of social class and access.

Furthermore, multiple participants noted that athletics personnel handled underrepresentation in interesting ways. Andy noted that, although it did not happen to her, her department's marketing team would often tokenize the Black athletes in predominantly White sports, in an effort to "prove [they] aren't racist and [they] do have Black people." In these cases, athletics personnel were using "diverse" student-athletes to project a seemingly false image of

diversity to fans and consumers. Similarly, Blu noticed that although there were only so many Black women on her team, they all played a very specific role, while non-Black players played another role:

It was ironic that all the hitters were Black, or the hitters that played, maybe, I don't know. I think it was just simply because Black people are athletic, and they jump high, you know? Maybe. I'm trying to think if any of the other hitters weren't Black. I think they all were Black. All of the hitters were Black and everybody in the back row was White.

Blu discussed this in her *sista* circle, and immediately following this statement, her former teammate, Zee, had the same observation. While these examples speak to underrepresentation, it also speaks to how stereotypes informed how student-athletes functioned as members of their teams and the athletic community.

Nonetheless, as Chinenye expressed earlier, Blu acknowledged that being a student-athlete kept the athletic community siloed from the lack of diversity, so much so that she was shocked when she encountered a Black student who was not an athlete at her first institution:

If I was Black and not an athlete at [institution 1] we'd be like, why are you here? So, I'm not going to lie. If I just saw some random Black people at [institution 1], I'd be like, "You're not an athlete, what?" Maybe if you got a full scholarship maybe I could understand, but being Black at [institution 1] was just kind of, it wasn't a racist vibe. It was just something I feel like Black people wouldn't be comfortable in for a long period of time. It just didn't really, the diversity there was not the greatest amongst regular students.

Participants also talked about how the lack of diversity affected what their coaching staff and athletic administrators looked like. Many participants noted that they had had few Black, women, and Black women coaches through their athletic career, a thread that continued into college. Andy expressed disdain with this, saying: “A majority of athletic departments their student-athletes are composed of people of color, but those who are coaching them and leading them are not. So, that can kind of create a little bit of an underlying tension, or lack of connection.” Andy brought up a good point about the disconnect that is created when the leaders and laborers do not look the same. Ann discussed the gender question of who is qualified to coach women’s sports:

There's a lot of males who are head coaches of women's basketball and men don't know how women operate personally, and how we function. So, it's like, what the heck? Does that even make sense, you know what I'm saying? We're on our periods and we're having those types of days. He’s like “not my problem”, and it's like, now, you've been coaching women for how long? That's like with any male coach, cause like, I think most, all of my life I've had male coaches. Why are there no females at the head of this?

Conversely, Chinenye noted the significance of her relationship with her sprint coach, a Black man, despite the head coach being a White man:

My sprint coach is Black, and my head coach of the whole track program is White. So, I would say [it's] a pretty good balance because at least having my sprint coach, the coach I see every day, [we] connect with on an everyday basis, is Black. Somebody I can connect to on that level. Then having my head coach being White, at least there's that. If they're both White [it would] probably, maybe be harder, but having at least one of them

Black, I'm able to just be myself around. Then around my head coach I have to switch to my White [Chinenye] version. So at least there's that time for me to breathe.

Chinenye believed that the shared racial identity with her sprint coach played a big role in their relationship because she “[felt] like [she was] talking to a friend” and she did not have to “put [her] professional voice on like [she was] talking to a White person.” Ann expressed a similar sentiment about one of her assistant coaches who is a Black woman. She said: “She is the one most, all of us go to. If she leaves today most of us would be out tomorrow cause we're not doing this without her.” These examples present the significance of being led by someone with which you share a common experience because of the identities that you hold.

Finally, participants discussed the lack of Black women in positions of leadership within their athletic departments. Melanie explained that this absence of Black women signaled to her that she “won't be working in an academic setting.” Ann described this as an embodiment of the fact that “Black women don't get the opportunities other people get.” Nonetheless, nearly all participants expressed their appreciation and admiration for the Black women at their university who had supported them in various ways. Ann, Andy, and Zee, all current and former athletes of the same institution, each mentioned the same woman in particular who was a large part of their support system. Ann explained that this person “tries to make sure that we understand that we're more than just athletes and that there's life after this.” Similar to what was discussed with Black women advisors in Theme 3, it seemed that having access to someone who looked like them, and was actually interested in their success beyond maintaining eligibility was impactful and fundamental to participants’ development and success in college.

Stereotypes and Microaggressions

Being underrepresented led to participants having a number of interactions with others that were informed by their identities. Many participants reported being microaggressed or stereotyped in different athletic settings, but also, to a lesser extent, in the classroom. In athletic spaces, participants were mostly policed for the way they looked. For example, Andy, who is biracial, often got comments related to her skin tone. These comments were common because many gymnasts tan their skin to avoid looking pale during competition. Her teammates would often say to her, “[Andy], I wish I was as tan as you.” She reasoned that they made such comments because they were unaware of her racial heritage and she explained that in their eyes, she “checked the box off as more of a White girl, than a Black girl.” Although her teammates made these comments as a seemingly well-intentioned compliment, they did not fully understand the socio-political or historical context that made their comments harmful. She recalled her reaction after hearing this comment one too many times:

I snapped one time my senior year when one of my teammates had said it just one too many times. I said, “you know, all it takes is hundreds of years of oppression and slavery and then you'll be tan.” She like, literally looked at me and she was like, “I have absolutely no idea what to say back to that.” I was like, “you shouldn't, you shouldn't know what to say back.” I just said that then I kept walking.

Andy’s reaction demonstrates the fatigue that may take place when these seemingly “harmless” microaggressions continue to go on unaddressed, and when people make no effort to understand the power of their words. Teammates were not the only ones who handed down these microaggressions related to her skin tone. Andy recalled the kinds of comments that one of her coaches’, a White man, would usually say:

Over the summer I would come in say, after going to the pool over the weekend and he would say, “wow, [Andy], you're looking more and more like an Islander every day.” What do I say in that moment? I don't know. That went on for all three years, all three summers. My mom would always be like, “[Andy] you need to say something” and I didn't feel comfortable saying something because that's my coach.

This story demonstrates the powerlessness that participants had when these microaggressions and microinsults came from people in positions of power, people who were responsible for their growth and personal development on and off the playing field.

Ann was also subjected to microaggressions and stereotypes at the hands of her coach, a White man. Most of the microaggressions were related to how she and her teammates appeared and presented themselves. She shared a few examples:

One day we come in with weave and then the next we'd be in there with our afros, embracing our hair. [He'd say] “*Whoa*, a full moon is going on over there in the back.” Whoa, this is just me. This is my hair, you know? I can't change that. This is the texture of it. This is what God has given me. I'm blessed for it. Thank you, God. But no, my hair can't always be in a weave or in braids.

Her coach's comments exemplify a lack of understanding of Black culture, particularly the ways in which Black women explore the versatility of their physical appearance. Her coach was also dehumanizing Ann and her teammates by comparing their appearance based on White standards of beauty. Ann was not the only one to experience microaggressions because of her hair. Zee discussed how she would often change her hair style and get comments from teammates. Her teammates would ask seemingly harmless questions about her hair:

Doing different stuff with my hair and edge control, grease, your night scarf, you have different scarves, different turbans, but all this different stuff. Stuff like that, and them not understanding, because they've never seen it before, like, “oh, how did they attach the braids? How did they sew in the weave? How are you able to do this different stuff?” Saying stuff like, “oh, your hair's like a sponge” and stuff like that, subtle. Because I know that they don't mean any harm, but it's just like, you say [it to] the wrong person something can be said back that would really hurt your feelings.

Like Andy, Zee acknowledged that comments did not come from a place of malice. Nonetheless, such comments are still harmful and can have a lasting effect on how the participants chose to present themselves.

Participants also discussed the ways in which different stereotypes had been projected onto them in regard to their athletic and emotional capabilities. Both Blu and Zee, volleyball players, were often confused for basketball players. Zee provided examples of comments she received from men in particular:

“You hoop?” No, I don't, I don't play basketball and you're only saying that because I'm 6'1” and I'm Black. Now, what if I told you I was a rower, how would you feel about it? Or a swimmer...You have no idea what sport I could have played. [They're] still like, “oh, you must've played basketball. Such a waste of your height.”

They both reasoned that people assumed they played basketball instead of volleyball only because of their race, and the stereotypes related to basketball being a predominantly Black sport. Furthermore, Melanie's often contentious relationship with her coach, who was a White woman, came to a head after the following incident:

There was a moment when I stopped playing. We were warming up and I had tipped a ball that was just a bit too hard for our setter to get it. Like, God forbid I do that. So, then my coach stopped the drill and yells at me in front of everyone like this is normal. Like this was just okay for her to do, right? I stopped approaching. I stopped jumping. My teammate came over to switch with me and I was like, “no, stay over there. You're probably gonna play.” That's not even an issue here. I don't *want* to play. I don't want to play for someone that is going to do that to me in front of the entire team.

During the conversation which followed this incident her coach justified her behavior, saying: “You just seem like the type of player that needed tough love and you know, we had our banter and stuff and you'd sometimes give me smart ass responses.” Melanie believed that in this moment her coach projected the “strong Black woman” controlling image onto her, and used it to justify the way she was treating her. In both examples, participants had stereotypes and controlling images projected onto them. These controlling images diminished the very unique experiences, personalities, and perspectives of Black women in a manner that reinforced the idea that Black women are a monolith.

Although most participants had only recalled being stereotyped or microaggressed in athletic spaces, Chinenye had experienced multiple microaggressions and stereotypes at the hands of her classmates and even professors. She shared several examples of these incidences:

In my engineering class, of course I was the only Black girl. So, in my group we were working on, I guess the project to present. So, since I was the one that really pushed the idea for our project, honestly, I thought I'll be the one to present. Some of my team members were like, of course they're White boys, actually, “I don't really think you should present. Obviously, appearance and look is, it's one of our grades for the

assignment. I really feel like,” I don't know what his name was. We're going to say Bobby, “I really feel like Bobby should present”, and I was like, “Oh, I hear you. But I feel like I should present.” Then they're like, “I just really think you shouldn't present.” So, I was like, “you're right.” So, I heard them whispering, “I don't know why she thinks she would present the project as the only Black girl in this class. That would be so embarrassing.” I said, just wait... “Group seven.” So, I quickly stood up and said, “all right, so for this project.” They were pissed. They were like, “oh my God, can you sit down?” I said, “so, for this project yada yada yada.” I was just presenting the project and we actually ended up getting 100% on it. They didn't have nothing to say and from then on, they always let me present because I guess seeing the grade that we got on the project, they were like, maybe she should present. But it's sad that because I was a Black girl, they're like, that's gonna make us look bad.

Here, Chinenye's classmates felt that allowing her to share on behalf of their group would negatively impact their grade, even though she was a major contributor on the project. While this example contains many microaggressions, it evokes historically situated stereotypes the Black people are not intelligent, and unfit to lead. Furthermore, microaggressions also came from her mostly White male professors:

He was doing a PowerPoint slide and there was one slide that was about, I guess diversity and inclusion or, I guess giving back to those in need. There was a picture of kids in Africa. Literally everybody in the class looked at me and I was like, can I help you? Even the professor looked at me and was like, “[Chinenye] do you have anything to share?” I was like, why should I have anything to share? With all of the slides, he didn't ask no questions from anybody, no anything to share, but that specific slide where there were

kids in Africa that were starving and are in need, you will look at me and say, do I have anything to add? ...I guess y'all really think I don't belong here. What was the point of singling me out like that? I didn't understand what the point was. That was so unnecessary... [The next class] he was like, "the way you left class on Wednesday, I wasn't sure if you felt offended or anything." So, stuff like that as a Black person, you have to decide, is this when I educate them? Is this one where I'm just going to let it go? You have to gauge the situation. So, I told him, "well, I felt like you were singling me out just because there was African kids on the screen and I'm the only African, and I'm the only Black person in the class. Maybe I'm not African. Y'all don't know, but just because of the skin color, y'all decided to look at me." I basically explained to him, you didn't ask anybody if they had any input on any of the other slides when there was White on the screen, but the one slide with a Black person and diversity and inclusion, you want to ask me that?

In this example, Chinenye was experiencing "spokesperson pressure" because her professor assumed that because she was of African descent, she could relate to the experiences that were shared in the slides. Although Chinenye is Nigerian, it seemed that her professor saw her name and made several assumptions about her family and upbringing, effectively projecting the "starving African" trope onto her. These experiences are a testament to the environment that Black women must navigate in most academic and professional fields, but particularly in STEM where Black women are routinely subjected to harm and mistreatment for no reason other than their race and gender.

Identity Performance

One of the ways in which participants worked to avoid certain stereotypes and microaggressions, was by adjusting how they “performed” their identities in certain situations. This looked like changing either the way they spoke, the way they dressed, and/or how they styled their hair, in order to appear as non-threatening or stereotypical as possible. As she discussed the photo she submitted to capture what it was like being a Black woman at her institution, Zee said:

I chose this photo specifically because I felt as a Black woman, I have to sit and be pretty and you can't see that there's so much more within, you know what I mean? I don't want to have the stigma... “Oh, she's just loud because she's Black. She has long nails. She's ghetto or this or that.” My hair is up. You can't see how long my nails, or my hair is. My makeup is done. I'm trying to look as pristine as I am, as posh as possible so that no one has this assumption of what a Black woman is. I feel like at a PWI, you have to be on your P's and Q's because sometimes I feel like they were just looking for a reason for you to look out of place here.

For Zee, being a Black woman at her institution meant that she had to behave in a manner that did not draw negative attention to herself. This was particularly true because she was battling against athlete and racial stigma. Similarly, Andy spoke about allowing people to attribute her athletic performance and success to her racial identity. She said:

I didn't want to be noticed for my racial [identity]. I wanted to be noticed for my athletic success. I didn't want, nor do I ever want my racial identity to be a reason for somebody to give me success. I want to gain my success for my hard work. I would never want somebody to say “[Andy] is an amazing Black gymnast.” Don't do that. I'm an amazing

gymnast because I worked my butt off to get there. I'm an amazing gymnast because I have dedication and commitment and time management and I work well with my coaching staff, and I know my body. You know? These are the reasons why I'm an amazing gymnast. I am not an amazing gymnast because I have more melanin in my skin. For Andy, given stereotypes like Black people having innate athletic ability, being “natural-born athletes”, it was important to her that others recognized that her talent was a product of her hard work and dedication to her sport, not her “biology.”

As they coped and discussed how their identity influenced how they presented themselves, participants also noted that they were expected to act a certain way and adjust the way they presented themselves to fit an image. For example, Andy noticed that Black gymnasts were expected to perform a certain way during competitions. She said:

When you do have a Black girl on your team, because it doesn't happen all the time, some teams have none. Other teams have maybe, two to three, but when they do have one it's like, “*Oh, here she comes. She's last up in our floor line up. You know, she's going to kill it.*” Just gonna have the big tumbling... You'd noticed demeanors would change or you would expect a certain type of floor routine to be done. You're expecting a certain type of music and a certain type of dancing, but it doesn't need to be like that at all.

Here, Andy recognizes that because several Black collegiate gymnasts have gone viral in recent years, people expect all Black gymnasts to demonstrate a certain “level” of Blackness as they compete. Along similar lines in the athletic realm, Ann felt that she had to adjust the way she spoke in order to get her point across to certain audiences. She provided this example of a time in which she “performed” in the hopes of being better received by her coach:

I had to have a conversation with my coach about why we have to call out the staff and the higher authority, why we have to do this. It was just like, I know I've got to break it down to [them] in an intelligent way or else [they] won't get it, because I know for a fact that my other teammate who doesn't really have that background where they can't really say things without like making it more understandable for another person, but I do. I had to sit down, and I had to explain to [them], this is why we're doing this, and this was why we're saying this and it's important for us to fight for what we believe in not only as athletes, but as Black student-athletes. Just telling him this is why, or explaining to him, this is why Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the National Anthem. It wasn't to disrespect America, but it was just to wake people up. I just kind of had to explain that to him, and I clearly had to make it sound more intelligent. I couldn't sound the way I want it to sound and say the things that I wanted to say, because I know he'd get offended and that would affect not only our relationship outside of the basketball court, but also on the basketball court.

Here, Ann recognized that her message would likely only get across to her coach if it was communicated a certain way. She acknowledged that in this moment she had to be devoid of emotion so that White people did not think she was “another Black person mad at the world for something they didn't do” or else there would be ramifications that spanned beyond the conversation. In both examples, participants recognized that there were external and internal expectations about how they should behave if they wanted to be received positively, or in a manner that was consistent with the norm.

Finally, Chinenye felt that it was also necessary to perform a certain way as a Black woman in STEM. In light of some of her experiences that were shared in the previous sections,

Chinenye quickly realized that her classmates, professors, and advisors were going out of their way to show her that she did not belong in these academic spaces. As such, she was intentional about showing them that she did belong:

I really have to make sure that these people know I belong. So, that'll be making sure I'm on time for class every day. Other people, they can skip class, but being the only Black girl in class it's going to be very noticeable if I'm not there. I'm always answering questions that the professor asks, just making sure that people know that I'm here.

Here, Chinenye explained that she was intentional about how she presented herself because of her social identities, similar to how she and Zee would avoid wearing athletic gear in class to reduce athlete stigma. All of these examples demonstrate the implications of identity-based expectations on how participants performed their Blackness in different athletic and academic spaces. It seemed like these expectations led to performing in ways that were inauthentic to who they were, but these actions and behaviors were necessary in order to avoid the harm caused by being stereotyped and microaggressed.

Differences Across Sports

Finally, the impact of participants' identities varied across the variety of sports that athletes represented (e.g., volleyball, gymnastics, basketball, and track & field). This was particularly true in regard to gender and gender identity in athletic spaces. Many of them noted that certain issues of college sports affect male athletes in football and men's basketball in a unique manner. This was true as they talked about racial and capitalist exploitation, career preparedness, and identity foreclosure. Blu described this in the following way: [Black men are] appreciated for those type of things, because outside of [sports], nobody wants a Black man. Not nobody wants them, but you know what I mean.

In this reflection, Blu acknowledged that Black male athletes are in high demand in college sports, an industry which makes money on their unpaid labor, and that Black men are not valued in the same ways in other fields and professional industries. She noted that her experiences were different than that of Black men because she felt prepared to be something other than an athlete for this reason.

Furthermore, what's noticeable about Blu and others' perspectives is that it's coming from student-athletes in single gender sports at their institution. As we discussed gender, I quickly noticed that single gender athletes (e.g., Andy, Blu, Melanie, Naomi, and Zee) were impacted by gender in a manner that was different than those who played co-ed sports (e.g., Ann and Chinenye). I believe this was mostly because single gender sports did not have a direct male team counterpart to make comparisons to. To demonstrate, Ann, a basketball player, shared several examples of how her team experienced differential treatment than their male counterparts. She recalled:

When we look at the men compared to us, they're definitely more spoiled than us. Like come on, [the men's coach] got them parking spaces. Our coach will not do that for us. Right by their gym in [men's facility], right by their practice gym. He bought them that and our coach was like, "You guys can walk. It's okay. It's not a bad walk. Get you some exercise before practice." That's what he said to us. I'm like, *wow*. I see, I see. Then they get breakfast delivered to them. They get meals after practice and we get none of that. Mind you, before we complained about it, we didn't have a fridge in our locker room and the men had everything and we're like, whenever we go to [men's facility], we take all their food. *Of course*, because we don't have this. Y'all have ice cream in here. What the heck?

To provide more context, her institution's men's basketball team had their own facility, while the women's team shared one facility with multiple sports. Furthermore, it seemed that the women's team did not receive certain small perks unless they advocated for themselves. The impact of this differential treatment was exacerbated by the fact that the women's team has had many more recent winning seasons than the men's team; yet, the men continue to receive new perks. She also noted that male athletes received differential treatment in different academic spaces as well, saying:

You walk in to [academic building], you see how people greet people and you see the difference when you see a woman being greeted, between a man being greeted, or boy.

There's a difference in how they walk in and their like, "Yep, we own this place because yeah, I'm a man, look at me." You can definitely see the difference.

Here, Ann recognized that athletics staff viewed male athletes more favorable than female athletes and treated them with a bit more respect and regard than they did with the women. She noted that athlete advisors and tutors act the same way, as if "the girls really aren't there, that they don't need your help" and advisors preferred to work with the males because they were "going places." It seems that being in a co-ed sport made Ann hypersensitive to issues of gender in sports, so much so that she found herself questioning whether these were larger Title IX issues at play.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented themes of participants' collective experiences as it related to being a Black woman student-athlete at PWIs. These four themes were as follows: "*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*", which captured participants' experiences of being an athlete in the classroom, "*I'm not like a normal person*", which captured participants'

experiences related to being a collegiate athlete at their institution, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, which captured participants’ experiences navigating different relationships and creating community within the athletic space, and “*I'll be the only Black girl?*”, which captured participants’ experiences and perceptions of how being a Black women athlete shaped their experiences. These themes, along with their accompanying subthemes, addressed both research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White, Division I institutions?
2. How do Black women student-athletes describe and perceive the intersections of their social identities as they navigate various stages of education and athletics?

These themes illustrate the shared narratives associated with being a Black woman student-athlete at a PWI. Chapter 6 will discuss the findings of this study in relation to prior literature, specifically discussing how this study supports, opposes, and/or extends prior literature on this population. Chapter 6 will also identify and share the implications of this research on future scholarship, and recommendations for practice and policy as it relates to gender equity, racial equity, and addressing intersectional issues in college sports.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This narrative study used Black feminist thought and critical race feminism to explore the college experiences and identity of Black women student-athletes at PWIs, within the context of their intersecting social identities and navigating predominantly White and male environments. The findings from this study affirm that Black women student-athletes' lived experiences are shaped by balancing academic and athletic responsibilities and expectations, navigating different relationships, and facing challenges related to their identity as Black women. This chapter includes a discussion of the major takeaways of this study, an overview of the methodological and theoretical implications of the findings, the study's contribution to scholarship on this population, and recommendations for future research, practice, and policy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and a brief conclusion.

Four Lessons

There are four major lessons to take away from this study. First, this study indicates the salience of identity in education and athletics, particularly the ways in which race shapes how Black women student-athletes interacted and engaged with their environments. Next, this study shows how creating community amongst Black women athletes and representation of Black women staff served as sites of belonging for Black women student-athletes, particularly those who competed in predominantly White sports. Third, this study demonstrates how athletic departments functioned as businesses, particularly how student-athletes' various relationships functioned in service of the business. Finally, this study affirms that there is not one single "Black athlete" experience within college sports.

Lesson 1: The Salience of Identity in Education and Athletics

The first major lesson learned from participants' lived experiences is the role and salience of identity, namely racial, throughout various stages of their academic and athletic careers. As discussed in Theme 3, "*Aren't you here to help me?*" and Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", being the only Black student in the classroom was a common experience that has been well-documented in the literature (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin et al., 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Mwangi et al., 2018; Solórzano et al., 2000). Being underrepresented in the classroom is a direct result of PWI's historical legacy of racial segregation and present-day systemic racism which limits Black youth's access to higher education. Of note is how participants of this study coped with being underrepresented. Participants retreated and/or adjusted their appearance or behavior so that they would not stand out. These coping strategies can be understood as identity negotiation, wherein Black women adjust how aspects of their identity showed up in different spaces or groups (Swann, 1987). This negotiation occurred as a result of stereotype threat (Harlow, 2003; Rockquemore, 2002; Steele, 1997; Swann, 1987) and is consistent with prior literature showing that Black students navigate stereotype threat across all levels of education (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004; 2003 Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Steele, 1997; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Watkins et al., 2010). Furthermore, as discussed in Theme 1, "*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*", participants also navigated athlete stigmatization, the process in which professors and non-athlete peers used the "dumb jock" stereotype to question student-athletes' academic abilities and their place at their institution (Simons et al., 2007), another concept that is well-documented in literature on Black athletes. However, most of the literature on athlete stigma has only explored this from the perspective of male athletes (Melendez, 2008; Griffin, 2017; Simons et al., 2007). This study contributes new

information about how athlete stigma impacts Black women student-athletes. Furthermore, this study contributes new information on the role of race and athlete stigma in STEM settings, an area that has not been studied much in recent years (Mark & Alexander, 2019). Chinenye and Zee's experiences as STEM majors are unique, especially considering that few student-athletes pursue STEM disciplines.

Race was also salient in athletic spaces for most participants. As discussed throughout Theme 3, "*Aren't you here to help me?*" and Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", race impacted the ways in which participants performed their identities in academic settings, and their levels of comfort with their coaches and teammates. This is consistent with literature that discusses the ways in which Black women student-athletes navigated interracial relationships with coaches and teammates (Carter-Francique et al., 2011, Harmon, 2009). However, this study provided new information about the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship for Black women student-athletes, an area that has received little scholarly attention. Of note, is the differential, and sometimes, preferential treatment that non-Black teammates received compared to the Black women participants in this study. This was particularly true as participants noted how differently their coaches spoke to them (e.g., changing their vernacular when speaking to Black players, being short with Black players), in comparison to their non-Black teammates.

Finally, this study was particularly interested in exploring the role of race and gender in the lived experiences of Black women student-athletes. While participants did recall experiencing gendered racism in the form of microaggressions and stereotypes in both academic and athletic settings, as discussed in Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", it seemed that participants in single gender sports (e.g., gymnastics, volleyball) did not perceive that gender alone directly influenced how they experienced being an athlete, although they noted how male

athletes in football and men's basketball were recognized and treated. Gender, specifically how participants perceived their gender impacted their experience as an athlete, was most salient for Ann, who competes in a co-ed sport. I believe the salience of gender in Ann's experience had more to do with her team's proximity to the men's program that was parallel to hers. The understated impact of gender may also be attributed to Olympic sport athletes being overrepresented in the sample, which is unique because prior studies on Black women student-athletes have typically been overrepresented with basketball and track & field athletes. The impact of gender may have been different had the sample included more participants that were in closer proximity to men's programs in the same sport.

Lesson 2: Community and Representation as Sites of Belonging

The second major lesson learned from participants' lived experiences is the role of community and representation as sites of belonging for Black women student-athletes. In Theme 3, "*Aren't you here to help me?*" and Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", participants discussed the challenges of building and navigating relationships with their non-Black coaches, teammates, and classmates. These relationships were often marked by unfulfilled expectations, differential treatment, stereotypes, and microaggressions. This is consistent with prior literature supporting that Black women student-athletes face challenges with developing relationships with teammates of a different race than them, as these relationships often include dealing with being stereotyped and/or microaggressed (Bernhard, 2014; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). The findings in these two themes also support prior literature that suggests Black women student-athletes contend with stereotypes and microaggressions in the athletic space (Cooky et al., 2010; Ferguson, 2016; Norwood et al., 2014; Simien et al., 2019; Withycombe, 2011).

Furthermore, this study extends the literature by highlighting the ways in which non-Black coaches are complicit in perpetuating stereotypes and microaggressions. While prior research found that Black women student-athletes received positive messages from and felt supported by their coaches (Carter & Hart, 2010; Cooper et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2017), findings from this study illustrate that this is not always the case. These kinds of negative experiences are particularly troubling because coaches are supposed to be sources of support and facilitators of student-athletes growth and development, not sites of harm and latent racism. Participants noted that experiencing such treatment from their peers and leaders negatively affected their sense of belonging on their teams and in their institutions. Nonetheless, in this study experiencing stereotypes and microaggressions lead participants to navigate their environments differently, such as seeking support and affirmation from outside of their sport, like Melanie did, or changing the way they spoke with their teammates, like Zee and Naomi did.

Consistent with prior literature on Black women college students and counterspaces (see Croom et al., 2017; Grier-Reed, 2010; Porter et al., 2019), participants developed both formal and informal counterspaces in which they could be in community with other Black women and cope with stereotypes and microaggressions. Informally this looked like developing smaller communities amongst their Black teammates, like Blu, Melanie, and Zee. Formally, this looked like creating groups or organizations that were meant to serve as counterspaces and sites of community building, as Andy did. While prior research has shown the ways in which formal programs and/or organizations can serve as counterspaces and sites of support, this study contributes new information about how Black women student-athletes fostered community and ultimately, developed a sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2018) defined sense of belonging as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the

experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers” (p. 4). As discussed in Theme 3, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, participants such as Ann, Melanie, Zee and Blu, created smaller communities within their teams and their athletic departments, in which they felt cared for, accepted, respected, and valued.

Black women professionals who supported the participants in various ways were also sites of belonging. Prior research found that the lack of Black women professors, coaches, and staff contributes to Black women student-athletes’ isolation on their campuses, lack of mentorship opportunities, and made them feel as though decisions were made without their best interests in mind (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). Participants in this study, however, did have access to Black women professionals who supported them in a number of ways. For example, as discussed in the *advisors* subtheme of Theme 3, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, Black women professionals supported participants as they selected classes, made plans to graduate early, and facilitated their personal development. These findings affirm the significance of representation in Black students’ success. This is important because as mentioned in Chapter 1, Black professionals, broadly, and Black women, specifically, are underrepresented in administration and coaching positions within college sports (NCAA, 2020b). This study shows that despite this underrepresentation, Black students and professionals are still finding and “retaining each other” (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005, p. 223).

Lesson 3: Athletic Departments’ Functions as a Large Business

Prior literature has documented the ways in which college sports function less as an educational institution, and more as an enterprise driven by capitalism (Hawkins, 2010; Shulman & Bowen, 2011; Van Rhee, 2013). Gayles et al. (2018) wrote,

The impressive (albeit questionable) commercial success of the nonprofit NCAA and its member institutions has enabled disproportionately (privileged) White athletics power brokers (e.g., coaches, athletic directors, conference commissioners, and externalities such as sponsors) to reap the material benefits from this athletics enterprise, enriching themselves on the sweat and undercompensated athletic labor of often disadvantaged and predominantly Black male athletes. (p. 12)

This critique of college sports concludes that the quest for money overshadows the importance of the human experience. Athletic capitalism often leaves Black men in the sports of men's basketball and football underprepared for life outside of sport, many of whom leave college without a degree after competing in college sports that generate a great deal of revenue from their labor (Gayles et al., 2018). Much of the literature on college sports as a capitalist-driven operation has focused on the revenue generators, men's basketball and football, and predominantly Black men who are responsible for bringing athletic departments millions of dollars each year (Hawkins, 2010). Women's programs are often left out of this analysis. What this study adds to the literature are the ways in which athletic departments function to sustain the college sports enterprise, from the perspective of Black women. Namely, how different relationships that Black women student-athletes have with different stakeholders within athletics, and how they contributed to keeping the business running like a well-oiled machine, without much consideration to the overall health, well-being, and fair treatment of Black women student-athletes. To further demonstrate this, I introduce a workplace analogy in which the participants were the laborers/employees, their sport was the workplace, and how different relationships within the workplace function in service of the business.

Theme 3, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, detailed the complex relationships that participants had with advisors, coaches, and teammates. Across these relationships, participants had some level of consciousness as to how these relationships functioned in service of the business. Athletic advisors advised participants to pursue “easy” courses, discouraged them from time-consuming academic pursuits, were only responsive when inquiring about course performance, and participated in hyper-surveillance practices. Prior research confirms that athletic advisors have influence over what courses and disciplines a student-athlete will pursue (Davis & Jowett, 2014) and the aforementioned examples highlight the negative aspects of this influence. These actions align with the idea of maintaining student-athletes’ academic eligibility with the NCAA in order to compete. Taking certain courses and majoring in certain disciplines make it easier for students to remain eligible. This makes it easier for athletic advisors to track and ensure their “progress” and eligibility, and thus, helps the advisors keep their jobs. This practice is called “academic clustering”, defined as a large number of student-athletes, usually 25-30% from a single team, being enrolled in certain courses or certain degree programs (Case et al., 2017). While prior research suggests that academic advisors are critical in supporting Black women student-athletes as they navigate the college environment (Carter & Hart, 2010; Cooper et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2017), the findings of this study provide multiple examples of athletic advisors working in service of the business because academically eligible student-athletes means there are laborers available to ensure that the money continues coming. The complicity of athletic advisors is documented in prior literature (Case et al., 2017; Castle et al., 2014; Paule-Koba, 2019), and in several academic scandals, such as the University of North Carolina’s “paper classes” debacle (Ganim & Bayers, 2014).

Relationships with coaches also functioned in service of the business. While Theme 2, *“I’m not like a normal person”*, and Theme 3, *“Aren’t you here to help me?”*, documented some rewarding aspects being an athlete and having positive coach-athlete relationships, there were many stories in which participants shared the belief that they were recruited because of their race and physique, differential treatment than non-Black teammates, being reminded that they will not play, or continue to receive their scholarship money, if they do not perform well and failed to meet unspoken expectations, and being subject to hyper-surveillance. All of these scenarios exemplify the disposability and replaceability of the collegiate athlete, which has fueled the college sports enterprise for years on end (Hawkins, 2010, Gayles et al., 2018). For Black athletes, disposability looks like “possessing value only relative to the interests of primarily White athletic stakeholders” (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020). Disposability also looks like Black student-athletes being under-prepared to pursue careers outside of playing sports upon graduation, while their coaches and institutions go on to recruit new talent and continue generating revenue (Comeaux, 2018). The latter examples even reinforce the idea of college sports as an athletic capitalist enterprise in which playing time is not rooted in equal opportunity, but rather a decision point determining what will lead to the most wins and more money (Gayles et al., 2018). To further equate the coach-athlete relationship stories that were shared to the supervisor-employee relationships in the workplace, the scenarios shared are commonplace for Black women in a variety of professional settings (Hall et al., 2012; Holder et al., 2015; Kennelly, 1999; Wingfield, 2007). This study demonstrates that the coach-athlete relationship functions as more of a supervisor-employee relationship than a teacher-student relationship, further reinforcing the idea that athletic departments are run as a business.

Furthermore, relationships with non-Black teammates functioned like an employee's relationship with their coworkers. Yes, participants created smaller communities within their teams, but they quickly realized that they would not get along with everyone in the same way. In this study, non-Black teammates were complicit in perpetuating a number of stereotypes and microaggressions, whether intentional or unintentional. This is a common experience for Black women in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015; Wingfield, 2007). Similarly, participants in the study intentionally built community with Black teammates and professionals, in the same way that Black women in professional settings do (West, 2017, 2019). Like any other workplace, relationships with co-workers vary from being transactional, to being meaningful bonds that transcended the workplace. Furthermore, participants in the study believed that coaches did not consider team chemistry or dynamics when recruiting, especially if the prospective recruit was highly sought after. This is yet another example of how teammate relationships functioned in the service of the big business enterprise. The primary function of these relationships was not always to forge lasting bonds with peers, but to work alongside each other in pursuit of athletic excellence, which meant more money for coaches, the department, the business. Essentially more money for stakeholders, except the student-athlete.

Finally, as evidenced in Theme 2, *"I'm not like a normal person"*, participants were acutely aware of the ways in which their role as college athletes also meant they were public figures, role models, and representatives of their athletic department, whether they wanted to be or not. Participants recalled having their social media and behavior surveilled, having fans, and the business aspects of the college sports enterprise affecting how they performed in different settings. An example of the latter point is Melanie's athletic department telling student-athletes not to talk about the police shooting an unarmed Black man on their social media and asking

them not to participate in local protests. These stories explained how collegiate athletes are being watched by fans/consumers, coaches, and administrators. Afshar (2014) wrote,

College athletes fall under this category of ‘public figures’ because they are on television on a weekly basis; the public [recognizes] them on the streets; and their jersey numbers are a representation of each individual player, linked directly to them and sold in stores. Collegiate athletes are public figures, as per the definition laid out by the Supreme Court, but such individuals’ statuses as amateurs directly [contradict] the rights afforded to professionals deemed public figures. (p. 121)

Participants discussed experiencing most of the phenomena described in this quote, further demonstrating how their status as an employee is reinforced by their public persona and figure status.

Participants’ relationships with advisors, coaches, teammates, and the public exemplified how their athletic departments functioned as a workplace and how student-athletes were pseudo-employees in this business. Again, while it is well-documented how college sports function as a money-making enterprise, this is often from the perspectives of the exploitation and unpaid labor of Black men, lavish salaries, and the facilities arms race. These concepts are all external manifestations of the business aspects of college sports. This workplace analogy contributes new information about how different interpersonal relationships within athletic departments function to sustain the business and ultimately, the flow of personal income and departmental revenue, all at the expense of student-athletes academic success, mental health, and sense of belonging.

Lesson 4: There is no single “Black Student-Athlete Experience”

This study’s findings exemplify that Black student-athletes are not a monolith. This is particularly true when considering differences across gender within the Black student-athlete

population. Findings of this study as well as each of the lessons in this chapter highlight how participants' experiences extended and differed from existing scholarly narratives of how Black student-athletes and Black male student-athletes experience college. An example of how this study extended this narrative can be found in Theme 1, "*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*", wherein participants discussed their academic aspirations. Advanced undergraduates and former student-athletes in this study discussed the ways in which they leveraged or were leveraging their athletic scholarships to obtain both undergraduate and graduate degrees. This finding extends existing scholarship, which found that student-athletes' intentionally used their athletic scholarships to obtain multiple degrees (Haslerig, 2013, 2017, 2020). This prior scholarship, however, exclusively explored how Division 1 football players have leveraged their scholarship to obtain both undergraduate and graduate degrees. The present study extends such work by highlighting this phenomenon from the perspective of Black women student-athletes.

Additionally, another way in which this study confirmed that there is no single "Black student-athlete experience" is in regard to how Black women student-athletes experienced the athletic environment as a whole. As discussed in Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", participants were subjected to stereotypes and microaggressions at the hands of their teammates and coaches. In most cases, these stereotypes and microaggressions were not only informed by racism; but gendered racism (Essed, 1991). Some noticed differences in how they were treated versus how White women athletes and male athletes were treated. Additionally, athletic advisors underestimated participants' ability to excel in rigorous disciplines and on the playing field simultaneously, and thus, encouraged participants to select courses and majors that were of no interest to them, and did not stimulate or engage them in meaningful ways. These experiences

were likened to the workplace analogy in Lesson 3: Athletic Departments' Functions as a Large Business, and they also provide a different insight into what exploitation looks like for Black women student-athletes.

Exploitation in college sports is typically discussed with regard to the unpaid Black men in football and men's basketball players who generate millions of dollars in revenue for their athletic departments (Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2012; Murty et al., 2014; Van Rheenen, 2013). Billy Hawkins (2010) described this model as "the new plantation" (p. 55). Few scholars have captured what this exploitation looks like for Black women student-athletes. While "the new plantation", or exploitation in college sports exists for Black male student-athletes at the economic level, I argue that exploitation exists for Black women student-athletes at the interpersonal level. Branaman (1997) defined relationships of interpersonal exploitation as ones in which "one or more of the participants derives distorted power or value from relating to another as a subordinate/dominant...one person's power and status depends upon adopting a stance of superiority in relation to another whom he/she psychologically exploits and falsely devalues" (p. 22). Coaches used differential treatment and their positions of leadership, and thus power, to put down and devalue participants, which made participants question their athletic ability, as Melanie and Blu did. Coaches and teammates used stereotypes and microaggressions to call attention to the ways in which participants were different, outsiders, and essentially treated as less than their peers. These acts ultimately enforced the coaches' and teammates' superiority, while devaluing participants and reinforcing their mythical subordination. By encouraging participants to pursue majors that prioritized academic eligibility over academic growth and development, athletic advisors devalued participants, while reinforcing the power they held in shaping student-athletes' lived experiences. This study demonstrates that

exploitation in college sports is not exclusive to Black men in revenue-generating sports and it is uniquely experienced by different populations of marginalized student-athletes.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

The counternarratives presented in Chapter 4 align with counterstorytelling methodology as they highlight the ways in which Black women student-athlete's challenged dominant narratives regarding what it is like to be a Black woman and athlete. Many times, Black women athlete's narratives are written *for* them, not often *by* them or *with* them. When situated within BFT, each woman had a very unique journey into their sport. Each woman experienced racialized and gendered stereotypes and microaggressions, or *controlling images*, in various academic, athletic, and social contexts (Collins, 2000). Each woman shared distinctive stories related to how they interacted and developed relationships with teammates, coaches, athletic administrators, and faculty and staff outside of athletics. These counternarratives of identity can be understood as contributing to the heterogenous Black women's standpoint.

From the lens of CRF, most participants explicitly mentioned the ways in which race and/or gender influenced how they described and "performed" their identities, and how they experienced sport and academics throughout various points in their lives. Of note were other salient identities that arose, namely ethnicity and class. These identities manifested in how they defined themselves, as well as in how they described their access to certain sports and all levels of education. Ultimately, these counternarratives represented the lived implications of intersectionality and further rejected the notion of essentialism, as the participants' identity-based experiences varied across class, ethnicity, geographic location, and sport.

Furthermore, the four major themes described in Chapter 5 map on to the study's theoretical frameworks in a number of distinct ways. Relative to BFT, the findings illustrate

three of the four concepts that were discussed in Chapter 2 including: *Outsider-within* status, which refers to the social location of Black women in America's racial hierarchy (Collins, 2000), which is best illustrated in Theme 1, "*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*", Theme 3, "*Aren't you here to help me?*", and Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*" Although participants had achieved access to higher education, space historically reserved for people with some form of privilege, they were made to feel like outsiders in a variety of ways, by a variety of people. Within their campus environments, they were stereotyped, microaggressed, treated differently than their peers, and made to feel as though they did not belong, both intentionally and unintentionally. The *matrix of domination*, which refers to a paradigm that explains how intersecting forms of oppression are created and maintained (Collins, 2000), is best illustrated in Ann's discussion of gender-based treatment in Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*" Ann's explanation that the men's team received preferential treatment despite having little athletic success illustrated how women's oppression in sports is maintained. Despite the men's teams' lack of success, they would always be viewed as the priority and preferred over the women's teams, and the women's teams would always have to fight for scraps. Finally, *controlling images*, or longstanding images based on racist and sexist notions that incorrectly represent a group of people (Collins, 2000), were best illustrated in the discussions of athletic and racial stigma in Theme 1, "*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*", and stereotypes and microaggressions in Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*" In both cases, controlling images followed participants into different academic and athletic settings and shaped the ways they behaved and how they were treated. In sum, these findings illustrate several concepts and the various experiences of Black women that are essential to major assumptions of BFT. These stories are drawn from participants' lived experiences, reflections, and observations

from their time as student-athletes. Although I've weaved these stories together in a narrative manner, the participants were still very much the experts of their own experience.

To CRF, these findings exemplify the ways in which intersectionality and anti-essentialism manifested in the individual lives and collective experiences of participants. Intersectionality, which provides a lens for examining inequitable and oppressive structures and barriers that shape the lived experiences of people who hold multiple marginalized social identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), is illustrated throughout this study. For example, lack of access to certain sports as a youth, as Andy and Melanie discussed, and their institutions' historical legacies of exclusion were inequitable and oppressive barriers that led to them being underrepresented on their teams and within their universities (Carter & Hawkins, 2011; Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Harvey et al., 2004; Thornhill, 2018). Being surveilled by coaches and advisors more closely than other groups of athletes, as Ann, Melanie, and Zee discussed, was an inequitable and oppressive barrier that influenced how participants navigated different academic and athletic spaces (Bruening, 2004; Comeaux, 2018). For Chinenye, Zee, Melanie, and Ann, athlete stigma, or the belief that athletes are "dumb jocks" (Simons et al., 2007) and racial stereotypes of Black people's "innate athletic ability" and academic inferiority (Bruening, 2005; Comeaux, 2010; Harrison et al., 2009), were inequitable and oppressive barriers that shaped participants' academic experiences and interactions with professors, classmates, and advisors. Navigating stereotypes and microaggressions related to their skin tone, physical appearance, and behavior, as most participants discussed, were inequitable and oppressive barriers that impacted the ways in which participants interacted with others and performed their identities in different spaces (Domingue, 2015; Ferguson, 2016; Lewis et al., 2016; Rockquemore, 2002; Withycombe, 2011). While there were several experiences that participants shared, there were many that were

unique to one or just a few participants. In regard to anti-essentialism, they exemplify the unique experiences related to being a Black woman student-athlete, rejecting the essentialist notion that there is a singular “Black athlete” or “woman athlete” experience (Grillo, 1995).

Furthermore, in this study, the photovoice activity provided participants with the opportunity to express themselves in a manner that was distinctly different than just participating in an interview. The photos opened up new windows into their lives and introduced significant moments and relationships that were important pieces of their college experiences. They facilitated insightful dialogue about identity and sense of belonging and allowed participants to recall and reflect on several years of memories. As such, future research should mobilize photovoice methodology to gain an additional layer of understanding to how Black women student-athletes make sense of their college experiences. Contemporary methodologies, such as photovoice and sista circles, mitigate unequal power dynamics that are present in more traditional forms of data collection and lends itself to being social justice and equity-focused (Chapmen & DeCuir-Gunby, 2019; Huber, 2008). Scholars should continue to use these methodologies, as they allow the participants the opportunity to be active and engaged contributors to the research process. Scholars should also discover new ways to incorporate photos into their final research product(s), while protecting participants and third parties in the photos.

Finally, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are also of note. I initially planned to conduct interviews and sista circles in-person. Stay-at-home orders forced me to conduct data collection over Zoom. Moving to the virtual platform meant I was no longer location bound and I was able to recruit participants across multiple institutions. This served me and participants in the sista circles because they got to meet Black women student-athletes who attended other

universities, bond, and in some cases commiserate, over similar experiences, and offer advice and support to help each other. Additionally, without the concern of having to reserve private rooms for limited amounts of time, I was able to have conversations with participants that were not constrained by time limits. Scholars should continue to explore how to use technology to make research participation more accessible.

Implications for Future Research

While this study did uncover several relevant insights regarding how Black women student-athletes experience predominantly White and male college and athletic environments, it unearthed several areas for future research to explore. Research on Black women in college is a seemingly understudied topic, with Black women athletes being a significantly understudied group within this population. More research needs to be done to better understand how these women experience college, and what challenges they face in academic, athletic, and social spaces. In the same ways that researchers investigate the challenges Black men and White women athletes face related to their race and gender, researchers must keep that same energy for understudied populations and think more critically about who is being excluded when they fail to use an intersectional approach to their research.

Additionally, BFT contends that the Black women's standpoint is not homogenous. If scholars and practitioners truly value inclusion and equity, then a more deliberate effort should be made to study and understand Black women student-athletes' experiences, in order to uncover what kind of support they need to be successful on their campuses. Future research should continue to explore the experiences of Black women student-athletes at PWIs, and also the experiences of Black women student-athletes at HBCUs. Black womens' participation in college sports began at HBCUs, and prior literature suggests that Black student-athletes fare better in

areas of academic achievement and social engagement and belonging at HBCUs compared to PWIs (Cooper, 2018; Cooper & Dougherty, 2015). Additionally, this study focused specifically on Division I institutions, particularly because this division represents the most competitive and publicized aspects of college sports (Gayles et al., 2018). However, Black women student-athletes still make up 6% of Division II student-athletes, and 3% of Division III student-athletes (NCAA, 2020b). Certain aspects of Division I life, namely those discussed in Theme 1, “*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*”, and Theme 2, “*I'm not like a normal person*”, may not be as relevant for a Division II or III student-athlete. However, the issues discussed in Chapter 1, namely underrepresentation, differential treatment, and intersectionality, could be present across all divisions. Further, these concerns may be exacerbated by the lack of capital and resources present at Division II and III institutions. Future research should explore Black women student-athletes' experiences across these two divisions of the NCAA.

Furthermore, this study explored the identity-based experiences of Black women student-athletes, particularly how their Black womanhood shaped the ways in which they navigated predominantly White and male environments. The findings of this study present a number of ideas for future research. For example, the postgraduate life and aspirations subtheme of Theme 1, “*They care about the GPA, but it can't conflict with practice*”, uncovered how Black women student-athletes were thinking about and preparing for life after sport. Future research should explore the career development and transitions of Black women student-athletes. Theme 2, “*I'm not like a normal person*”, and Theme 3, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, described how Black women student-athletes engaged with the business aspects of college sports, and how their relationships functioned in service of the “athletic capitalist enterprise” (Gayles et al., 2018). Future research should continue to explore the location of Black women within the

college sports enterprise, uncovering how different relationships within the enterprise could move from sites of interpersonal exploitation toward ones in which student-athletes are receiving adequate social support and mentorship. Theme 3, “*Aren't you here to help me?*”, also discussed how Black women student-athletes created community and ultimately sense of belonging. Both topics are of particular significance given the stories that were shared in Theme 4, “*I'll be the only Black girl?*” (e.g., being racially underrepresented, dealing with stereotypes and microaggressions). Future research should examine the factors that contribute to sense of belonging for Black women student-athletes, and how Black women student-athletes foster and sustain community in athletic spaces.

Finally, as scholars are tackling the research problems outlined in the section, they should consider how their scholarship can influence practice. Some additional praxis questions that arose from the findings of this study include: How can athletic advisors better support Black women student-athletes with STEM aspirations? How can athletics staff create dialogue about social issues? How can athletics staff create opportunities for mentorship and community-building amongst Black women student-athletes? How can athletic departments educate White coaches and teammates in areas of cultural competency, inclusion, and anti-racism so that Black student-athletes and other student-athletes of color are not subjected to stereotypes and microaggressions? These questions can help scholars as they consider how their scholarship can create more inclusive and equitable environments in college sports. These are also the questions that shape the recommendations that are discussed in the next section.

Recommendations for Programming, Practice, and Policy

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study bears significance for practitioners and policymakers. In addition to questions about their experiences, I also asked participants to share

recommendations on how athletics and academic personnel can better support Black women and girls in sports. Based on these findings, I present the following recommendations for programming, practice, and policy.

Youth Programs

The counternarratives of Chapter 4 shared how multiple participants noted the expenses and affordability of their sport as they were first beginning to play. Andy even inferred that her sport is predominantly White because of lack of affordability. Participants who shared these sentiments competed in gymnastics and volleyball. The NCAA (2019) found that across the majority of women's sports, most recruited athletes competed on both clubs and their high school teams. The only exceptions were golf and track & field, as majority of recruits in these sports only played on their high school teams. As discussed in Chapter 1, Black women are oversaturated in basketball and track & field, two sports that research asserts are amongst the most affordable and accessible for Black girls and other girls of color (Bruening et al., 2008a; Bruening et al., 2008b; Smith, 1992). While this oversaturation is a result of being socialized, or learning to behave or interact with society in a certain way, into these sports by parents and family, their environments, and sports media (Bruening et al., 2008a; Bruening et al., 2008b), it also has something to do with affordability and thus, access. Smith (1992) wrote that many low-income families of color cannot afford "elite sporting experiences" (p. 236) and as such "their children must participate in stereotypical, 'popular' sports such as basketball and track and field or not participate in at all in organized sports" (p. 236). To further illustrate, a participant in Perkins and Partridge's (2014) study, which explored Black mothers' perceptions of their daughters' sports participation, said "affordability is a big thing for the not-so-privileged. And a lot of people generalize sports as White sports and Black sports, and I think affordability has a

big reason to do with it” (p. 167). If young Black girls cannot afford to participate in sports that require gym and club memberships, additional training sessions, their access to sports that require such amenities is limited. Access of low-income student-athletes will be limited to sports that do not require significant expenses, and sports that are readily available in their local schools.

Youth sports is an estimated \$17 billion industry (WinterGreen Research, 2018). Furthermore, USA Today found that families spend between \$1500 to \$5000 for their children to compete in “high-level club programs,” some with hopes of their children getting recruited to play at the next level (e.g., college, professionally) and/or strengthening their college applications (Lyell, 2019; Gardner et al., 2020; Trouman & Dufur, 2007). A participant in Perkins et al.’s (2014) study said “if you want Black girls to play sports, make it affordable. That way everybody gets to play and it don't separate the Black kids with money from the poor ones” (p. 167). The youth sports industry must evaluate the ways in which they use capitalism to limit access and function as a site of privilege. If the true purpose of youth sports programs is to promote health and wellness, increase self-esteem, and teach young people about the values of discipline and teamwork (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2007), programs must reevaluate how charging \$5000 a year accomplishes these goals. As it stands, it seems like these programs line the pockets of the program administrators, while leaving youth from low-income backgrounds with limited opportunities to compete in a diverse array of sports. Because most women student-athletes played club sports, youth sports may also function as a method of limiting access to higher education opportunities.

Programming

This study presented narratives that highlighted ways in which PWIs are not inclusive spaces for Black women student-athletes. This section outlines different programs and initiatives practitioners can implement to better serve and support this population and make the college environment more inclusive for Black women student-athletes, and other underrepresented populations of student-athletes.

As discussed in Theme 3, *“Aren't you here to help me?”* and Theme 4, *“I'll be the only Black girl?”*, although many of the participants noted that their coaches, teammates, and institutions were not blatantly or intentionally prejudice, their actions were racist. This suggests that there is a lack of racial awareness and understanding within their athletic departments. This translated to student-athletes being subject to racist comments and microaggressions at the hands of people who are unaware of the harm and weight of their words. Thus, it is important for departments to develop programming that holds the purpose of increasing racial awareness for all coaches and student-athletes. Such programming should not only center racial education and awareness, but also thrive to create anti-racist allies in non-Black student-athletes, coaches, and administrators. While the prevalence of student-athlete led activism on college campuses following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor is a positive sign that Black student-athletes are using their economic power to demand change within their institutions, those who serve and support athletes must understand the influence they hold in shaping student-athletes futures' and perceptions of themselves.

Furthermore, as discussed in Theme 3, *“Aren't you here to help me?”*, participants noted feelings related to being the only or one of few Black women on their teams, and isolation from other Black women student-athletes as a result. Andy took action by creating a support group for

Black women and other women of color. This support structure is on par with other institutional initiatives, such as Sista-to-Sista, a “co-curricular leadership development program designed to foster a sense of connectedness amongst Black female collegiate athletes” (Carter-Francique et al., 2017, p. 22), which was started by Drs. Akilah Carter-Francique and Deniece Dortch, and the Black Athlete Sister Circle that was started by Dr. Tomika Ferguson. These programs center the personal, social, and professional development of Black women student-athletes. They serve as a counterspace in which Black women student-athletes can find support amongst each other and develop skills that will prepare them for the world outside of intercollegiate athletics.

Finally, in Theme 4, *“I’ll be the only Black girl?”*, some participants noted the lack of attention to intersectionality in different programming and conversations within their athletic departments. Student-athlete development curriculum must incorporate programming which not only addresses diversity and inclusion, but also considers intersecting identities. For Black women student-athletes, this looks like incorporating the perspectives of Black women in different programs related to academic topics, such as career development, and other programming, like health and wellness. This may also look like developing peer mentorship programming and other formal counterspaces, such as the ones discussed in the previous paragraphs, wherein Black women can connect, learn from each other and create community. Prior research supports that these spaces exclusively designed for underrepresented students, such as Black women, can be critical sites of belonging and retention (Harris & Patton, 2017; Patton, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).

Practice

During data collection participants were asked to share recommendations for how faculty and staff inside and outside of athletics can support all student-athletes. Many of these

recommendations were related to how these practitioners' "practice", meaning the application of their advising support or teaching methods, "how" they do their jobs and how it affects student-athletes' success and the relationship between the athlete and staff member. Participants called for athletics and academic staff to be more empathetic to both the demands of being a student-athlete and the struggles associated with being Black in America. In regards to the demands of student-athlete life, participants called for staff and professors to be more conscious of their mental strain and time demands. In regards to being Black in America, participants called for practitioners and their universities to be more outspoken on issues of racism and harm done to Black students and communities.

Theme 4, "*I'll be the only Black girl?*", shared how participants perceived their athletic departments responses to the murders of the Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor during the summer of 2020. Many athletic departments released public statements in which they denounced systemic racism and police brutality, affirmed that Black lives mattered, and committed to being more inclusive, and even anti-racist. Black student-athlete organizations formed on campuses across the country both as a result of these murders and some as a result of their leadership's inaction to creating inclusive spaces for Black student-athletes. What my participants asked for is that athletic leadership take an outspoken stance on issues of social justice without regard to how fans or donors will respond and support student-athletes who choose to use their platforms to speak out as well. Many student-athletes demonstrated a willingness to no longer participate in donor (e.g., donor dinners, mixers) or recruiting events (e.g., hosting prospective student-athletes) if things did not begin to change (Blinder & Witz, 2020; Hale, 2020; Kartje, 2020; Sykes, 2020). For example, student-athletes at the University of Texas at Austin called for their institution to rename campus buildings that were named after

racist figures and discontinue a school spirit song that had “racist undertones”, among other demands (Blinder & Witz, 2020). The institution agreed to rename buildings but refuse to discontinue the spirit song. Wealthy alumni and donors threatening to pull donations is believed to be a large reason why they would not let go of the song (McGee, 2021). Athletic leadership must begin placing the health and well-being of their student-athletes above the interests of wealthy donors and revenue generation. These demands are ultimately a call for athletic leadership to recognize student-athletes personhood outside of playing their sports.

Ultimately, these “practice” recommendations align with the idea of caring for the “whole person”, beyond their roles as students and athletes. Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the two largest organizations for student affairs practitioners, outlined seven principles of “good student affairs practice”: active learning, value and ethical standards, high expectations, systematic inquiry, effective utilization of resources, educational partnerships, and supportive and inclusive communities (Blimberg & Whitt, 1998). These principles largely cover how to facilitate learning and what opportunities student affairs professionals should create for students. However, I invite practitioners to consider an additional principle that involves developing relationships with students that center compassion and empathy. This new principle would align with Black feminist epistemology’s ethic of caring. Carter-Francique (2013, 2014) argued that integrating an ethic of care into practice and programming supports the developmental needs of Black women student-athletes in both academic and social settings. An ethic of caring coupled with the seven aforementioned principles of student affairs practice could help practitioners create safe spaces in which Black women student-athletes can be their whole selves. This can be formal settings, such as *sista circles* or spaces such as the one Andy created for women of color athletes are her

institution, or informal spaces, such as an advising office and/or professor office hours. The latter recommendation again calls on practitioners in both athletic and academic settings to reevaluate their “practice”.

Finally, as practitioners and consumers, we must remember that our student-athletes are more than entertainers. In the stories shared in Theme 2, “*I’m not like a normal person*”, participants talked about receiving negative responses from their fans who wanted them to “shut up and play” on social media during the summer of 2020. In September 2020, Dr. Matthew Mayhew wrote an op-ed suggesting that playing college football during a global health pandemic would be an effective way of unifying the country as the 2020 Presidential election approached. This was poorly received because college football is overrepresented by Black men. College sports have a longstanding history of exploiting Black athletes’ unpaid labor, and Black communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. If nothing else, 2020 was a reminder that student-athletes are human, and just as important, *students*. Any suggestion that student-athletes should be silent and place their bodies on the line to entertain the masses is dehumanizing.

Policy and Organizational Structure

Finally, policy shapes the context and the environments that exist within college and athletic spaces. Policies such as the ones mentioned in Chapter 2 (e.g., Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1965, and the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*) have led to major strides in access to higher education and college sports, particularly for Black students and women students. These policies, however, fall short of addressing intersectional issues in college sports, issues that manifest themselves in the lived experiences of Black women student-athletes, as noted in Theme 4, “*I’ll be the only Black girl?*”. This study provided insight into the ways in

which the experiences of Black women student-athletes differ from those within dominant narratives of “women athletes” and “Black athletes”. As discussed in Theme 4, *“I’ll be the only Black girl?”*, some participants felt that Title IX issues arose in regard to access to facilities and certain perks. With the 50th anniversary of Title IX swiftly approaching, policymakers and athletic administrators must evaluate how the scope of Title IX needs to evolve to be more considerate of race in college sports, the facilities arm’s race which has benefitted men’s programs far more than it has women’s programs, the commercialization of college sports and how it has increased the visibility of and access to men’s competitions much more than it has women’s competitions. Many of these current gender issues could not have been predicted 50 years ago, which is why it is important to update policies to accurately reflect the current landscape. Furthermore, athletic departments must reimagine what Title IX enforcement looks like on their campus, particularly as it relates to access to facilities and certain perks.

Chesler and Crowfoot (1989) explained that an organization’s values are reflected in their mission and vision, culture, structures, and resources. Thus, for an athletic department to truly value diversity, inclusion, and equity, which will in turn support the growth and retention of Black women student-athletes, it must start by reevaluating departmental structures. Major structural changes can be made through the development and implementation of policy. Of the many issues participants’ discussed in regard to how their athletic departments currently function, a few reoccurred across all participants.

Theme 4, *“I’ll be the only Black girl?”*, highlighted that many participants were critical of their athletic departments handling issues of diversity and inclusion, namely their responses to police brutality and systemic racism against Black people and other communities of color. Athletic departments must invest in prioritizing diversity and inclusion in their mission and

values, hiring and socialization practices of current and new staff, and incorporating these topics in the student-athlete development curriculum. I propose the following recommendations for accomplishing this. To make these concepts organizational values, athletic departments should adopt written diversity and inclusion statements to be shared on their website, with their staff, and with student-athletes. These statements must move beyond defining these concepts and affirm that these are values that are (or will be) considered and/or inherit in every decision made, from staff hiring to student-athlete recruiting. To further affirm this commitment, athletic departments should adopt chief diversity, inclusion, and equity personnel that is responsible for ensuring that this statement moves beyond espoused and toward enacted values and hold the department accountable.

Secondly, performative values have been a convenient way for athletic departments to mobilize their espoused values when it serves their public image. For example, Melanie explained that she was the “go-to” student-athlete for her university. While it is likely that this was the case because Melanie was both an exemplary student, and athlete, it is also possible that being a Black woman from a predominantly White team and sport, at a predominantly White institution played a role in why she was tapped for public engagement opportunities. Andy noted that her institution often used Black student-athletes in promotional materials to “prove [they] aren't racist and [they] do have Black people.” Tokenism, or the practice of increasing visibility of underrepresented populations (Kanter, 1977), is a very common and performative method of projecting a more diverse and inclusive environment. The problem with tokenism is that its performative nature is only enacted when an organizations’ values and actions are questioned. Athletic departments must move beyond performance and toward a transformative organizational structure and environment in which these values are inherit within every practice and policy

within the organization. Employing the aforementioned recommendations would take some foundational and transformative steps in the right direction.

Thirdly, because many participants discussed experiencing differential treatment, stereotypes and microaggressions at the hands of coaches and teammates, athletic departments should prioritize cultural competency and anti-racist education in orientations, or other socialization practices of new students and staff. New and current athletics staff and administrators should be required to complete some form of interactive, anti-racist education during their onboarding and at the beginning of every academic year. Furthermore, multiple participants discussed the underrepresentation of Black women on their coaching and administrative staffs within their athletic departments. They also acknowledged the significance of having someone who looks like them to support them through various athletic and academic challenges (e.g., having Black women advisors or coaches). Thus, student-athletes should be included on hiring committees for new coaches and administrators within their athletic departments, to ensure that the student perspective is considered when selecting staff members who will work closely or in service of student-athletes. This could be a measure of ensuring not only racial and/or gender representation, but ensuring alignment of values, leadership style, etc. This practice is not new in higher education. In fact, Barden (2017) wrote this on why students' input is valuable on a search committee:

They represent the institution as it is experienced in real time. They feel its heartbeat. They get the most important and elusive factor in any search: fit. Students are seldom so swayed by credentials and interview performance that they don't see straight through to the heart of the matter ... and of the candidate. They very often know when someone will — or will not — fit with the ethos and environment of the institution.

These recommendations can all be written into an athletic department's bylaws, policies and procedures to ensure that they are lasting and enforceable.

Finally, conversations about compensating student-athletes have reached the national stage. In 2019, California passed the Fair Pay to Play Act, legislation that will allow student-athletes in the state to make money off of their name, image, and likeness (NIL) beginning in 2023 (Murphy, 2020). Shortly after, the NCAA began exploring similar NIL legislation that would be applicable across all member institutions (Young, 2019). While these conversations are still up in the air within the NCAA, NIL legislation has since garnered the attention of the U.S. Senate (Berkowitz, 2020) and the Supreme Court (Barnes & Maese, 2020). What's unclear about these new developments for student athlete's compensation are the implications of gender. Any conversations about student-athlete compensation that does not consider how the market will be equally beneficial across gender, race, and intersections of these identities, will ultimately do more harm than good. Although there are few women's athletic programs that are revenue-generating, women deserve the same opportunities to earn money off of their labor. If there is any question about women collegiate athletes' ability to monetize their name and likeness, look no further than the athletes on UCLA's gymnastics team and past and current athletes on the University of South Carolina women's basketball team.

Background "Revisited" and Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduced three problems that warranted this study: 1) the (under)representation of Black women student-athletes, particularly those at Division I institutions, 2) inequities and differential treatment that exist within sports, and 3) the implications of intersectionality in intercollegiate athletics. The findings of this study highlighted 1) the impacts of being underrepresented in their classrooms, athletic teams, and within their

athletic departments, 2) the differential treatment participants experienced and witnessed within different athletics environments, and 3) the lived implications of intersectionality in the form of gendered racism impacting their interactions. The results of this study suggest that Black women student-athletes' experiences at PWIs are informed by both race and gender. With the 50th anniversary of the passage of Title IX quickly approaching, practitioners, scholars, and policymakers must reflect on how the needle of gender equity in college sports has both shifted and remained the same in the last 50 years, particularly in regard to Black women and other women of color's access to and lived experiences within college sports. The findings of this study can be used by practitioners to inform their programming and support for Black women student-athletes, by scholars to inform future research on this population and similar populations, and policymakers to inform policies concerning gender and racial equity. Until then, Black women student-athletes will continue to excel academically and athletically, despite inhabiting environments that were built to exclude them and often do not have the support structures to support their personal development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Online Screening Survey

Please complete the following electronic form if you are interested in participating in a research study about your experiences as a Black woman student-athlete. Please answer questions honestly, as a diversity of backgrounds and experiences will help enrich the results of this research.

Please complete the below screening survey that will determine your eligibility to participate in this research. Depending on interest, I may not be able to include everyone who wants to participate. If you are chosen to participate, you will participate in a sista circle (a discussion with other current or former Black women athletes), take pictures and audio as part of a research activity, and do a personal interview with the researcher. If you qualify and complete all of the study activities, you will receive a \$20 gift card via email, as a small token of the researcher's appreciation.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact the researcher, Ezinne Ofoegbu, at eofogb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465. You can also contact the faculty advisor for the protocol, Dr. Joy Gayles, at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

I am at least 18 years of age:

- Yes
- No

(If respondent is under age 18, the survey will end here with the following message: "Thank you for your interest in the current research project, but you are ineligible to participate." If the respondent is above age 18, the survey will proceed to next page with the following questions)

Do you agree to being recorded?

- Yes
- No

Are you willing to participate in this study that will require 5 to 6 hours of your time?

- Yes
- No

(If respondent selects no, the survey will end here with the following message: "Thank you for your interest in the current research project, but you are ineligible to participate." If the respondent selects yes, the survey will proceed to next page with the following questions.)

What is your first name and last initial?

Do you identify as a gender?

What is your race* (select more than one, if applicable)?

**Race refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant.*

- Black
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian/Asian American
- Hispanic/Latino/a
- Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
- White
- Other (please specify): _____

What is your ethnicity*?

**Ethnicity refers to the shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs (e.g., African American, Nigerian, Jamaican, etc.).*

Are you a first-generation college student (first in your family to attend college)?

- Yes
- No

What is your current class year? Please select from the below options:

- First year (*If respondent selects no, the survey will end here with the following message: "Thank you for your interest in the current research project, but you are ineligible to participate."*)
- Sophomore/ second year
- Junior/ third year
- Senior/ fourth year
- Fifth year +
- Alumni (*If respondent selects alumni, they will be asked this additional question: What year did you graduate?*)

What institution do/did you attend?

What is your major?

What sport do you play?

What is your email?

Please select all dates in which you are available:

- Option 1
- Option 2
- Option 3
- Option 4

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Should you be eligible for participation in this study, I will reach out to discuss next steps.

Appendix B

Email Correspondence

Gatekeeper Contact Email

Subject: *Dissertation Research--Recruitment Email for Student Participants*

Hi [Program coordinator name],

I have received institutional review board approval for my dissertation research (attached) and am excited to move forward!

I'm looking to recruit Black women student-athletes to participate in my doctoral research. To participate, the athletes must be 18 years old or older, are a member of an NCAA-sanctioned athletic team for more than a year and identify as Black and female.

If the athlete is qualified and chooses to participate, they will take and/or upload 4-8 photographs on their phone or camera that they will share with me for research purposes, complete a virtual personal interview with me, and participate in a virtual sista circle (group discussion) with other Black women student-athletes. I expect that these activities will take a total of 5 to 6 hours of their time.

There is minimal risk and no benefit to the athletes if they choose to participate in the study. Participating in this research is not a requirement nor expectation of their enrollment or standing at your institution or of any athletic team that they are affiliated with. If the athletes complete all study activities, they will receive a \$20 electronic gift card via email.

Would you mind forwarding on the attached recruitment email and recruitment flyer to your athletes for me?

I would greatly appreciate your help in recruiting eligible participants to participate in the study. I have included a bit more information below about the logistics of the study, and of participation, and have drafted text for a recruiting email that you can send to your students (see at the bottom).

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at eofogeb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465. You can also contact the faculty advisor for the protocol, Dr. Joy Gayles, at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

Please feel free to send any questions my way.

Sincerely,

Ezinne Ofoegbu

Recruitment email for student-athletes

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Subject Line: Looking for Black Women Student-Athletes to Participate in a Research Study

Hello all,

You're receiving this email and attached flyer because I asked your program coordinator to forward these materials to all of the student-athletes.

I am recruiting Black women student-athletes to participate in my doctoral research at NC State University. To participate, you must be 18 years old or older, are a member of an NCAA-sanctioned athletic team for more than a year and identify as Black and female.

If you are qualified and choose to participate, they will take and/or upload 4-8 photographs on their phone or camera that they will share with me for research purposes, complete a virtual personal interview with me, and participate in a virtual sista circle (group discussion) with other Black women student-athletes. I expect that these activities will take a total of 5 to 6 hours of their time.

There is minimal risk and no benefit to you if you choose to participate in the study. Participating in this research is not a requirement nor expectation of your enrollment or standing at your institution or of any athletic team that you are affiliated with. The person who is sending this email for me, your coach, and other teammates will not know if you volunteer to participate in this research. If you complete all study activities, you will receive a \$20 electronic gift card via email.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the brief online survey at the link below:

[Survey Link](#)

The online survey will be used to see if you qualify to participate in the research. Only if you qualify and choose to participate in the research will the survey be used for research purposes—all other surveys will be destroyed and not used for research purposes.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at eofogeb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465. You can also contact the faculty advisor for the protocol, Dr. Joy Gayles, at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

Thank you for your consideration!

Ezinne Ofoegbu

Invitation email for student-athletes

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Hello,

You're receiving this email because you expressed interest and are qualified to participate in my dissertation research.

If you decide to participate, you will:

1. Take and/or upload 4-8 photographs that you will share with me for research purposes through a private Google Drive folder.
2. Complete a virtual personal interview with me that will last about 2 hours long and be recorded.
3. Participate in a virtual sista circle (group discussion) with other Black women student-athletes. This group discussion may last up to two hours and be recorded.

I expect that all of these activities will take up to 5 to 6 hours.

There is minimal risk and no benefit to you if you choose to participate in the study. Participating in this research is not a requirement nor expectation of your enrollment or standing at your institution or of any athletic team that you are affiliated with. If you complete all study activities, you will receive a \$20 electronic gift card via email.

I have attached the link to the informed consent form for your review. This form details your rights as a participant in this study. Please review this form closely, as it includes details related to how your data will be shared in publications and presentations related to this study. Please sign the form via this Qualtrics link:

[Consent Form](#)

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at eofogeb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465. You can also contact the faculty advisor for the protocol, Dr. Joy Gayles, at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

Thank you for your consideration!

Ezinne Ofoegbu

Photovoice instructions and interview confirmation email

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Hello,

I'm excited that you decided to participate in my research!

Your interview will occur [insert date and time] over Zoom at the following link: [insert Zoom link]. The purpose of this interview is for me to learn a bit more about you and what it's like being a Black woman and student-athlete at your institution. I will ask you some questions related to your upbringing and how you've navigated identity throughout various parts of your life. The interview may last up to 2 hours and be recorded.

Here is the link to the Google Drive folder in which you will find instructions for the photovoice activity and upload your photos: [insert Google folder link]. Please plan to submit 1-2 photographs for each prompt. There are four prompts in total. **Please remember to upload your photos at least 48 hours before you interview, by [date].**

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Photovoice and interview reminder email

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Hello,

I'm excited that you decided to participate in my research!

Your interview will occur tomorrow over Zoom at the following link: [insert Zoom link]. If you have not done some already, please upload your photos to the Google Drive folder: [insert Google folder link].

If you have any questions between now and the interview, please contact me at eofogb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465.

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Sista circle scheduling

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Hello,

Thank you for participating in my study thus far! I've truly enjoyed our conversations and appreciate you for being honest and vulnerable in sharing your story.

The final stage of this research study is a sista circle (group discussion) with other Black women student-athletes. During the sista circle, I will ask some general questions about what college has been like for you, specifically in class, on your teams, and different relationships that you have on campus. The sista circle may last up to 2 hours and be recorded.

Furthermore, please complete this Qualtrics form to provide your availability for this sista circle: [insert Qualtrics link]. Please select all the times you are available. I will ultimately select the time in which majority of participants can attend.

Please let me know if you have any questions between now and the interview, please contact me at eofogb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465.

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Sista circle confirmation email

Hello,

Our sista circle will occur on [insert date and time] over Zoom at the following link: [insert Zoom link].

During the sista circle, I will ask some general questions about what college has been like for you, specifically in class, on your teams, and different relationships that you have on campus. The sista circle may last up to 2 hours and be recorded.

Furthermore, I have attached a broad consent form for your review. This form is different from the consent form you viewed earlier because it either grants or denies me permission to use your data in future research not related to this study. Please sign the form via this Qualtrics link:

[Broad Consent Form](#)

Please let me know if you have any questions between now and the interview, please contact me at eofoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465.

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Sista circle reminder email

Make sure that this email is BCC'd to recipients.

Hello,

I'm looking forward to our sista circle on [insert date and time] over Zoom at the following link:
[insert Zoom link].

Please let me know if you have any questions between now and the circle, please contact me at efoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465.

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Member checking email

Hello,

Thank you again for participating in my dissertation study!

I am now writing up the findings of the study and would like to share your individual narrative and initial findings for your review. Would you mind taking a look at both documents and let me know if my writing conveys what you meant to express during data collection?

There are two files that you will review. The first is your individual narrative, which can be accessed here:

The second document is the initial findings, which share stories from all participants. This document can be accessed here:

If you have comments, questions, or concerns, please don't hesitate to make comments on either documents or reach out to me via email. I will respond on the document or we can schedule a Zoom meeting, if applicable. I would very much appreciate your thoughts!

While I value any feedback you have to offer, if I do not hear from you by Wednesday, December 23, I will assume that you do not have anything to modify regarding the findings.

Thank you!
Ezinne Ofoegbu

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer



Seeking Black Women Student-Athletes for Dissertation Study!

I am conducting a research study on the identity-based college experiences of Black women student-athletes at predominantly White institutions. I would love to hear your experiences!

Eligible participants will:

- Identify as a Black woman
- Be a current member of an NCAA, Division 1 athletic team at your Institution
 - Recent graduates (2018-present) are also eligible
- Have completed at least one full year of academic coursework
- Be willing to spend 5-6 hours on study-related activities

Participation includes:



Sista Circle

Virtual group discussion with the researcher and other Black women student-athletes



Photovoice Activity

Take 4-8 pictures to share with the researcher



Interview

One-on-one virtual interview with the researcher

If you are interested in participating, please use the QR code to the right to complete a questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact Ezinne Ofoegbu at efoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465, or the faculty advisor for this research, Joy Gayles at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.



Appendix D

Consent Form

Title of Study: An examination of the college experiences of Black women student-athletes (eIRB #20796)

Principal Investigator: Ezinne Ofoegbu, efoegb@ncsu.edu, (562) 595-2465

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Joy Gayles, jggayles@ncsu.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the college experiences of Black women student-athletes. I will do this through facilitating a virtual sista circle (group discussion) with other current or former Black women student-athletes, asking you to take 4-8 photographs on your phone or camera that you will share with us for research purposes, and completing a virtual personal interview. I expect that these activities will take a total of 5 to 6 hours of their time.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because it will illuminate the experiences of Black women student-athletes and help athletics professionals better serve their unique needs. You may not want to participate in this research because the information and stories you share may be re-identifiable.

In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?** section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the college experiences of Black women student-athletes.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

There will be approximately 6-8 participants in this study. In order to be a participant in this study, you must be over the age of 18, be currently enrolled at a 4-year institution, identify as a Black woman, and have participated in an NCAA-sanctioned sport at your institution for more than one year. You cannot participate in this study if you do not meet those requirements or if you do not agree to be recorded.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

1. Allow the researcher to use the screening survey that you filled out to determine whether you qualify to participate in this research.
2. Participate in virtual sista circle (group discussion) with 6-8 other Black women who are current or former student-athletes. This may last up to two hours. This sista circle will take place on Zoom and will be recorded.
3. Take 4-8 photographs on your phone or camera and upload the photographs to a private Google Drive folder for research purposes.
4. Participate in an individual interview with the researcher on Zoom. This may last up to two hours. This interview will take place on Zoom and will be recorded.
5. Review your interview transcript to ensure your data has been accurately reported and analyzed.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in the study is 5-6 hours.

Audio recording

If you would like to participate in this research study, you must agree to be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you cannot participate.

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. One of risks to you as a result of this research includes discomfort in talking about sensitive information or challenging experiences. Please know that you never have to answer a question that you don't want to and you can stop participating in this research at any time. The other main risk of participating in this research is a breach of privacy due to the likely possibility that other people will know that you participated in this research. I will take care in how I report your data; there is, however, no way I can promise that the data about you won't re-identify you.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are contributing to the understanding of the lived experiences of Black women student-athletes, understanding that will help practitioners better serve their needs.

Mandated reporter/reporting

Under State law, we cannot keep information about known or reasonably suspected abuse or neglect of a child/student confidential, including but not limited to physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect. If any member of the study team has or is given such information, he or she is required to report it to the appropriate authorities G.S. 7B-301(a).

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please contact the researcher, Ezinne Ofoegbu at efoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465, or the faculty advisor for this research, Joy Gayles at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your information from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your information for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that we have described to you in this form. The information that you share with us will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to us. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How we manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that we protect your personal privacy. Data shared about you will be both re-identifiable (your screening survey, sista circle comments, and interview responses) and identifiable (your photographs).

Re-identifiable. Re-identifiable data are information that I can identify you indirectly because of my access to information, role, skills, combination of information, and/or use of technology. This may also mean that in published reports others could identify you from what is reported, for example, if a story you tell us is very specific. If your data are re-identifiable, I will report it in such a way that you are not directly identified in reports. Based on how we need to share the data, I cannot remove details from the report that would protect your identity from ever being figured out. This means that others may be able to re-identify from the information reported from this research.

Identifiable. Identifiable data are information that directly links you to the data. This includes, but is not limited to, your name, e-mail, or other details such as your photograph/image that makes you easily recognizable to me and others. Identifiable data has your real identity directly on the information that are shared with me and other people.

To help maximize the benefits of your participation in this project, by further contributing to science and our community, de-identified information will be stored for future research and may be shared with other people without additional consent from you.

Compensation

If you complete all research activities, you will receive a \$20 electronic gift card via email. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will not receive a gift card.

What if you are a student?

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at your institution, Participation in this study is also not a requirement as a student-athlete and will not affect your eligibility in any way.

What if you are an employee at your institution?

Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at your institution, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Ezinne Ofoegbu at eofogeb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465, or the faculty advisor for this research, Joy Gayles at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

Consent to Participate

By selecting “Yes, I want to participate in this research” and electronically signing this consent form with my name and email, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Yes, I want to participate in this research study <Qualtrics button>

Name _____

Email _____

Today's Date _____

No, I do not want to participate in this research study. <Qualtrics button>

Thank you for your consideration.

Broad Consent Addendum

Title of Study where Broad Consent is Initially Sought: An examination of the college experiences of Black women student-athlete (eIRB #20796)

Principal Investigator: Ezinne Ofoegbu, efoegb@ncsu.edu, (562) 595-2465

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Joy Gayles, jggayles@ncsu.edu, (919) 513-0924

This form asks you to make an important choice about the use of your re-identifiable and identifiable information. It asks you to decide if you are willing to give your consent to the use of your re-identifiable and identifiable information for future research.

If you agree, researchers in the future may use your re-identifiable and identifiable information in many different research studies over an indefinite period of time without asking your permission again for any specific research study. This could possibly help other people or contribute to science. If you do not agree to allow re-identifiable and identifiable information to be used for future research, your data will not be kept for future use by anyone.

This form explains in more detail what saying “yes” or “no” to this use of your information will mean to you.

If you say “Yes” on this form

The researcher(s) will store, use and share your re-identifiable and identifiable information and may do so for the purpose of medical, scientific, and other research, now and into the future, for as long as they are needed. This may include sharing your re-identifiable and identifiable information with other research, academic, and medical institutions, as well as other researchers, drug and device companies, biotechnology companies, and others.

If you say “yes”, there are no plans to tell you about any of the specific research that will be done with your re-identifiable and identifiable information.

By saying “yes,” your re-identifiable and identifiable information may be used to create products or to deliver services, including some that may be sold and/or make money for others. If this happens, there are no plans to tell you, pay you, or give any compensation to you or your family.

The main risk in saying “yes” is that your confidentiality could be breached. Through managing who has access to your re-identifiable and identifiable information and through regularly updated data security plans, I will do our best to protect your re-identifiable and identifiable information from going to people who should not have it.

Another risk is that if you say “yes,” your re-identifiable and identifiable information could be used in a research project to which you might not agree to if you were asked specifically about it.

You will not personally benefit from saying “yes” in this form. Saying “yes” in this form is not a condition of participating in the *An examination of the college experiences of Black women student-athlete (eIRB #20796)* study, nor of your enrollment or employment at your institution.

If you say “no” or do not complete this form

The researcher(s) and institution(s) identified above will not store, use, or share your re-identifiable and identifiable information beyond the purposes stated in the previous consent form that you agreed to and signed for study *An examination of the college experiences of Black women student-athlete* (eIRB #20796).

If you want to withdraw your consent

You can stop participating at any time for any reason, please contact Ezinne Ofoegbu at eofoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465, or the faculty advisor for this research, Joy Gayles at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924. You can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your re-identifiable and identifiable information from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your re-identifiable and identifiable information for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

If you have questions

Please ask the research team to explain anything in this form that you do not clearly understand. Please think about this broad consent and/or discuss it with family or friends before making the decision to say “Yes” or “No.”

If you have any questions about this broad consent, please contact Ezinne Ofoegbu at eofoegb@ncsu.edu or (562) 595-2465, or the faculty advisor for this research, Joy Gayles at jggayles@ncsu.edu or (919) 513-0924.

If you want to discuss your rights as a person who has agreed to, refused, or declined to respond to an offer of broad consent or believe that your rights were violated as a result of your agreeing to this broad consent, please contact the NC State IRB Director, at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

Please select one checkbox and enter your name and today's date

Statement of agreement

I say yes. The future use of my data and consent has been explained to me, and I agree to give my consent to the future research uses of my re-identifiable and identifiable information. My participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw my consent at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Statement of agreement: Name

Statement of agreement: Today's Date

Statement of refusal

I say no. The consent has been explained to me, and I do not agree to this consent.

Statement of refusal: Name

Statement of refusal: Today's Date

Appendix E

Part 1: Photovoice Instructions

Photovoice is a research approach that seeks to deepen an understanding of participants' experiences. Photovoice empowers participants to “speak” through photographs about issues that are important to them and advocate for change (Amos et al., 2012).

Directions:

1. Please respond to the following prompts by uploading 1-2 photos for each prompt. Please refrain from uploading more than two photos per prompt.
2. Follow the link that I sent you via email to a private Google Drive folder.
3. Upload your photographs into the designated confidential folder.
 - a. Please rename your photos as Prompt# (e.g., Prompt1)
4. Please upload your photos before your individual interviews.
5. If you experience any challenges/problems in uploading your photos, please contact me at efoegb@ncsu.edu and I will assist in figuring out solutions so that you can upload your photos.

Prompts:

1. Take a self-portrait of yourself that captures who you are.
2. Take a photo that best represents what it's like to be a Black woman at your institution.
3. Take a photo that best represents what it's like to be a student-athlete at your institution.
4. Take a photo that best represents a space on campus where you feel you belong.



Appendix F

Part 2: Interview Protocol

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. Before I proceed, I would like to ask if there are any questions about the consent form.

The purpose of this interview is for me to learn a bit more about you and what it's like being a Black woman and student-athlete at your current or previous enrolled institution. I will ask you some questions related to your upbringing and how you navigated identity throughout various parts of your life.

The interview questions today are very open-ended. I want you to share with me only what you are comfortable sharing. You do not need to talk about anything that you are not comfortable talking about. Throughout the interview I will also be asking you questions about the photos you took.

This interview may last up to two hours and is being recorded just so that I have an accurate record of what you said. As soon as I transcribe the audio of your interview, I will delete the audio file. No one will ever have access to the raw audio file except me and my faculty advisor for this research. All of your comments today will be confidential and will only be used for my research project.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? What are you studying?
2. Tell me about your upbringing (your family, your schooling, etc.)
 - a. When and why did you begin playing your sport?
3. Tell me about the photos you chose for prompt one (e.g., self-portrait). What does this photo represent/mean to you? **(photovoice)**
 - a. *Probe: Why did you choose this particular photo(s)?*
4. What aspects of your identity are most important to you?
 - a. *Probe: What about your social identities? Race, gender, etc.*
5. Growing up, what messages did you receive about the identities that you hold?
 - a. *Probe: Make you provide an example?*
6. Tell me about the photos you chose for prompt two (e.g., being a Black woman at your institution). What does this photo represent/mean to you? **(photovoice)**
 - a. *Probe: Why did you choose this particular photo(s)?*
 - b. *Follow up: What does being a Black woman mean to you?*
7. How does being a Black woman shape the way you navigate the world around you?
8. What experiences have shaped how you perceive or make sense of who you are and your identities?
 - a. *Probe: These can you experiences in education, observation of media, familial messages.*

- b. *Probe: Can you provide me with an example of a time when you learned about yourself?*
9. What are some experiences you've had that may have caused you to change your thoughts about who you are (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.)?
- a. *Probe: Can you provide me with an example of a time when your thoughts about who you are changed?*
10. Tell me about the photos you chose for prompt three (e.g., being an athlete at your institution). What does this photo represent/mean to you? (**photovoice**)
- a. *Probe: Why did you choose this particular photo(s)?*
11. How has being an athlete/student-athlete informed your understandings of who you are?
12. What, if any, are some of the barriers or challenges you've encounter as a student-athlete?
- a. *Follow up: Describe how these challenges have affected your college experience or how you view yourself.*
13. How, if at all, have your identities shaped your experiences as a college athlete?
- a. *Follow up: How do you think your experiences are different than those of people who do not hold your identities? Why or why not?*
14. Do you perceive any conflict between who you are and your role as a student-athlete?
- a. *Follow up: What are some examples of these conflicts?*
15. Tell me about the photos you chose for prompt four (e.g., a space of campus where you feel you belong). What does this photo represent/mean to you? (**photovoice**)
- a. *Probe: Why did you choose this particular photo(s)?*
16. Are there places in and around campus where you feel you do not belong?
- a. *Probe: Why do you feel that way?*
17. Tell me about your interactions with classmates, faculty and staff of different race or gender than you?
- a. *Probe: Can you recall some positive experiences? Challenging, or negative? How did this experience unfold?*
- b. *Follow up: How do these interactions make you feel about your place at the universities?*
18. How has the presence (or absence) of Black women, and other underrepresented groups on campus informed how you see your identities?
- a. *Probe: What about the presence of Black students, faculty/ staff, and administrators within the university and in athletics?*
19. In what ways have institutional policies and practices shaped how you think about your gender, nationality, race, and any other identities you feel are most salient? You could talk about campus culture, or attitudes toward diversity and inclusion.
- a. *Follow up: Can you talk a bit more about your team's response to the recent incidences of racism in the country?*
- b. *Probe: What about how your athletic department responded?*

Wrap Up Questions

20. What can coaches and other athletics personnel do to better support you?
21. What can faculty and staff outside of athletics do to better support you?

Researcher: That concludes our interview. Thank you so much for your time and assistance with this research. I want to again assure that your comments will be handled confidentially. If you think of any additional information that you think might be helpful for me as I conduct my research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you would like a summary of my completed work, I will be happy to share it with you after I have completed it. Thanks again!

Appendix G

Part 3: Sista Circle Protocol

Researcher: Thank you for participating in the sista circle and the photovoice activity. Before I proceed, I would like to ask if there are any questions about the broad consent form.

The objective of today's sista circle is to provide an opportunity for me to understand your experiences as a collegiate athlete.

I will ask some general questions about what college has been (or was) like for you in class, on your teams, different relationships that you have (or had) on campus. My interview questions are open-ended because I want you hear about your experiences from your perspective. Please know that you only need to share what you are comfortable sharing. You do not have to answer every question if you don't want to.*

Some of the questions I ask will have you reflect on your experiences with other people. Please share those experiences. To protect the privacy of all involved, please don't use the names of other people but refer to them by the role in your life instead such as, "coach," "teammate," "student," "professor," "mom," "brother," etc.

This group will last up to two hours and is being recorded just so that I have an accurate record of what you said. As soon as I transcribe the audio of this group, I will delete the audio file. No one will ever have access to the raw audio file except me and my faculty advisor for this research.

I want to ask that everything that is said in this group remains confidential. However, I also want to caution that due to the nature of groups, I cannot promise confidentiality.

Does anyone have any questions before we start?

* Questions below indicates topics to be addressed, and do not reflect exact wording or order in which topics will be addressed during the sista circle.

1. To get started let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please share your name and pronouns, where you're from, your academic classification, major, the sport you play, and what you do for self-care.
2. What did you expect college to be like before you arrived?
 - a. How is your actual experience different or similar to what you thought it would be?
3. Tell me about your experiences as a college athlete.
 - a. Relationships with teammates, coaches, academic and student development staff.
 - b. Tell me about how those relationship develop closeness distance

- c. Accomplishment and/or obstacles you've faced.
4. Describe your academic experiences in college.
 - a. Experiences with classmates?
 - b. Experiences with professors and staff outside of athletics?
5. Describe your social life and participation in activities in college, both inside and outside of athletics.
6. Do you believe your race and/or your gender influences the way that you experience college?
 - a. *Probe: If so, how?*
7. Do you believe your race and/or your gender influences the way that you experience sports?
 - a. *Probe: If so, how?*
8. Can you recall an experience in which your race and/or gender may have influenced how you experienced a situation?
9. What could your institution do to better support Black women student-athletes?

Researcher: That is all the questions that I have for you tonight. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you so much for your time and assistance with this research. I want to again assure that your comments will be handled confidentially.

I want to confirm that you're okay with these photos being published and/or presented in journal articles and/or conferences with this.