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"SOMETIMES WE ARE SMART *AND* ATHLETIC": A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN INTERCOLLEGIATE FEMALE ATHLETES

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Jenny Lind Withycombe

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my parents who always believed I could do and be anything I wanted. It was with their unfailing love and support that I achieved so much in my life. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband who sacrificed so much so my dreams could come true. I know I would never have made it without him and I cherish his good heart for helping me through the process. To my young daughter, I thank you for your smiles and unconditional love. I know I sacrificed some of our time together to pursue my dream, but I hope when you look back on these times it will serve as a reminder to always remember who you are and what you want out of life. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to every teacher with whom I have ever learned or worked. My love of learning was inspired by the countless, thankless, and often unappreciated hours of dedication you all made to your students and to me. There is no nobler profession than imparting knowledge and fostering a love of learning. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

The historical, socio-cultural, and psychological construction of the African American female identity is one which has endured a 250-year legacy of slavery, discrimination, and oppression. The advent of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the lives of all women forever, especially the lives of women of color. Despite the progress of these movements there remains both overt and covert sexism and racism within American society, the realm of athletics being one of many of these domains. Therefore, eight Division I African American female athletes were interviewed regarding their perceptions of media portrayals of themselves and other African American female athletes against their own identity constructions using a semi-structured interview guide and a text analysis of campus media guides. The rationale for interviewing African American female athletes was based on previous research by Crenshaw (1993) which suggested that women of color are frequently marginalized and their perceptions and experiences framed in terms of singular exclusion, that of woman or of person of color. As stated by Crenshaw (1993), "racism and sexism [intersect] and factor into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experience separately" (p.1244). Findings suggested that gender and athletic identities were far more salient for African American female athletes than race. Surprisingly, it was also found that an additional aspect of identity was important in determining whether African American female athletes drew empowerment or disempowerment from their athletic experiences, and that was the various ways coaches and institutions construct identities for their athletes. Future research should explore these identity constructions and the impact they

have on African American female athletes in more depth to ensure all athletes leave with positive experiences that reaffirm their senses of self and lead toward empowerment.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The historical, socio-cultural, and psychological construction of African American female identity is one which has endured a 250-year legacy of slavery, discrimination, and oppression. The advent of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the lives of many American and European women forever, especially the lives of women of color. Despite the progress of these movements there remains both overt and covert sexism and racism within American society. As a practitioner who views sport as a primary source of women's empowerment I am particularly interested in the ways in which African American women's athletic participation has shaped their identities throughout history and continues to do so today.

Literature Review in Brief

In the last 35 years, women's sports in the United States and the girls and women who participate in them have experienced un.p.recedented change (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007). The addition of thousands of sporting opportunities for women of every race and social background has been dramatic (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007). In recent times, the media itself has played a large role in disseminating positive images of female athletes to younger generations of girls and women who have the opportunity to participate in almost any kind of sport (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007). Despite the quantitative progress of women's sporting opportunities, numerous historically-, socially-, culturally-, and psychologically-based stereotypes continue to impact the

identities of female athletes and particularly African American female athletes.

African American female athletes face a marginalization unknown to their White counterparts. Not only are they subjected to the feminizing effects of a gendered society, but they are also racialized in the most stereotypical ways. They are neither allowed to be women nor "true athletes." Their successes are attributed to racial genetics and their accomplishments diminished by others' comparison of them to men's athletics, leaving a hole in the history of African American women's sporting experiences. Thus, there is much more to explore within the complex nature of the intersections of race, gender, media, and sport. And researchers are charged with the substantial yet, essential task of combating both the racist and sexist oppression faced by African American female athletes. Like Hargreaves (2000), I believe the goal then becomes to:

> investigate how [African American women] understand themselves and construct personal and group identities; how their identities are constructed relationally through contact with other people and communities of people; why they make certain allegiances and not others; and how their identities are socially, historically, [and psychologically] constructed within culture and through cultural [and individual] discourses. (p. 8)

It is only through this deconstruction of sex and gender, race, and athletic identities that we might come to understand what it means to be an African American female athlete.

To understand the ways in which society has marginalized African American females' and particularly African American female athletes' lived experiences, I turn to the discipline of cultural studies. I do so because:

> Students of cultural studies dwell on the boundaries of lived experience and intellectualized critique. They shuttle back and forth between these domains with one eye on the social identities, structures, and interactions occurring within the spheres of collective life, with the other on abstracted notions of power, human understanding, ethics, and critical-cultural assessment. A check point through which they regularly pass goes by the name "representation(s)." (Gronbeck, 2007, xiii)

The representations investigated by students of cultural studies are seen as acting as stand-ins for or in place of something else. For example, a photograph provides a representation of the actual person whose picture has been taken. She is merely a "holographic image standing for the person electronically outlined on a photosensitive surface" (Gronbeck, 2007, xiii). Although a photographic image may appear to be an accurate representation of the actual person it is meant to represent, a number of issues arise from its use. To stand-in for someone or something means that the viewer must put together a number of socially, culturally, and historically divined signs in order to give the photograph meaning. The representation then becomes a "constitutive process" (Gronbeck, 2007, xiv).

Institutions carefully choose the ways in which they represent themselves to the public. The content and especially the cover of an athletic media guide convey to the viewer the contemporary values and morals held by the athletic department and by extension the university regarding gender, race, and sport (Buysse and Embser-Harbert, 2004). Although media guides are rarely distributed in mass to the public, media and sports information directors as well as the general press and advertisers "serve as critical conduits for these images and the messages that they convey" (Buysse and Embser-Harbert, 2004, p.67). The messages, both overtly and

covertly laid out on each cover are consumed by not only those who have direct contact with the guide, but those who become the "secondary consumers of the information that these people and organizations create" (Buysse and Embser-Harbert, 2004, p.67). Thus, the importance of media's influence on shaping social norms and values as well as altering individuals' own identities is not to be ignored. In a representation-driven society, Americans have allowed themselves to live via stereotypes. Men of color and all women have been reduced to mere caricatures of their true selves. This impact of such media-driven ideals is twofold for women of color as they face the marginalization of both their gender and their race.

Statement of the Problem

Who is She? The African American Female Athlete. What does she think of herself? Her sport experience? The representations of her? What influences how the African American female athlete makes sense of her identity? How do the media's representations of her identity as an African American woman, African American female athlete, and as an individual impact her identity? What role does the media play in empowering and/or disempowering the African American female athlete?

These are the questions missing from the previous literature that might allow researchers to understand more fully the inner workings of developing an African American female athlete identity. These questions are asked in earnest because previous research has supported the notion that the images represented on intercollegiate media guides and posters are oppressive to both White and African American female athletes. However, it is probable that the images are more damaging to African American women because they are *both* racist and sexist. As a

former female intercollegiate athlete I can identify with the sexist representations of female athletes in the media. However, I am not an *African American* female athlete, nor am I any longer an undergraduate student newly exposed to the often taken-for-granted aspects of our society. Thus, I believe this research to be critical in helping myself --both an "outsider" and an "insider" within this research-- and other professionals more deeply understand the power and influence of media images in identity formation. In addition, I assert that many women are not critical consumers of media images, and the negative potential impact is great for all women, but particularly for women of color.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate Division I African American female athletes' perceptions of media portrayals of themselves and other African American female athletes against their own identity constructions using a semi-structured interview guide and a text analysis of campus media guides. Identity politics suggest that many women's identities are influenced by numerous dimensions of their lives such as race and social class (Crenshaw, 1993). As stated by Crenshaw (1993), "racism and sexism [intersect] and factor into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experience separately" (p.1244). Unfortunately, feminist efforts to explore more fully the experiences of African American women often exclude the racial aspects of their lives resulting in an incomplete depiction of how racism and sexism intersect to influence Black identity development (Crenshaw, 1993). The purpose of this study is to begin to address that deficiency.

Research Questions

1. How does sport media portray African American Division-I collegiate female athletes via sport media guides?
2. How do African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of such portrayals?
3. What influences how African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of their identities?
4. What influences how African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of the media's representations of their identities as African American women, African American female athletes, and as individuals?
5. What role does the media play in empowering and/or disempowering African American Division-I collegiate female athletes?
6. What is the relationship between sport media guide portrayals and African American Division-I collegiate female athletes' self-perceptions?

Positional Claims

Although I lean more towards the psychological and sociological aspects of social science research, borrowing from anthropologist Wolf's (1992) A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility, I am reminded of what she noted about conducting research:

> The anthropologist listens to as many voices as she can and then chooses among them when she passes their opinions to members of another culture. The choice is not

> arbitrary, but then neither is the testimony. However, no matter what format the anthropologist/reporter/writer uses, she eventually takes the responsibility for putting down the words, for converting their possible fleeting opinions into a text. I see no way to avoid this exercise of power and at least some of the stylistic requirements used to legitimate that text if the practice of ethnography is to continue. (p. 11)

Although to some, taking such a position on my research claims is irreverent, it in actuality the most logical aspect of qualitative research. No matter how sophisticated the researcher and/or methodology, the knowledge gleaned is always situated in the socio-historical context of the world, the positionality of the researcher, and the conscious and unconscious narrative choices of the reporter (or co-participant). "Whether or not an anthropologist believes she creates, interprets, or describes culture, she must recognize that she creates „Others' as a result of her work, and that she must bear some responsibility for those Others" (Wolf, 1992, p. 12). And it is this „Other' that fits so perfectly within postmodern constructs "because it is constantly having to be redefined, is nearly always vague in its boundaries, and is as luxuriant in meanings as it is constrained by specificity" (Wolf, 1992, p. 12).

I have used Wolf's (1992) *Ruminations with a View(point)* as a guide for making certain positional claims. The way in which she discusses the concepts of identity, both researcher and co-participant, the honoring of lived experience, the intersectional dynamics of power, and the collaboration between researcher and co-participants fit perfectly with my own epistemological orientation. Any claims I make regarding the results of my research as necessarily situated within the contexts in which they were lived, gathered, and derived. As someone wrestling with postmodernism I realize that everything I report is only partial knowledge. Though I valued and

adhered strictly to the tenets of feminist critical ethnography, there is no way in which I, or my co-participants, entered into this research value-free.

The completion of this research, looking into the ways in which the media influences African American female athlete identity formation, is only one piece of a complex and intersectional puzzle. Although my results may not generate new theories or even conclude with sociological, psychological, or cultural generalizations, the voices I present are real. The experiences they have encountered, the lives they have lived, and the reflections they have ruminated upon are one aspect of a larger reality. I claim only to *know* what is (re)presented to me through their words. What I hope to offer are stories, narratives, collaborated upon with my co-participants and guided by my own very specific questions. As suggested by Abu-Lughod (1990):

> Feminist [research] disrupts boundaries, brings to light what it means to be a woman in other places with different conditions, and replaces the presumption of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences. (p. 27)

The claims I make come from grounding myself within critical feminist research. I honor women's experiences by "presenting [their] voices in detail, paying attention to the variety among women's situations, and historically contextualizing ethnographic material" (Lamphere, Ragone, Zavella, 1997, p. 7). Further, I include my own voice within the narrative and analysis thus, moving my own research "toward creating more dialogic rather than objectifying accounts" (Lamphere et al., 1997, p. 7). Therefore, my claims are situated (and in a sense) limited within my own as well as my co-participants' positionalities.

More practically, it is important to note that qualitative sample sizes are typically small

(6-10 co-participants) and the generalizability of results is not the focus of the study. It is more the recording of experiences and life stories in conjunction with the co-participant that matters. Furthermore, this study will conducted at a large, predominantly White university in the Southeast United States. Thus, I cannot speak for the application of my findings to other universities, especially historically black colleges and/or colleges with a much more or less diverse demographic make-up.

Delimitations

The study was delimited most heavily in regards to co-participant demographics. The nature of qualitative research guided the selection of a small sample of eight athletes. The co-participants were selected from a large urban university located in the Southeast United States, with a demographic make-up of predominantly White students and a large African American student-athlete population. I interviewed athletes in every year of collegiate schooling although I would have preferred to focus on those who were in their junior or senior years of college in order to enhance the likelihood of experience with NCAA Division I athletics and who may have developed critical thought in relation to those experiences. Finally, only those female athletes who identified as African American were interviewed in order to get at their stories and experiences.

Definitions

Athlete Identity: "The degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role" (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237).

African American: A contemporary label for persons of African descent who reside in the

United States or for Americans whose are considered to have African heritage (biologically or socio-culturally) (Thompson, 1994).

Black: Although still referenced in certain situations today, Black is more often applied as a historically situated label for persons of African descent used within the socio-political culture of the 1960s and 70s (Thompson, 1994).

Challenging the Status Quo: Challenging the "current state of things, or way things are, usually said to require a good reason before it is changed" (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001, p. 155).

Critical Race Theory: "Radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.144).

Critical Reflexivity: Constantly, continuously, and critically reflecting upon one's own positionality throughout the research process (Lamphere et al., 1997).

Cultural Inhibition: The inability of persons of color to "communicate expressions of their culture without being outcast by others or suffering adverse consequences" (Peretto-Stratta, 2003, p.84).

Double Consciousness: "The propensity of excluded people to see the world in terms of two perspectives at the same time-that of the majority race, according to which they are demonized, despised, and reviled, and their own, in which they are normal" (Delgado, 1995, p.347).

Disempowering: The process through which individuals lose "mastery and control over their lives, [as well as experience a loss of] critical understanding of their environment" (Zimmerman, Israel, Schultz, & Checkoway, 1992, p. 708).

Empowerment: "A process by which individuals gain mastery and control over their lives, and a critical understanding of their environment" (Zimmerman et al., 1992, p. 708).

Feminism: "A movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 1994, viii).

Feminist Critical Ethnography: A branch of post-critical ethnography which acts as a theoretical guide for making certain positional claims (Wolf, 1992). A way of thinking in which the concept of identity, of both the researcher and co-participant, the honoring of lived experience, the intersectional dynamics of power, and the collaboration between researcher and co-participants are of critical importance (Lamphere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997).

Feminist Standpoint Theory: The assumption that "individuals in oppressed and marginalized social groups develop both an understanding of how the world operated from the perspective of the oppressor group(s) as well as the realities faced as a member of an oppressed group(s)" (Dewar, 1993, p. 219-220).

Gender: A person's own sense of themselves as male or female as well as the socio-cultural meanings attached by others or given to one's sex (Wharton, 2005).

Gender Identity: "In psychological terms, [gender identity] is a „fundamental, existential sense of one's maleness or femaleness, an acceptance of one's gender as a social-psychological construction that parallels one's acceptance of one's biological sex'" (Spence, 1984, p.84).

Hegemony: "Domination by the ruling class, and an unconscious acceptance of that state of affairs" by both the oppressor and the oppressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.147).

Identity: "There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of „identity', at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique" (Hall, 1996, p. 1). The reason for this paradoxical development is the variety of disciplines which have begun to explore the concept and meaning of identity within culture. Although differing in approach, each

discipline shares the basic tenant of being "critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity" (Hall, 1996, p. 1).

Identity Construction: The impact a variety of factors has on one's sense of self in which an "ongoing assessment of current and future priorities, which in turn, involves the dynamics of interaction with significant others and perceptions of one's physical and emotional state of well being at a given point in time" factor into the determination of one's personal identity (Granskog, 2003, p.28).

Intersectional Identities/Oppressions: Identity politics suggest that many women's identities are influenced by numerous dimensions of their lives such as race and social class (Crenshaw, 1993). As stated by Crenshaw (1993), "racism and sexism [intersect] and factor into black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experience separately" (p.1244).

Liberation: The recognition and eradication of the underlying cultural bases of sexism and all other forms of oppression (hooks, 2000).

Media Guide: According to Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) "National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I intercollegiate media guides are representative of a powerful, highly prestigious, and influential sector of organized sport participation. They are the primary means by which colleges and universities market their athletic teams to the press, advertisers, and corporate sponsors as well as alumni, donors, and other campus and community members who read them. Unlike many game programs, the media guides tend to be thicker, slicker portrayals of the images the institution wishes to present about itself and its athletes" (p.67).

Myth: A reflection of what a society believes or would like to believe about itself; often such

myths act as reinforcement for commonly held beliefs about the identities of an individual or collective group of peoples (Bjornson, 1971-72).

NCAA Division-I Athletics: To be given NCAA Division-I status a university must have "seven male/mixed and seven female, including two team sports per gender and not more than two emerging sports" (NCAA, 2007, p.1). In addition, financial aid minimums must be "fifty percent of max grants in 14 sports; or aggregate expenditure of $964,700 ($482,350 for women) on 38 full grants (19 for women) exclusive of football and basketball; or 50 of full grants (25 for women) excluding football and basketball; or exception for institutions with exceptional reliance on federal assistance for student's needs" (NCAA, 2007, p.2).

Oppression: "[A]n unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression" (Collins, 1990, p. 299).

Positionality: The role of the researcher within the study (Wolf, 1992).

Postmodernism: "Critique of modernism, a previous system founded on Enlightenment thinking and philosophy, and capitalism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.152).

Qualitative Research: "A reflective, interpretive, descriptive, and usually reflexive effort to *understand and describe* actual instances of human action and experience from the perspective of the co-participants' living of a situation" (Fischer, 2006, p.438).

Race: Commonly a social classification based on physical characteristics such as skin color and hair rather than biological determinants (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). It is suggested that people have a "natural propensity to create categories, especially those dealing with human characteristics. Because easily identifiable physical characteristics are often used in this

category-formation process, „race' becomes central to folk theories and thus, gains cognitive and social meaning and importance" (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004, p. 17).

Race Identity: Identification with a "vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry (Delgado, 1995, p.193).

Racism: "A system of unequal power and privilege where humans are divided into groups or „races' with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification. Variations of racism include institutional racism, scientific racism, and everyday racism" (Collins, 1990, p. 300).

Reflexivity: "Turning back on one's self; critically viewing one's own part in coming to an understanding of having taken an action. A form of circumspection but often including an affective aspect rather than purely cognitive introspection or rational reflection" (Fischer, 2006, p.438)

Reinforcing the Status Quo: Reinforcing the current state of things or working to keep things the way they are (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001).

Sex: A person's biological make-up of both internal and external genitalia, sex hormones, and chromosomes (Wharton, 2005).

Sexism: Prejudice or discrimination based on sex; *especially*: discrimination against women. Behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex (Wharton, 2005).

Social Activism: "Attitudes and behaviors that attempt to influence the social distribution of status, power, and resources" (Perez, 1996, ¶1).

Transformative Potential: The potential of a person or group of persons to inspire people to challenge the status quo (Jones, 1999).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

"she had nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may well have invented herself" (Toni Morrison as cited in Giddings, 1984, p. 16).

The historical, sociological, and ethnographic scholarship of the social construction of the African American female is a topic of distinct importance. The intersection of gender, race, social class, and constructions of meaning as axes of power is a space of infinite contradiction. One of many groups who exist within the vortex of such intersections is that of African American women. Birrell and McDonald (1996) advocated a method for reading specific moments or individuals through mediated narratives at the articulation of interdependent power lines. They argued that axes of power such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and so on are inextricably linked with one another in such a way that to privilege one axis over another or to consider each axis as simply additive to the next is to engage in potentially dangerous and violent theoretical work. In fact, despite a growing body of literature examining the intersectional lives and experiences of African American women throughout history, the voices of the women themselves has largely been ignored (Collins, 1986; Douglas, 2003). This lack of critical study has turned the complex and contradictory nature of African American women's multiple oppressions into a marginalized and oversimplified vision of race and gender acting independently to influence their lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1993; Douglas, 2003).

Furthermore, stereotypes as a site of cultural struggle have largely been ignored by White

feminists despite the fact that African American stereotypical mythology evolved over 250 years ago, during slavery, and has persisted well into the present time (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The damaging myths characterizing African American women "have their roots in negative anti-woman mythology" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 639) and yet, "on one level […they] are just words. But on another level these terms are situated at an ideological crossroads that both replicates and resists intersecting oppressions…[in turn] these terms help shape changing social conditions" (Collins, 2004, p. 121). Thus, it is vital that the stereotypes and persistent mythology surrounding the African American female be critically examined as a potential vanguard for the creation and dissemination of stereotypically gendered and racialized messages regarding African American females in modern times.[1]

Sociological Background

> We exist as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet, an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle – because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world. (Mumininas, 1971, p.4-5)

The sociological, historical, and ethnographic scholarship of the social construction of the African American female athlete as it relates to media representations and identity formation is a topic of distinct importance. The intersection of race, gender, media, and sport as axes of power is a space of infinite contradiction. Despite growing bodies of literature produced in women's, African American, media, and sport studies, the *intersectional* lives and experiences of women,

[1] For a complete historical account of stereotypical representations of African American women see Appendix A.

particularly African American women in sport, have largely been ignored, while instead emphasizing the tales of White men and women as well as African American men (Douglas, 2003). This lack of critical study has turned the complex and contradictory nature of African American women's multiple oppressions into a marginalized and oversimplified vision of race and gender acting independently to influence women's sporting experiences (Douglas, 2003). Furthermore, sport as a site of cultural struggle has largely been ignored by feminists and African American women scholars alike. Yet, as explained by Mary Jo Kane (1996):

> It is clear that one of the most powerful transmitters of cultural knowledge – the visual image – is actively shaping, reinforcing, and creating oppressive and demeaning attitudes toward female athleticism. (p. 1)

Thus, it is critical that sport media be examined as a potential vanguard for the creation and dissemination of stereotypically gendered and racialized messages regarding African American female athletes.

This portion of the literature review will discuss scholarship relating to the social construction of African American female athletes in American culture. In order to analyze the depth of social and cultural gendered practices it is critical to be "mindful of a globalized world [which is] increasingly interconnected and multi-layered with meaning" (Lamphere et al., 1997, p. 16). By situating the experiences of the African American female athlete in time and place it is possible to place "gender in relation to the historical and material circumstances where gender, race, class, and sexual orientation intersect and shape everyday interaction" (Lamphere et al., 1997, p. 1). Therefore, the multi-layered nature of intersectional lives requires a non-linear approach to its exploration. Therefore while a number of concepts are explored as discrete

categories such as gender, race, the media, identity formation, representation, they often fold back upon each other and intersect in unexpected ways. The section begins with a theoretical explanation of the frameworks which inform the analyses and then delves into the socio-cultural ways in which the media influences the identities of African American female athletes. What we discover is that what it "means to be a woman changes over time, varies across cultures, and shifts from one social context to another" (Jackson, 1993, p. 5).

Previous research has already examined the gendered and racialized nature of media as an institution within American society. Although not an integral part of the original study, Acker (1992) describes institutions within the United States as highly gendered and one could argue, by extension racialized. As Acker (1992) states,

> To say that an institution is gendered [and/or racialized] means that gender [and/or race] is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sections of social life. Taken as more or less functioning wholes, the institutional structures of the United States or other societies are organized along the lines of gender [and race]. [These institutions] have been historically developed by [White] men, are currently dominated by [White] men, and are symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of [White] men in leading positions, both in the present and historically. (p. 567)

Thus, the purpose of this section of the literature review is essentially to question how race and gender influence media representations and what their impact is on African American female athletes' identity formation within the larger society. In order to do this we must follow in the footsteps of Jennifer Hargreaves (2000) and

> investigate how [female athletes] understand themselves and construct personal and group identities through sport; how their identities are constructed relationally through contact with other people and communities of people; why they make certain allegiances and not others; and how their identities are socially and historically constructed within culture and through cultural discourses. (p. 8)

By using media as a medium through which to better understand African American female athletes we can focus on a unique approach to understanding African American female athlete identity construction. Charged with the mission laid out by Jackson and Andrews (2005) we will explore "how audiences read, interpret and resist advertising and focus on how vital it is for all of us to question the increasingly influential role of the media, and advertising in particular, to shape our identities and lived experience" (p. 17). Furthermore, we must take into consideration the following questions laid out by Murdock (1999):

> who orchestrates these representations? Who is licensed to talk about other people's experience? Who is empowered to ventriloquize other people's experience opinions? Who is mandated to picture other people's lives? Who chooses who will be heard and who will be consigned to silence, who will be seen and who will remain invisible? Who decides which viewpoints will be taken seriously and how conflicts between positions will be resolved? Who proposes explanations and analyses and who is subject to them? (p. 28)

It is through this interrogation that we will come to understand the potential impact of media on the African American female athlete's identity.

Postmodern Feminism

The social construction of the African American female athlete is not a concept easily explored. In order to understand the complex nature of the African American female athlete experience, it must be broken down into discrete categories only to be linked together again by its own contradictory intersections. To explore the being is to investigate the social constructions of gender and race and the ways in which they intersect within the sporting realm. In that sense, the most practical theoretical framework which allows for such an examination is postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism allows for the blurring of boundaries around race and gender. As noted by Abu-Lughod (1990):

> feminist ethnography…works with the assumption of different in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and another that is also partly the self. Feminist anthropology disrupts boundaries, brings to light what it means to be a woman in other places with different conditions, and replaces the presumption of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences. (p. 27)

The problemitizing of accepting a universal "meta-narrative" which assumes to know the core of women's oppression opens up space to hear the voices from the margins (Flax, 1987). Through the representation of other voices postmodern feminism allows us to "deconstruct gender categories and reveal the ways in which they have been culturally constructed and to demonstrate that they are fictions rather than natural facts" (Jackson, 1993, p. 5). It is through the deconstruction of such categories and the rejection of a unified self that we are able to question the ways in which we explore and interpret the human experience (Flax, 1987).

Gender

The social construction of gender is demonstrated at three different levels throughout society. First, at the micro level we must consider that "people are gendered beings [and thus,] gender is produced at the individual level" (Wharton, 2005, p.218). Second, again at the micro level, our daily interactions and social relations also produce gender distinctions (Wharton, 2005). And third, at the macro level, gender is produced and reproduced "through organizational arrangements and institutions" (Wharton, 2005, p.218). Thus, gender itself is a fluid and "multi-layered system of practices and relations that operates at all levels of the social world" (Wharton, 2005, p.69). As individuals, through our interactions, as well as through our experiences with the organizations and institutions with which we come in contact we are created and we actively create our gendered being.

The ways in which institutions are gendered and reproduce gendered personae and beings is particularly relevant to organized sport which at the college level is itself a highly organized institution. As defined by Wharton (2005):

> An organization [much like an institution] is a social unit established to pursue a particular goal. Organizations have boundaries, rules, procedures, and means of communication. The social practices that are associated with organizations play an especially important role in the production and reproduction of gender and gender inequality. In the simplest terms, sociologists define an institution as „an organized, established pattern' or even more simply, "the rule of the game." Institutions, then, are those features of social life that seem so regular, so ongoing, and so permanent that they are often accepted as just „the way things are.' (p.65)

Sport and education are two forms of gendered institutions and they intersect in the arena of intercollegiate athletics. In fact, intercollegiate sport in America is influenced not only by university policies and procedures, but also by governing bodies such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), professional organizations (e.g., National Football Association, (NFL), Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), etc.), the media (e.g., institutional, local, national and international), and large corporate sponsors such as Nike and Adidas (Wharton, 2005). These various institutions act as "important sources of cultural beliefs regarding the social world, including beliefs about gender. Institutions provide scripts that become guides for action" (Wharton, 2005, p.68).

Race

In order to understand the social construction of race *and* gender within American society it is necessary to put African American women at the center of any racial analysis. Although while investigating the effects of double marginalization it would be possible to focus on any number of race and/or ethnic groups, by focusing on Black feminist thought, a "fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression" can occur (Collins, 1990, p. 553). As asserted by Collins (1990):

> Placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of [a Eurocentric] worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques. [Furthermore,] Black feminist thought addressed ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing "truth." Offering a subordinate group's new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing

> that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications. (p. 553)

The lack of an Afrocentric approach to understanding the lives of African American women has long been a criticism and fault of Second Wave feminism, especially in the realm of sport.

> Two of the first feminist scholars of sport who were critical of exclusionary „White' research were Susan Birrell (1989) and Yevonne Smith (1992) from the USA. They represent a slowly emerging field of feminist scholarship about women from non-hegemonic groups. But the body of work remains very small and feminist sport historians and sociologists and research students should once more be urged to look at various marginalized women in sport so that we can build up a picture of the particular histories, experiences, traditions and cultures of women in sport from all countries and social groups and in all their complexities. (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 8)

It is here that we must start. We must move beyond the mistakes of the past and reach out to women of color and from all social classes in order to "include the particularities of their experience and needs in framing feminist values and political strategies" (Owen, Stein, & Vande Berg, 2007, p. 9).

To Be Black and Female

In order in understand the origins of the double marginalization faced by African American women it is important to explore the use of a framework of transgression laid out by Owen et al. (2007). They use transgression in the ontological sense, when they state that in this sense "African American women's existence *itself* constitutes a transgression against nature of divinity or man himself" (p. 2). That African American women dare to *exist* is a transgression in

American society. In fact, "to be born female or black (or both) meant learning the entitlements of membership in a free society are only selectively available. In that sense, embodied existence as „other' is itself transgressive: I exist therefore I transgress" (Owen et al., 2007, p. 2). As Owen et al. (2007) assert however, Black bodies could work to "redeem" themselves by participating in the socially acceptable forms of submission such as "obedience, silence, invisibility, and uncompensated labor" (p. 3). However,

> The fracturing of consciousness that arises from this embodiment leads women to hide in and merge with hegemonic discourses of gender by adopting feminine drag, or living as outliers, relegated to the margins of political and economic channels of change. Black female bodies have borne the burden of two intersecting historical trajectories of oppression, positioning black women and girls ontologically as double-transgressors. (p.3)

Owen et al. (2007) take the concept of transgression further by exploring the ways in which African American women engage in transgression as a "cultural practice." To do so entails the use of three overlapping rhetorical strategies. The first is the act of remembering oppression. This concept was first expressed by W.E.B. DuBois' idea of the "double consciousness" and again when Second Wave feminists acknowledged that the "enemy has outposts in our heads" (Owen et al., 2007, p. 3). For African American women, the "memory of oppression is vivid, palpable, and hurtful. In a Foucauldian sense, the fracturing is at once painful and productive, capable of causing debilitating psychic pain and yet, producing willful memory of an oppressive past" (Owen et al., 2007, p. 3).

The second concept concerns the inheritance of liberation. Today's women have no lived

experience with the oppressions faced by the women of the 60s and 70s. Today's women live in the safety of a collective amnesia regarding the past (Owen et al., 2007, 2007). Rather than pick up the feminist movement where it left off, rather than alter that which had gone astray within the Second Wave, Third Wave feminists have placed capitalist ideals before gender concerns. In this post-feminist atmosphere "labor practice, childcare, domestic violence, and political representation are erased as foundational concerns of feminism [as they run] contrary to established economic interests, entrenched labor practices, and the entitlements of wealth (Owen et al., 2007, p. 4).

The third rhetorical act involves

> the staging of exploitive symbolic acts as ironic, and therefore, liberartory texts such as media artifacts capitalize the notion that oppressive signifiers of the past have been emptied out by the obliteration of inequitable racial and gendered social barriers. [Positing the belief] that they are regressive co-optations serving to reinscribe demeaning sexualized and racialized objectifications useful to the interests of patriarchal rule is overlooked. (Owen et al., 2007, p. 4)

The media often tells us that the battle over race and gender has been won. By co-opting what were once symbols of iconic importance to the struggles of race and gender the media makes passé the concept of gender and/or race imbalance. In this context, such representational practices become acts of willful ignorance. By disregarding the substance of our own personal experiences within society we are able to eliminate any notion that inequality still exists. We create for ourselves a sort of "cultural amnesia" surrounding negative socio-cultural experiences (Owen et al., 2007).

Constructions of Race and Gender in Sport

"There is little dispute about the assertion that the mass media play a significant role in the transmission of dominant cultural values, especially in the perpetuation of images of gender [and race] difference and gender [and racial] inequality" (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004, p. 66). The media plays a key role in the maintenance of such ideals within the world of sport (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). For example, African American female athletes are often featured in either extreme or hypersexualized postures which play on the racial stereotypes of the "Black athlete" as animalistic and/or superhuman and the gendered stereotypes of female athletes as being women first and athletes second (Douglas, 2003; Withycombe, 2007). In fact, "media and sport construct and utilize gender [and arguably by extension racial] stereotypes to maintain gender [and racial] inequality, it is important to examine the ways in which these two powerful institutions interact with one another" (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004, p. 67). Yet, no studies with regards to media have examined the ways in which sporting institutions such as colleges and universities housed under the NCAA have perpetuated and sustained gender and race differences. Nor has any study yet, examined the effect of such stereotyped re-inscribing on African American female athletes' identities. If there is to be a clearer understanding of the African American female sporting experience, then such constructions must be explored in greater depth.

Media has a powerful influence on the ways in which people learn to view sport and sporting bodies (Creedon, 1994). In fact, the media often "operates as a surveillance mechanism, monitoring, coding, and recording virtually every element of [our] daily lives" (Douglas, 2003). The lack of prominent African American female figures in the mainstream media, both in

general and in sport, until recently has significantly influenced the way in which the American public thinks about them as a group. Although it is critical to resist the essentialist notion of uniting all African American women's experiences under one banner, so marginalized have these women historically been that little can be said without generalizing to a certain degree. The general trend within mainstream media is to use gender in a way which both consciously and unconsciously trivializes the athletic efforts of African American female athletes (Douglas, 2003). And while this approach has also impacted African American female athletes, they are additionally marginalized by stereotypical representations of their race. Often African American women's athletic efforts are not only belittled through the sexualization of their bodies, but they are also made victims of exaggerated physicality used to reinforce their contradiction when compared to dominant notions of white hegemonic femininity (Douglas, 2003). The use of visual media to keep African American female athletes on the fringes of two already marginalized groups puts them in the unique and precarious position of facing double discrimination at the hands of commentators and researchers.

Identity Formation

To be a woman of color is to exist in a world full of contradictory space and hidden subtexts. A woman of color must speak a variety of languages and understand numerous perspectives (Sweeney, 2003). If she is to survive economically and socially in American culture she must be particularly fluent in the language and perspective of the dominant white male culture (Sweeney, 2003). A woman of color's understanding of what necessitates her survival is augmented by her need to be able to "also navigate the languages of [her] many-layered subcultures" (Sweeney, 2003, p. 96). The broad concept that encompasses a woman of color's life is then complicated

with the role contemporary media is playing in developing, altering, and dictating people's identities. In fact, today's media "is a commercial tool, a social language, a genre of spectator/reader experience, a technique of persuasion; in fact, it is almost a world in its own right, with its own languages, customs and history, and one that sets the tone and pace for large parts of our lives" (Davidson, 1992, p. 3). It is therefore safe to assert that media is yet, another layer women of color must navigate in order to achieve success in today's society.

Being a member of a marginalized group means that identity as a concept embodies both sameness and difference. According to Stuart Hall (1994),

> identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation." (as cited in Hargreaves, 2000, p. 7)

In a time of mass globalization, the media becomes an increasingly important venue through which identities are constructed, modified, and re-constructed. It was Zaretsky (1995) who claimed that

> mass consumption and mass culture emerged as basic spheres for the formation of personal identity. Through the globalization of culture and the spread of self-consciousness about the body, sport has become increasingly important in defining female identity in recent years. (p. 248; as cited in Hargreaves, 2000, p. 8)

Therefore, the argument can be made that although identity formation negotiation is a multi-layered process, in modern times the media has come to play a large role in its development.

Furthermore, although Zaretsky (1995) alludes to the impact of the media on female identities he neglects to recognize its impact on racial and ethnic identities as well. The various ways race is socially constructed within American society are also crucial to understanding the double oppression faced by African America female athletes.

Racial socialization. The impact of media on the cultural production of knowledge plays a significant role in the continued perpetuation of our social world. In the same way gendered institutions inherently reinforce sexism and patriarchy, the media plays a role in maintaining the status quo.

> The images of idealized lifestyles and identities constructed and represented through advertising are those that contribute to a particular social order, economy and cultural belief system. The consequence is that based on their perceived value to the marketplace certain imagined groups and categories of people are either empowered or disempowered. (Jackson & Andrews, 2005, p. 3)

The meanings produced by media creators and media audiences is not "a politically neutral activity" (Owen et al., 2007, p. 5). In fact, Hartley (1992) noted that media representations "are much more socially pervasive, commonplace components of everyday life" than we realize (p. 3). Hartley (1992) goes on to state "their public, political aspects are real, and engagement with them is personal and practical….They are…the form in which democracy is diffused and disciplined" (p. 3).

The disciplining of women's bodies, particularly African American women's bodies, by White men, is a concept dating back to American slavery (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Even when joined under the banner of abolition and women's rights, African American women's

bodies and the experiences they endured with them were relegated to the margins of history. Two hundred years later the method is still to "treat White, Western, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied women's experiences as the norm and other women's experiences as different" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 6). Feminists are arguably just as guilty of universalizing whiteness. Whether intentionally or not, many feminists continue to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness described the world (Hargreaves, 2000). Rather than acknowledging a diversity of experience, White women use their power to "make it seem as if their own experience is wholly representative of all women's experience. Black women, Native women, disabled women, in fact, most other women, are left without anyone noticing they were absent" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 6).

African American Female Athletes

African American men and women have endured a long history of scrutiny in the United States (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Owen et al., 2007; Schultz, 2005; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The "black body" was traditionally seen as a "site and source of black pathology" (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Schultz, 2005; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The use of such research served to justify the continuation of slavery and later the racial discrimination of African Americans throughout history (Collins, 2004; White, 1999; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). African American athletes were often described in predominantly physical ways, seen as natural athletes, and were perceived as being rooted in the body rather than the mind (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Schultz, 2005). Because sport is centered on the body, it easily developed into a site of racial and cultural significance for African Americans and aided in the "social production of blackness" (Douglas, 2003; Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). Exaggerated

representations of African American athletes, particularly female athletes, "establish a symbolic line, which supports beliefs regarding racial difference" (Douglas, 2003, n.p.). As Stuart Hall (1988) further explains, racism…operates by…its typically binary system of representation [which] constantly marks and tries to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness (n.p.). Racial imagery has often served to place black bodies at the center of an extremely dangerous discourse.

The physical nature by which African American athletes have become known serves to marginalize their intelligence both on and off the court. The overemphasis on the extreme physicality of the African American athlete particularly "otherizes" African American female athletes by placing them far outside the white hegemonic standard of femaleness (Spencer, 2004). The concept of "otherness" is evidenced by racial depictions of Venus and Serena Williams that "show extremely muscular physiques which emphasize raw talent rather than hard work and intelligence[2]" (Spencer, 2004, p.122). These examples of "racial marking" serve the significant purpose of enforcing racial boundaries (Douglas, 2003).

Historically, sport media has focused on "blackness" as a way of "otherizing" both male and female African American athletes (Schultz, 2005). Although sport organizations often claim a high level of "colorblindness" as demonstrated through continually increasing numbers of African American athletes in their ranks, the Other is still created. Always the signifier of cultural difference, the Other is marginalized and reproduced only in contradiction to the dominant image (Schultz, 2005). Another example of the Othering of black bodies, is the clear

[2] For an excellent example of the "Otherizing" of African American female athletes see "Reading the Catsuit" by Schultz (2005).

line draw between the acceptability of Anna Kournikova, the epitome of White hegemonic femininity, and the Williams' sisters.

Through the Williams' sisters

> White culture drew a direct correspondence between stereotyped depictions of black womanhood and "manly" athletic and physically gifted females. Their racialized notions of the virile or mannish black female athlete stemmed from a number of persistent historical myths: the linking of African American women's work history as slaves, their supposedly "natural" brute strength and endurance inherited from African origins, and the notion that vigorous competitive sport masculinized women physically and sexually. (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998, p.541)

Thus, African American female athletes are portrayed as both unfeminine and hypermasculine, their successes being simultaneously celebrated and despised (Banet-Weiser, 1999). Again, there is evidence supporting the existence of a dual process at work against African American female athletes. According to acceptable White gender expectations, African American women should be thin and "lightly muscled" while at the same time demonstrate the natural athleticism attributed to their race (Schultz, 2005). No matter how athletic achievement is coded, African American women can never fulfill the culturally and socially acceptable roles relegated to them.

Representations of African American Female Athletes

The years between World War I and World War II marked a significant era for African American female athletes (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). It was during this time that African American women began to "dominate track and field at the national level and adhere to a more active level of femininity than did their white counterparts" (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998, p.533).

The opportunity to essentially "appropriate" the sport of track and field was due to a significant drop in participation by white women. This exodus followed the public testimonials of "experts who were [concerned] that the masculinizing effects of such activity would make women unfit for their feminine roles, particularly that of motherhood (Lansbury, 2001, p.235). At the time, African American women were not constrained by the same social limitations as white women. As Jennifer Lansbury (2001) suggests:

> African American femininity…was not constructed through limited attributes set in opposition to masculinity. Rather, ideal black womanhood was imbued with the positive qualities of strength, morality, and family and community commitments that had been forged through difficult circumstances as well as through the respect accorded them in the successful assumption of these different roles. (p.235)

The symbolic elements of overcoming adversity through individual and collective successes in track and field aligned perfectly with African American women's concept of womanhood (Lansbury, 2001).

During the pre-Title IX era, track star Alice Coachman and tennis phenom Althea Gibson were two of the most celebrated African American female athletes. That few people know of these women and their athletic accomplishments speaks to the tendencies of both the white and black media of the times to inadvertently relegate the two women to the margins of history (Lansbury, 2001). Their relatively substantial media coverage functioned as a celebration for African American female athletes while it simultaneously paled in comparison to coverage received by White male and female athletes, as well as that given to African American men. Coverage of the two athletes by the Black and White press often followed different lines. The

white press often portrayed the women in both a stereotypical and racialized manner. Either they were neglected because of their race or they were made to serve as evidence of the negative stereotypes concerning their race (Lansbury, 2001).

Although the Black press was far more likely to portray the athletes in action shots which clearly demonstrated their sporting prowess, it also sought to "feminize" them such as by highlighting their domestic prowess over their athletic endeavors thereby inadvertently marginalizing their achievements (Lansbury, 2001). Although African American female athletes were socially allowed to enjoy their physical strength on the field, they were often simultaneously and contradictorily degraded for being too "mannish." Thus, the dominant field of success for African American women served only to further "confirm the oppressive stereotypes of black women as animalistic, sexually deviant and unattractive. Grafted onto corresponding images of the mannish female athlete, the figure of the black woman track athlete fused gender and racial stereotypes" (Cahn, 1994, p.110). Over thirty years after Coachman and Gibson, the African American women like those who now dominate the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) are still trying to counteract the pervasive nature of both gendered and racial stereotypes (Banet-Weiser, 1999).

The gendered stigmas attached to pre-Title IX female athletes are just as pervasive in the post-Title IX days. In fact, during the rise and fall of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), the passage of Title IX, and the switch to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), women's collegiate athletics did not see a change in coverage *quantitatively* nor *qualitatively* (Lipping, 2000). Although society has led most women and men to believe that women's sports has become socially acceptable, the media often contradicts this

message with its highly feminized and marginalizing coverage (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). As explained by Mary Jo Kane and Susan L. Greendorfer (1994):

> these feminized and sexualized portrayals are simply new variations on very old themes: media images as a product or tool of patriarchal oppression of women--their bodies--through an institutionalized socially constructed system of gender roles and values. (p.30)

This assertion was demonstrated by the gendered and racialized coverage of the 1988 and 1992 Olympic Games. Although Jackie Joyner Kersee won gold medals in the heptathlon in both Games, it was the fingernails of the more hegemonically feminine Florence Griffith Joyner which received most of the press (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). The media's move to ignore and trivialize the accomplishments of female athletes resulted in what Kane and Greendorfer (1994) called the "symbolic annihilation" of sportswomen (p.34). The symbolic annihilation of the female athlete snatched what little value and respect she had in the sporting world.

According to a synthesis of research conducted between 1971-1998 on media portrayals of female athletes, women of the post-Title IX era are most often portrayed as "sexual objects available for male consumption rather than as competitive athletes" (Schell, 1999). The most common images represent women using the ideals of hegemonic femininity as a guide. Women are shown as weak, passive, timid, and most importantly sexy (Schell, 1999). Athletic talent and strength were often lost in the media's focus on physical appearance and compulsory heterosexuality. A study by Kane and Greendorfer (1994) found that in 1983 nearly 60 percent of all visual media content in *Sports Illustrated (SI)* portrayed female athletes in passive, non-athletic roles. In addition, the accompanying print media emphasized physical appearance and sexuality rather than ability and accomplishments. The most common agents of feminizing

visual media include focusing on (or, more recently, digitally creating) smiles, unblemished skin, slender and toned physiques, and long blonde hair (Schell, 1999). It seems clear that

> The media have transformed the meanings of women's physicality--women becoming active agents with and of their own bodies, and women using their bodies skilled, physical activity--to commodify sexuality and femininity. As a consequence, we find the media not only focusing attention on, but also dictating and legitimating the ways in which women's physicality will be acknowledged. (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p.40)

The danger then, poses a much more serious threat to the African American female athlete who is the victim of not only a patriarchal media, but a racist one as well; both of which stand as gatekeepers to physical and athletic validation.

In the post-Title IX era, the African American female athlete fares no better, and often far worse than her white counterpart. The covertly racist culture of the United States during the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and even into the early 21st century did not consider African American women as "real women," which allowed African American female athletes to make significant advancements in sport without paying the price of losing their humanity and femaleness (Williams, 1994). Some of the media coverage of post-Title IX women of color follows similar quantitative and qualitative trends as the coverage of white female athletes. No significant increases were made in terms of the quantity of all forms of sports coverage, although the black press continued to promote and celebrate African American female athletes more than the white press, in albeit heavily genderized terms (Lipping, 2000). A 35-year study of *SI* covers revealed that of the 114 covers which featured female athletes, only 5 (4 percent) were African American women (Williams, 1994). The first African American female athlete featured on a *SI* cover was

Althea Gibson in 1957. It would be another 30 years, in 1987, that another African American female athlete, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, would be pictured on an *SI* cover (Lipping, 2000).

The few times that African American female athletes have been portrayed in mainstream white media coverage (via newspapers, magazines, etc.) they are often represented in a combination of both racialized and gendered stereotypical ways (Williams, 1994). This representation is unique to African American women given their doubly marginalized status within US society. African American female athletes are often sexualized by the media just as their white counterparts are, however, African American bodies are often pictured in more extreme poses (e.g., the body exposed with minimal uniform dress, pictured at the start of a stride and/or mid-jump with arms and legs spread widely, etc.). The extreme nature of their poses reinforces the "longstanding, racist ideology that equates African heritage with animality" (Schultz, 2005, p. 340).

Althea Gibson, the first African American woman to play on the professional tennis circuit was often described by the media as being "fierce" and "mannish" (Douglas, 2003). To be a successful African American female athlete ran counter to societal expectations and challenged the dominate notions of culture which sustained racism in the US (Douglas, 2003). In order to preserve the racial order of sport, African American female athletes have been sexualized and their physicality highlighted to the extreme that they are marginalized within both a racist and sexist culture. In summary, despite the amazing accomplishments and advancements of African American female athletes, sport remains a venue in which racism is reproduced.

Conclusion

In the last 35 years, women's sports in the United States have experienced un.p.recedented social change. This section explored the social, historical, and cultural construction of the African American female athlete by the media as well as attempted to imply the nature of the influence media has on the athletes' identities given the relatively non-existent scholarship in this area. It is evident that African American female athletes face a marginalization unknown to their White counterparts. Not only are they subjected to the feminizing effects of a gendered society, but they are also racialized in the most stereotypical ways. They are neither allowed to be women nor „true athletes'. Their successes are attributed to racial genetics and their accomplishments diminished in their comparison to men's athletics, leaving a hole in the history of African American women's sporting experiences. There is much more to explore within the complex nature of the intersections of race, gender, media, and sport, and African American women are charged with the substantial yet, essential task to combat both the racist and sexist oppression which they face. Without deeper exploration we may fall prey to dangerous "eye-cons" which present themselves as positive steps towards just representations, yet, in reality continue to reinforce the status quo. Only by becoming critical consumers of media images and advertising can we begin to challenge the representations which have come to stand in for all women and especially female athletes.

Psychological Background

> Identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the

> sedimentation of the „we' in the construction of any I, the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion compelled to give away. (Souter, 1993, p. 105)

As explained above by Souter (1993), identities are complex, unstable, and subject to continuous (re)construction. What does it really mean to develop a female identity? An African American identity? Or even an athlete identity? As these questions were laid out before me I was instructed to realize that "an examination of the conceptualization of *female identity development* and the intersection of this with *racial* and *athlete identity development* would be of great benefits to the field of Sport Psychology, to related fields such as Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies, and to those of us who are doing work with female athletes" (Fisher, 2008, n.p.). However, before such an examination can take place the concepts of identity, female, race, and athlete must be explored in depth.

Each of these concepts plays a central role in the construction and execution of my dissertation research. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate Division I African American female athletes' perceptions of media portrayals of themselves and other African American female athletes using a semi-structured interview guide and a text analysis of campus media guides. Identity politics suggest that many women's identities are influenced by numerous dimensions of their lives such as race and social class (Crenshaw, 1993). As stated by Crenshaw (1993), "racism and sexism [intersect] and factor into black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experience

separately" (p.1244). Unfortunately, feminist efforts to explore more fully the experiences of African American women often exclude the racial aspects of their lives resulting in an incomplete depiction of how racism and sexism intersect to influence black identity development (Crenshaw, 1993). The purpose of my research is to begin to address that deficiency.

Thus, this final section of the literature review discusses scholarship relating to identity development as it pertains to gender, race, and athletic identity formations. Due to the nature of my dissertation research I first focus only on a generalized form of female identity development, recognizing there are many potential paths for each female identity to take depending on a number of mitigating factors such as race, social class, and sexual orientation. Second, I examine models of black or African American identity development, bearing in mind again that each life makes its own path and is influenced by a myriad of factors, structures, and circumstances. I would like to note here that the term black is historically situated within the socio-political terminology of the 1960s and 70s. Current political stances refer to persons historically known as "black" as African Americans. Although these terms are not interchangeable because of their historio-political origins, I will frequently employ both terms in order to situate the various race identity models, most of which developed in the 1960s and 70s. Although each race is unique, some theorists have posited that models of Black Identity Development (BID) could aptly be applied to other racial and ethnic groups (Harrison, Jr., Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Tatum, 1997; Helms, 1990). Third, I explore the conceptualization of constructing an athlete identity, focusing mainly on young adults since this population aligns with my dissertation interests; however, I recognize that the process of forming an athletic identity often begins at a young age and is sustained throughout childhood, adolescence, young

adulthood, and beyond (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Finally, I examine the intersections of each of the three identities and work to construct an integrative model which will help practitioners in the fields of Sport Psychology, Women's Studies, Afro-American Studies, and Cultural Studies better understand what it means to identify as a female, African American, athlete.

Identity

As stated by Stuart Hall (1996), "there has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of „identity', at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique" (p. 1). The reason for this paradoxical development is the variety of disciplines which have begun to explore the concept and meaning of identity within culture. Although differing in approach, each discipline shares the basic tenant of being "critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity" (Hall, 1996, p. 1).

What has allowed the concept of identity to be expanded and yet, problemitized in so many ways is the following of two basic principles. The first principle was described by Derrida (1981) as "thinking at the limit." Expanded upon by Hall (1996), we acknowledge that identity "is such a concept – operating „under erasure' in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought of at all" (p. 2). Thus, according to Derrida and Hall, the philosophical tools needed to explore the notion of an identity are outdated and useless, but only to the point that since they have yet, to be replaced it is impossible to understand identity without them. This requires that our understanding of identity is always placed within a sociohistorical context while simultaneously being problemitized by the present state of culture and society.

The second principle is derived from Foucault who questioned the significance of the concepts of agency and politics with regards to identity (Hall, 1996). Hall (1996) agrees with Foucault in that "what we require is „not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice'" (p. 2). Thus, Foucault and Hall call for an engagement with "the processes by which cultural meanings are produced and understood" (Anthropology, 2008, ¶1). As explained by the Discursive Practice Program in Anthropology at the University of Hawaii, the discursive practice approach is grounded in four insights concerning discourse:

> One is the affirmation that social realities are linguistically/discursively constructed. The second is the appreciation of the context-bound nature of discourse. The third is the idea of discourse as social action. The fourth is the understanding that meaning is negotiated in interaction, rather than being present once-and-for-all in our utterances. (Anthropology, 2008, ¶2)

The Discursive Practice Program (2008) is aligned with many of the same ideals as Stuart Hall. Hall (1996) argues for an extension of Foucault's focus on discursive practice by employing a modern approach to understanding identity development. Rather than abandoning the notion of identity, he calls for a reconceptualization of it, "thinking it in its new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm" (p. 2). Following modern discursive anthropologists, Hall instructs us that "instead of focusing on how things „really' are or should be, we [should] attend to how [identities] are established, negotiated, maintained, and challenged in discourse" (Anthropology, 2008, ¶5).

In the most basic sense, identification is "constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with

the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Although this definition of identification appears natural, Hall's insistence on using the discursive approach to understanding identity places it as a construction, a continual process which is never "complete" (Hall, 1996). As Hall (1996) states,

> [Identification], like all signifying practices, is subject to „play', or difference. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of „frontier effects.' (Hall, 1996, p. 3)

This is where we may begin to explore the intersectionality, the difference, and the symbolic boundaries of the female African American athlete identity in all its parts. In order to do this we must follow in the footsteps of Jennifer Hargreaves (2000) and investigate:

> the accounts of women who are „on the margins' of mainstream sport; [explore] how they understand themselves and construct personal and group identities through sport; how their identities are constructed relationally through contact with other people and communities of people; why they make certain allegiances and not others; and how their identities are social and historically constructed within cultures and through cultural discourses. (p. 8)

Within this section I discuss the scholarship relating to the identification process of female, African American athletes in American culture. I begin with a theoretical explanation of identity as a concept and continue through what it means to identify as a female, an African American, and as an athlete. What we discover is that what it "means to be a woman [an African American, and an athlete] changes over time, varies across cultures, and shifts from one social

context to another" (Jackson, 1993, p. 5).

Female Identity Development

> History is now viewed as contextual and is sensitive to gender as well as culture. When research is conducted, various factors embedded in their contextual approach should be examined. Feminist researchers are concerned with the particulars of women's experiences--how and why women come to act, think, and feel the way they do. Although not an easy answer, it is giving credence to the perspective of woman as a multidimensional and complex being. (Denmark, Klara, Baron, & Cambareri-Fernandez, 2008, p. 7)

Defining the field of the psychology of women is a complex and daunting task. History plays a large role in what we once "Knew" and now *know* about women. In order to move forward through the sociohistorical context of the development of the psychology of women throughout history I will put forth two definitions of such. The first was constructed by Denmark (1977) who said that "the psychology of women is defined as that which includes all psychological issues pertaining to women and their experiences" (as cited in Denmark et al., 2008, p. 5). The second came from Lerner (1992) who viewed the psychology of women through a "transitional history" lens whereby "women's experiences are examined through their multiple layers of understanding" (as cited in Denmark et al., 2008, p. 5). It is by employing both definitions simultaneously that we will explore the history of what it meant to develop a female identity and where we stand today.

Psychology is sexual, a person's biological make-up of both internal and external

genitalia, sex hormones, and chromosomes (Wharton, 2005) *and* gendered, the socio-cultural meanings attached by others or given to one's sex (Wharton, 2005). The duality of psychological and identity development has been divided into three historical time frames and conceptualizations where we would find women explored as problem, examined for similarities and differences to males, and today as the subject of feminist study of women's lived experiences (Denmark et al., 2008). Although the history of psychology is long, the psychology of women has enjoyed a relatively short exploration. Early psychological studies focused on the male species (animal or human) and if women were ever used as co-participants "neither sex nor gender differences were reported, which discounted the influences of these factors, and in essence, was an indication of the belief that men were the norm when considering various psychological factors" (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 6). In fact, in 1976 a study conducted by McKenna and Kessler discovered that 95% of psychological research studies did not examine gender comparisons at all (Denmark et al., 2008).

During the years leading up to the second wave of feminism, and long after, psychological studies which focused on sex differences often *found* results which ended up "supporting male superiority and domination" within early theories and research findings and especially with the discipline itself (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 6). One of the best examples of the ways in which male authority and power within the field of psychology was used to homogenize men's and women's psychological development was discovered by Carol Gilligan. In 1982, Gilligan published *In a Different Voice*, in which she heavily critiqued the Kohlberg Model of

Moral Development.[3] Gilligan (1982) expressed serious methodological concerns with the ways in which the data were gathered. Not only was Kohlberg's sample comprised solely of males, but the context of the moral dilemmas was heavily male-orientated (just to name a few) (Gilligan, 1982). In the end Kohlberg concluded, based on what Gilligan (1982) decried as invalid results, that women could only reach the third of the six levels of moral functioning, which was as a way to cite women as morally deficient rather than seen as a problem with Kohlberg's model. According to Gilligan's (1982) own research:

> The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the "real and recognizable trouble" of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus, protect from interference the rights of life and self-fulfillment…. Development for both sexes would therefore seem to entail an integration of rights and responsibilities through the discovery of the complementary of these disparate views. (p. 100)

Although later studies (Walker, 1984; Mednick, 1989) have critiqued Gilligan's original reformulation of Kohlberg's model, she was one of the first feminist psychologists to demonstrate the devastating effects of applying male models to females as well as expose the power derived from silencing certain voices (Tolman & Brown, 2001).

Early psychoanalytic. One of the earliest and strongest threads of inquiry into the identity development of females was Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory:

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[3] For more on Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development see Kohlberg, 1969.

> Freud, a 19th-century Viennese medical doctor who practiced neurology, founded the psychoanalytic school of psychology. [He] constructed his personality theory based on his own self analysis and his analysis of individual case studies. When evaluating the validity and generalizability of Freudian results, one must take into account the limitations of his methodology. (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 11)

Despite his limitations, Freud is still known as the founding father of psychoanalytic thought. The foundation of much of his work in psychosocial development was linked to men and women's sex drives ((Denmark et al., 2008). According to Freud, healthy psychological development could only occur if the sex drives were successfully satisfied (Denmark et al., 2008).

In what Freud termed the "oral" and "anal" stages, there is little difference between males and females. Both sexes focus on the mother as their "primary love object" (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 12). At the age of three, the "phallic" stage begins. In this stage young boys become obsessed with their penises while girls become centered on their clitorises (Denmark et al., 2008). It is here that Freud focused most of his energy on male psychosocial development. During the "phallic" stage boys and girls are both said to be focused on "masculine" and "active" sexual aims thereby discounting girls' engagement with sexual and psychosocial development (Denmark et al., 2008).

The cornerstone of Freud's theory of psychosocial development, like nearly all studies of the time, focused on male behavior and identity formation. In Freud's Oedipus complex, young boys are said to begin to feel hostility towards their fathers over competing for their mothers' love (Denmark et al., 2008). Despite the strength of the young boys' feelings they fear their

fathers' retribution for such discretions more. Young boys begin to fear castration by their fathers for desiring their mothers in such a way, a feeling which is intensified as they learn that young girls lack penises, as though they have already been castrated (Denmark et al., 2008). Hereafter, boys align themselves with their fathers and reject their mothers based on the belief that the future will bring a substitute love object that will not engage the rivalry of their fathers (Denmark et al., 2008). During this time young boys will "incorporate their fathers' moral values, along with those of society for which the male moral value is seen as representative. This internalization of paternal/societal male moral standards results in the formation of the *superego*, or what is often called the conscious" (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 12).

As cited in (Denmark et al. (2008) according to Freud, girls do not follow the same path of psychosocial and identity development. Once girls discover that they do not have penises they envy little boys and blame their mothers for this loss (Denmark et al., 2008). Freud states that young girls then change their allegiance from their mothers to their fathers in hopes of obtaining a penis, but they cannot identify with their fathers' nor society's masculine codes and therefore never internalize a moral code (Denmark et al., 2008). Thus, the development of the *superego* is stunted in young girls. Eventually, Freud concludes that young girls realize the normalcy of their lack of penis and begin to wish instead for a baby. The girls' sexual aims transform from active and masculine to the more appropriate passive feminine receptivity (Denmark et al., 2008).

> According to Freudian theory, anatomical differences and the resulting differences in sexual functions are viewed as being the casual factors in the development of psychological differences. Here, body creates psyche, and the phrase "biology is destiny" is formed. The biologically "healthy" woman has passive sexual aims, is

> motivated by motherhood, and spurns achievement related behaviors. Thus, biological differences are instrumental in the creation of psychological differences, which, in turn, explain social behavior and serve to maintain the status quo." (Denmark et al., 2008, p. 13)

It is important to note that Freud's view of young girls and women leaves a narrow view of identification within society and must be historically situated with regards to its modern day relevance in understanding female identity formation.

Modern psychoanalytic. In the 1970s and 1980s, Freud's psychoanalytic ideals underwent major paradigmatic shifts. One of the most important sociologists of the modern psychoanalytic movement was Nancy Chodorow. As cited by Layton (1998), like Freud, she and others like her used:

> psychoanalytic theories to trace the origins and content of gender differences. Like their postmodern counterparts, they worked not only on the individual but on the cultural (although not linguistic) level, arguing that conditions such as the fact that women are primarily responsible for childcare produce particular versions of masculinity and femininity. (Layton, 1998, p. 38)

According to Layton (1998), Chodorow felt that since a child's first primary caregiver is the mother, each child would develop a specific affinity for femininity. If this were, in fact, the case, then it was boys, not girls (as Freud had suggested) who would have a harder time developing a solid gender identity (Layton, 1998). Boys would need to, in fact, dis-identify with their mothers. According to Layton (1998), Chodorow believed that the overwhelming absence of fathers (due to employment outside the home) leaves many boys with no one with whom to

identify and instead they adopt the often sexist cultural constructs of masculinity (Layton, 1998).

In Chodorow's model, girls are able to easily "develop the capacity for primary relatedness and mutuality in the early relationship with their mothers" (Layton, 1998, p. 38). Since girls are never forced to sever their relationship with their mothers they "develop a sense of self that has permeable boundaries and that draws esteem from creating and preserving intimate relationships. What women crave, men cannot give; only with children (and other women) can they recreate the longed-for intimacy" (Layton, 1998, p. 39). Despite the intriguing nature of Chodorow's theory it cannot account for women's sense of, or command for, agency nor their adoption of stereotypically *male* attributes, such as those often required for sport participation.

Postmodern gender identity development. During the mid to late-1980s, the rise of the postmodern movement began to take hold of the ways gender identity development was viewed. Three of the most prominent postmodern feminists to explore female identity development were Jacqueline Rose, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler (Layton, 1998). Rose (1986, as cited in Layton, 1998) disavowed previous psychoanalytic attempts to force young girls and boys to stand on one side of the phallus or the other, dividing all children into the "haves" and the "have nots." For Rose, the escape from gender polarities lay with the unconscious, "for it is the place from which constant disruptions of seemingly un.p.roblematic identifications emanate" (Layton, 1998, p. 47). Rose charged psychoanalysis not with reworking childhood development and identity formation better or "enforcing traditional narratives of development, but to uncover the psychic resistance to cultural norms of femininity and masculinity" (Layton, 1998, p. 47). Rose's goal was to use postmodern psychoanalysis to break free from hegemonic notions of

female and maleness.

Luce Irigaray (1985) dismantled Freud's notion of female identity formation by stating that women live within a patriarchal (or phallic) cultural order and have no choice but to follow a specific line of psychosocial development (as cited in Layton, 1998). Irigaray charges society with not allowing women to relate to their own genitals in a space separate from the phallic-centered society (Layton, 1998). As Layton states, she shows how both Freudian and Lacanian theory endow the phallus with the status of origin, defensively wresting that status away from the mother, origin of us all" (p. 48). For Irigaray the only solution is the construction of a "counter-symbolic based in women's creation of their relation to their bodies and to their mothers" (Layton, 1998, p. 48). Through the creation of such a counter-symbol, young women will not be doomed to identify with a damaged psyche in a culture that does not value their uniqueness.

Judith Butler, accounts for gender acquisition through a more poststructuralist rather than postmodern paradigm. Although post-structuralism is often thought of as an offshoot of postmodernism, the two are not synonymous (Layton, 1998). While postmodern thought is theoretically based on the notion that sex is constructed through language (Layton, 1998), post-structuralist theory emphasizes the ways in which language can be manipulated to construct master narratives or universal "Truths" about individuals and society. The ability to use language in this way implies there are a multitude of lived experiences which are often neglected and unexplored, especially when intersected with gender (Butler, 1999). Butler thus, created what has been called one of the most "sophisticated accounts of gender acquisition" (Layton, 1998, p. 48).

According to Butler (1999) gender is a *performance* of identity. Society influences this

gendered performance by the establishment and enforcement of gender norms (Butler, 1999). In this sense gender performances are tightly controlled by societal expectations and how an individual speaks, plays, and/or dresses are a function of gender dictates (Butler, 1999). Butler's theory of female identity formation as well as Layton's assessment of Butler's work aligns well with my own postmodern stance and the inherent intersectionality of a female African American athlete's life. As Layton explains in her interpretation of Butler's theory:

> In our particular culture, assuming a sex and a gender identity involves not only identifications that are allowed within the cultural norm, but also repudiations of those that lie outside the cultural norm. Thus, identity is based as much on disidentification as on identifications. What is repudiated and disavowed, however, always returns to threaten the boundaries of the subject. (Layton, 1998, p. 50)

As will be discussed later in this paper, it is often the differences which come to constitute large portions of female, African American athletic identities.

The negotiated model of female identity development. In Layton's (1998), *Who's that girl? Who's that boy? Clinical practice meets postmodern gender theory*, she proposes a negotiated model of gender identity development that deviates from the numerous stage theories and embraces the idea that "men and women maintain multiple gender identities, and each gender identity is associated with its own modes of agency and relationship" (Layton, 1998, p. 53). Although she contends that hegemonic masculinity and femininity will continue to be some of the most powerful internalized forces to contend with, they are not the only ones (Layton, 1998). According to Layton, the internalizing forces of gender identity can be altered and changed by the competing cultural norms (Layton, 1998). Thus, Layton conceptualizes an

individual being who is internalizing both cultural *and* internal psychological meanings in order to create an identity. There is no true self to achieve, but a "continuously evolving negotiator between relationally constructed multiple and contradictory internal and external worlds" (Layton, 1998, p. 26). We create our own individual identities through our own psychology just as our identities are created for us by socio-cultural factors outside our bodies. The result is an individual subject with many gender identities existing harmoniously and contemptuously at the same time (Layton, 1998). Gender identity "is a negotiation, within relational matrices, between the constructing and facilitating consequences of gender categories" (Layton, 1998,p. 64). Thus, a continuous internal (psychological) and external (social and cultural) gender struggle is the core of Layton's model of gender identification. The negotiation of such a struggle is particularly applicable when examining the intersectional identities of African American female athletes.

Although there exist a number of other and alternate psychological explanations of female identity development, in this section, I have given a brief overview of the primary theories which guide the development of the psychology of women. For the purposes of my own dissertation research and my own adherence to postmodern and critical feminisms I find Layton's combination of psychological structure and cultural combatant the most provocative. Layton's assertion that social influences on female identity are just as potent as our own individual psychology and our own ways of making meaning align perfectly with understanding what it means to identify as a female in American society.

Racial Identity Development

> Every person goes through a process of defining themselves in terms of personal and social importance and meaning attached to being part of a particular group. The social construction of these groups tends to change over time, but in the United States there are important and significantly different experiences of people that vary by racial categorization. (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 122)

As stated by Tatum (1997), "given the dominant/subordinate relationship of whites and people of color in this society it is not surprising that [the] developmental process will unfold in different ways for the different racial groups" (p. 93). Given the literature (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002; Tatum, 1997; Helms, 1990) there is no reason to believe that the identity development of peoples of color (Asian, Latina/o, Native American) is similar to or drastically different from that described for African Americans. Tatum (1997) asserts that in each case it is "assumed that a positive sense of oneself, as a member of one's group (which is not based on an assumption of superiority) is important for psychological health" (p. 93). However, due to the historical, social, and cultural differences affecting marginal groups of people, it is critical to distinguish among the many unique types of identity formation. For the purposes of my dissertation research which focuses on African American female athletes, it is necessary to use a developmental lens which aligns with the construction of a black identity. [4]

Cross (1995) asserts that the development of identity is a social process by which a person is shaped through a number of experiences with family, peer groups, schools,

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[4]For more on racial identity formation of other minority groups see Phinney, 1989 and Helms, 1990.

communities, culture, and various other social affiliations. Each identity "undergoes trials and tests that serve to make the owner feel focused and stable by making life predictable" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 122). Although racial identity models describe a process by which an African American person comes to adopt a "positively affirmed sense of racial identity" this is not to discount that each individual is comprised of many identities based on their membership in various social groups throughout society (Tatum, 1997, p. 92). However, as Vicki Spelman (1988) asserts in *Inessential Woman,* and is paraphrased by Tatum (1997), "these identities cannot be separated like pop beads. For instance, we black women cannot isolate our blackness from our femaleness. We are always both simultaneously" (p. 91). Thus, racial identity development theory focuses specifically on the "psychological implications of racial-group membership, that is, belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential group membership (Helms, 1990, p. 3), but always with the knowledge that alternate identities exist.

Although there are a number of excellent models of racial identity development, the four most prominent will be discussed here: (a) the *Nigrescence model: (b) racial identity development theory; (c) feminist standpoint theory; and (d) critical race theory.* Since each of the four models references the relationship racism plays in developing and influencing an African American identity, it is vital to define racism as it is used throughout these models and this section. Racism is defined as "a pervasive system of advantage based on race, which has personal, cultural, and institutional implications for our daily lives, [as well as] a daily impact on our interpersonal relationships" (Tatum, 1997, p. 92). Thus, it is clear that racism is an essential, though unfortunate, component of all racial identity development models and theories.

Additionally, because I have chosen to focus only on the identity development of African

Americans in US society, it is vital to define the demographics of this group before moving forward. Often times the subject of race is glossed over and assumptions are made regarding its meaning and implications. Such occurrences leave room only for racial stereotypes and caricatures to stand in for real similarities and differences within and between races. "Genetically speaking, the boundary lines drawn between races have been profoundly blurred. In this country there are some classified as African American who have more features common to Europeans than Africans" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 121). History has proven that the biological and genetic bases for race differences are faulty. LaVeist (1996) asserted, and I concur, that "race is a social rather than biological factor that reveals a common socio-political history. Being African American has more to do with shared experiences than shared genetic material" (as cited in Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 121). Thus, I defer to the research on racial identity development and LaVeist (1996) and Helms (1990) that it is those who most closely identify with a shared experience of being African American that will identify as such.

Nigrescence model. Cross (1971, 1978, 1991, 1995) outlines a developmental process experienced by African American adults in which they "become black." "This developmental process in which African Americans develop a manner of thinking about and evaluating themselves in terms of being ‚black' is called *Nigrescence*" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 122). *Nigrescence* is characterized by a transition in racial identity from Eurocentric to Afrocentric (Helms, 1985). For over twenty years Cross revised and modified his original four-step model to a more comprehensive five-step model based on research and continual review of relevant literature (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). In Cross's 1995 racial identity model *Nigrescence* is conceptualized "as a mechanism by which African Americans who are assimilated, deculturized

and in many cases miseducated develop into more Afrocentric people (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 123).

The five stages of Cross's (1995) *Nigrescence* include: (a) pre-encounter; (b) encounter; (c) immersion-emersion; (d) internalization; and (e) internalization-commitment. The pre-encounter stage "outlines the ongoing and stable identity that will eventually be the object of the metamorphosis" (Cross, Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, p. 244). During this time the individual's racial attitude lies along a continuum from race neutral to anti-black (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 123). Although the individual will not deny the physicality of being black, s/he will consider it an insignificant factor in her/his life (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). Helms (1990) states of this stage:

> the person must maintain the fiction that race and racial indoctrination have nothing to do with how he or she lives life. It is probably the case that the Pre-encounter person is bombarded on a regular basis with information that he or she cannot really be a member of the ‚in' racial group, but relies on denial to selectively screen such information from awareness. (p. 23)

During this stage there is likely to be little pride in one's perceived race and an increased tendency to distances oneself from others of the same racial background (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002).

Movement into the encounter stage is usually precipitated by an significant event or series of circumstances that drastically alter the individual's world view (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002; Tatum, 1997). The event(s) must be acknowledged by the individual and recognized as a legitimate act of racism which has come to affect his/her life (Tatum, 1997). According to

Harrison, Jr. et al. (2002) these occurrences are quite common. Although not as explicit and frequent as in previous decades, African Americans are still bombarded with a number of racialized instances which shake the foundation of their Pre-encounter belief systems.

Entering the immersion-emersion phase is characterized by the destruction of the pre-encounter identity while "simultaneously constructing the new Afrocentric identity" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 124). As Parham (1989) describes, "at this stage, everything of value in life must be black or relevant to blackness. This stage is also characterized by a tendency to denigrate white people, while simultaneously glorifying black people" (p. 190). Harrison, Jr. et al. (2002) noted that black youth will often self-segregate during this stage not just to reinforce being black but to distance themselves from groups of people who cannot possibly validate or identify with them.

Because there is little difference between the internalization and internalization-commitment phases, both will be discussed here. The internalization phase begins when a "sense of contentment with the self calms the internal struggle of the previous stages" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 124). Militancy turns into reflection regarding the structure of society and a "thoughtful examination of oppression and racism" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 124; Tatum, 1997). The individual is now filled with a love and desire to accept all that African American communities are and have to offer. The internalization-commitment stage is not radically different from the internalization phase. However, during this fifth, and final stage of *Nigrescence*, the individual has "found ways to translate his/her personal sense of blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment" to the concerns of blacks as a group, which is sustained over time (Cross, 1990, p. 220). Whether in the internalization or internalization-

commitment phase, the individual has achieved a solid sense of racial and individual self.

Racial identity development theory. Despite the comprehensiveness of Cross's *Nigrescence* model it has been criticized for its application to only African American adults (Tatum, 1997). Tatum (1997) has expanded upon Cross's model to construct a more relational construct of identity development called *Racial Identity Development Theory.* Tatum (1997) expands Cross's notion of the pre-encounter stage by stating that by this point:

> The African American has absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the notion that „white is right' and „black is wrong.' Though the internalization of negative black stereotypes may be outside her conscious awareness, the individual seeks to assimilate and be accepted by whites and may actively or passively distance herself from other blacks. (p. 93)

Although very similar to Cross's pre-encounter model, Tatum's extended explanation of identity struggle during this stage is particularly poignant. Tatum (1997) suggests that this stage applies to young children through pre-adolescents. This is the moment (before age ten) when black children have yet, to self-reflect (like all children of this age) and have yet, to adopt the identity "shaped for them by their parents and loved ones (Cross, Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, p. 246). Tatum's expansion of *Nigrescence* to include childhood and adolescent experiences enhances its generalizability to the numerous life stages, feelings, and experiences of African American peoples.

Like Cross's model, the encounter stage is entered upon the recognition of a racist encounter or series of marked events which causes a fracture in the pre-encounter identity. According to Tatum's model (1997), "encounter experiences happen as early as seventh and

eighth grades" (as cited by Cross, Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, p. 246). The occurrence triggers an "awareness of the significance of race, [as] the individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism" (Tatum, 1997, p. 55). Tatum describes a number of racist events which might precipitate the encounter phase, many of which occur within the context of schools (Cross, Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2001).

According to Tatum (1997) the immersion/emersion phase usually occurs throughout high school when self-exploration is predictable. During this time African American adolescents and young adults actively seek out ways to explore their own history and culture with the support of their same-race peers, the result of which is an "emerging security in a newly defined and affirmed sense of self" (Tatum, 1997, p. 94).

The internalization and internalization-commitment phases of Tatum's model follow nearly identically to Cross's *Nigrescence*. During internalization "pro-black attitudes become more expansive, open, and less defensive" (Tatum, 1997, p. 94). This usually occurs when the individual goes off to college:

> While maintaining his or her connections with black peers, the internalized individual is willing to establish meaningful relationships with whites who acknowledge and are respectful of her self-definition. The individual is ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups. (Tatum, 1997, p. 94)

In the fifth stage, Tatum (1997) finds that the individual is now anchored enough within the self to both "proactively perceive and transcend race" (Tatum, 1997, p. 94). Blackness becomes "a point of departure for discovering the universe of ideals, cultures, and experiences beyond blackness in place of mistaking blackness as the universe itself" (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991,

p. 330).

Cross et al. (1991) warn against viewing Cross's *Nigrescence* and Tatum's *racial identity development theory* as linear transcendence, but more as a spiral that moves forward and back as a person encounters new experiences. Jean Phinney (1992) also developed a way to examine the ethnic and racial identity development of children called the *Ethnic Identity Development Model (EIDM)* using Erikson's *Psychosocial Theory of Development*.[5] Although beyond the scope of this paper it is critical to note that the combination of models developed by Phinney (1992) and Tatum (1997) "make possible the mapping of black identity development from infancy through early adulthood. Both scholars believe they have isolated *normative* trends, which means their combined schema explains how the majority of black people develop a sense of blackness" (Cross, Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, p. 249).

Athletic Identity

Brewer et al. (1993) describe athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role" (p. 237). According to this definition any role which an individual assumes becomes a part of his/her identity to various degrees within a contextual sense. For example, for some people being an athlete might mean actively participating in sport, while for others it may mean that the person is considered "good" at sports; yet, for others still, it may simply mean being physically active and fit (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). Although each individual has a unique conceptualization of what constitutes an athletic identity, "it generally relates to one's view of self in relation to physical activity and involvement in sport" (Groff &

[5] For additional resources on Phinney's model see Phinney (1989) and Phinney (1992).

Zabriskie, 2006, 127).

Although identities are often thought of in a psychological "self-awareness" sense, the discipline of social psychology has often provided additional ways in which to view constructions of the self. Hewitt (1984), a sociologist, referred to identity as "images of oneself in particular role situations" (as cited in Webb et al., 1998, ¶1). According to Webb et al. (1998) then, identities are situational and unique to the various contexts in which individuals find them. In this sense identities are never fixed and are always shifting (Hall, 1996; Webb et al., 1998). Although Hall's ideas run counter to Brewer et al.'s conception of a fixed athletic identity, if we view Brewer et al.'s findings through a postmodern lens, we can translate his theoretical background in order to place intersectional identities within a sporting context.

The idea that athletic identities are unique situational identities is based on two principals. First, an individual's athletic identity is often begun and formed early in their life (Webb et al., 1998). At a young age developing a child's athletic talent becomes the central preoccupation to both the child and the adults in that child's life (Webb et al., 1998). As Webb et al. (1998) states:

> For those children, the time and psychological commitment to the role of athlete is such that by the time they reach high school, highly successful athletes have internalized the athletic identity, frequently at the expense of other possible social roles. As a result, an internalized athletic identity likely dominates the individual's overall self-concept. (¶1)

The second principle guiding the uniqueness of athletic identity is the often public nature of athletic identity performance (Webb et al., 1998). Unlike most other role enactments, "athletic performances are typically displayed to a wider public audience…with a greater evaluative weight on individual successes and failures, [with] outcomes which are immediately visible to an

interested public" (Webb et al., 1998, ¶2). Thus, the formation of an athletic identity carries with it special privilege, but also an exceptional burden.

In fact, athletic identity theory explains that sport involvement often follows a predictable pattern of time, skill, and the identity engagement (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). "Increased time spent in sport and athletic performance are related to increased importance of sport to the individual and the extent to which s/he is likely to access athletic identity when negotiating various situations" (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006, p. 127). In fact, those athletes who more heavily invest their own sense of self in athletic endeavors while simultaneously attaching a high value to that aspect of their identities are most likely to have strongly developed senses of athletic identity (Curry, 1993; Horton & Mack, 2000). Thus, from a postmodern perspective, identity is fluid and ever changing as the individual invests more or less of her/him in connection with the sporting realm and disengages or lessens the attachments to other aspects of the individual's identity.

Athletic identities are of vital importance to athletes participating at every level of competition. As stated by Groff and Zabriskie (2006) "when viewed in conjunction with other aspects of one's self-concept, athletic identity plays a significant role in understanding one's cognitive structure and social role composition and, thus, becomes relevant to both athletes and non-athletes alike" (p. 127). A study conducted by Horton and Mack (2000) found that athletes who had a strong athletic identity exhibited significantly better performance outcomes, commitment to sport, enhanced social networks, and more positive training experiences. Additional studies by Anderson (2004) and Pepitas (1978) discovered that persons with strong athletic identities experienced better social relationships, were more committed overall to sport

performance, and were more likely to engage in physically active and healthy lifestyles in the future. Furthermore, more recent studies have found that young children and adolescents who develop strong athletic identities in young adulthood are more likely to continue their engagement in physical activity throughout their adult lives resulting in better overall life quality (Pica, 2003).

Although developing a strong athletic identity results in a number of beneficial behaviors and outcomes, several negative consequences can also arise. Results have shown that athletes with a strong athletic identity are more prone to overuse injuries (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). In addition, if the athlete develops a stronger sense of athletic identity than to other aspects of his/her life the resulting emotional vulnerability can leave him/her devastated when facing poor performance outcomes and short and/or long-term injuries (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). Athletes who are unable to attach significant meaning to other aspects of their lives and identities outside of sport have higher rates of depression (Brewer, 1993), lower academic achievement (Cornelius, 1995), and higher rates of performance enhancing drug usage (Cornelius, 1995).

In fact, most of the research conducted regarding athletic identity has been done by testing and interviewing retired athletes (Sparkes, 1998). These athletes may have retired for a variety of reasons such as age, loss of scholarship, lack of desire, deselection, or career-ending injury. By far, more of the research has focused on Division I intercollegiate athletes, predominantly males, who have sustained career-ending injuries. Studies conducted by Sparkes (1998) and Webb et al. (1998) have concluded that the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role can have significant impacts on her/his present and future identities. Brewer et al. (1993) suggested that a strong athletic identity could have both positive and negative

consequences, acting as either "Hercules' muscles" or an "Achilles' heel" (p. 250). All of these studies have shown that often the degree of athletic identity is also tied to self-esteem and overall sense of self. Due to the overall salience and multiplicity of other identity influencing factors such as gender and race, we will now turn our attention to how athletic identity has been shown to interact with other components of one's self-identity.

As stated by Groff and Zabriskie (2006), "of the utmost importance when discussing the impact of athletic identity, is the presence of a psychometrically sound instrument capable of accurately measuring this construct" (¶7). The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001) is the most commonly used instrument for measuring athletic identity (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). The AIMS was designed to "explore the strength and exclusivity of an individual's athletic identity and has been utilized to examine athletic identity among elite athletes, recreational athletes, and non-athlete samples" (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006, p. 128).

The AIMS was developed to measure the single construct of athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). The original measure was based on a sample of 243 college students and proved to be both a valid and reliable predictor of the strength and stability of athletic identity (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006). Later studies discovered that the AIMS was also a valid and reliable measurement of a multidimensional construct including social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity (Brewer et al., 1993). Social identity related to the "extent to which the individual views him/herself as occupying the role of athlete" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 3). Exclusivity referred to the degree in which the individual associated with his/her athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). And, negative affectivity was related to the degree of personalization and

generalization of poor performances in sport to the individual's overall sense of self (Brewer et al., 1993). Although the concept of being able to accurately quantify an individual's athletic identity as if it were fixed and stable over time goes against my own views of identity as a postmodern construction, I know of no means by which to assess athletic identity from a postmodern standpoint. This serves as a warning that such data is representative only of certain episodes in time and is not meant to serve as the one and only construct of athletic identity.

The AIMS consists of seven items that are "intended to reflect the social, cognitive, and affective components of athletic identity" (Mignano, Brewer, Winter, & Van Raalte, 2006, ¶11). Items include statements such as, "I have many goals related to sport," and, "Sport is the most important part of my life" (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). Responses are selected based on a Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). "The AIMS is internally consistent (alpha = .81) and AIMS scores increase with the level of athletic involvement" (Mignano et al., 2006, ¶11).

A study conducted by Hale, James, and Stambulova (1999) tested the cross-cultural application of the AIMS with elite international athletes. 1,160 athletes from the United Kingdom, United States, and Russia were sampled. All three populations from the sample countries supported the multidimensional structure of the AIMS (Hale et al., 1999). However, only 90% of the items were useful in accurately measuring athletic identity; thus, it was concluded that further cross-cultural analysis is needed to improve the reliability of the instrument (Hale et al., 1999). Recently, many practitioners have called for research on the influence of cultural, gender, and racial variables on the AIMS (Hale et al., 1999). "The AIMS can help to clearly discern an individual's level of commitment to, and importance that, they

place upon sport" (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006, p. 138). The development of a "more comprehensive understanding of athletic identity" may help practitioners support athletes throughout their careers and lives in order to promote healthy life choices and lifestyle behaviors (Groff & Zabriskie, 2006, p. 138). Future research would do well to explore the reliability and validity of the AIMS when other salient aspects of identity are factored into the assessment.

It is clear that athletic identities are highly salient aspects of an athlete's life. The results of the AIMS demonstrate that athletic identities cross over into a number of other life trajectories such as social relations and self-concept. Although the numerous benefits of developing a strong athletic identity are compelling, it is clear that over-identification can be a problem. Athletes who identify solely as athletes potentially lack the socio-cultural awareness to function in society, especially once their athletic careers come to an end. Because it is easy to see how a strong athletic identity can take over all other aspects of an individual's identity, it is interesting to think about athletes who have other highly salient identity aspects within their lives (e.g., gender and race) identify and function as athletes.

Athletics and gender. In order to expand upon the ways in which female and athletic identity development overlap it is important to look at the intersections of these two major components of female athlete identity. Sport and education are two forms of gendered institutions and they intersect in the arena of intercollegiate athletics. In fact, intercollegiate sport in America is influenced not only by University policies and procedures, but also by governing bodies such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), professional organizations (e.g., National Football Association, (NFL), Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)), the media (e.g., institutional, local, national and international), and large

corporate sponsors such as Nike and Adidas (Wharton, 2005). These various institutions act as "important sources of cultural beliefs regarding the social world, including beliefs about gender. Institutions provide scripts that become guides for action" (Wharton, 2005, p.68).

In fact, sport as an institution "helps to create ideas about male and female bodies and their physical capabilities or limitations" (Wharton, 2005, p.66). For example, as Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) discovered in their investigation of intercollegiate media guide covers for both male and female athletes, female athletes are rarely represented in ways which display them as "competent, elite athletes" (p. 79). One such example of this finding came from a women's basketball team. The team was featured in formal gowns complete with make-up and styled hair (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). As the authors noted, "the message communicated is not about basketball. There is no evidence anywhere on the cover that suggests that this is a basketball team. Rather, it appears that they might be candidates for homecoming queen" (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004, p. 79). Within this example we find that female bodies are being represented in ways that restrict their athletic competence and enhance their heterosexuality and physical appeal. This sort of portrayal sends a clear message to the viewer that the women are only marginal athletes and are first and foremost, beautiful women. Depending on the athlete's self-perception and social affiliations, the identity that could be drawn from this photo is one of "heterosexy appeal," not competent, serious athlete (Krane, 2001).

Athletics and race. Athletic identity can also influence and be influenced by racial identity. A study conducted by Harrison, Jr. et al. (2002) discovered that by applying a hybrid model of *Nigrescence* to sport, utilizing the combined theories of Cross (1995) and Tatum

(1997), they were able to account for a number of subtle and powerful ways athletic and racial identities intersected. For example, when one thinks about the phrase "African American," a number of unconscious images come to mind usually including athlete and/or sport (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). Although these terms are generally applied, experience and demographics indicate a much narrower focus is at work. Specifically, most people associate African American male athletes with basketball, football, and track and field due to their relative overrepresentation in all of these sports (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). This pattern is similar for African American female athletes who are also often overrepresented in basketball and track and field (Withycombe, 2007). It is possible, then that African American racial identity is tied to a specific type of athletic identity developed through particular sports (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002).

Although Harrison et al.'s (2002) research offers a unique and potentially helpful theoretical explanation as to why African Americans are often seen as natural athletes as well as essentially pigeonholed into certain sports, they do not explicitly explore the concept of sex or gender. This is a critical flaw in their work. As has been previously established in this paper, sex and gender play significant roles in an individual's identity. It would be false to uncritically apply Harrison et al.'s model to both African American male and female athletes without getting a clearer explanation of the methods that were used to draw such conclusions. However, for the purposes of this paper, Harrison et al.'s explanation for the overrepresentation of African American athletes in at least basketball and track and field will be accepted noting it with critical reservations as a possibility and not a conclusive fact. In this way I might move forward in positing my own model of the intersectionality of sex and gender, race, and athletic identity.

Harrison, Jr. et al. (2002) began their study by examining their *Nigrescence* model

against various forms of athletic involvement for African Americans. Like Tatum (1997), they extended the model to include childhood and pre/adolescence, the time periods when most future athletes become involved in sporting activities. During the pre-encounter stage, when the child believes that race has very little impact on his/her life s/he would likely engage in a number of sports with little preference to the meanings attached to them (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). If an African American child were to begin to specialize at this point s/he would likely engage in European American activities (e.g., soccer, swimming, tennis), as s/he "strives to shun any identification with African Americans" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 123). Because African American athletes are embraced by US culture it is likely that any signs of athletic talent and giftedness would be highly praised and rewarded not only by family members, but also by the child's peer group and the culture at large (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002).

Due to the meritocratic nature of many youth sports, some African American children may be protected from the encounter phase for an extended period of time (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). However, although sport often offers protection from some of the more blatant encounters with racism, the racism is still present although often subtle and covertly played out. The likelihood of moving into the encounter stage increases significantly as the athlete ages. For example, this could include situations where African American athletes date white men or women or have encounters with law enforcement who are unaware of the athlete's status (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). In today's society, experiences with the media can also trigger a move into the encounter stage (e.g., Don Imus's negative comments regarding the Rutgers basketball team in 2008). Whatever the trigger, unfortunately, all African American athletes will eventually enter the encounter stage (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002).

Following the encounter stage is the immersion-emersion stage in which the individual is eager to embrace all that is African American:

> Participation in sports or physical activities that identify the individual's „blackness' are likely sought out in an effort to completely immerse themselves in „blackness'. Physical activities that are identified as „white' may be shunned even if the individual shows potential for outstanding performance in the sport or activity. (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 124)

Given the overrepresentation of African Americans in intercollegiate and professional sports such as football, basketball, and track and field it is likely that African Americans go through the immersion-emersion phase prior to entering college.

Stage Four and stage Five account for the internalization and internalization-commitment phases of *Nigrescence*. During these times as the internal struggles subside the African American athlete will begin to view sport and physical activity as a "mode of recreation rather than a source of identity" (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 124). During internalization the athlete begins to re-construct her/his basic identity as it becomes enmeshed with other identities drawn from employment, spiritual engagement, and familial roles (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). Once the African American athlete's identity becomes diversified, an elevated sense of "collective self-esteem and perpetuation of positive self-stereotypes in the realm of sport" and life begins (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002, p. 125).

The application of Cross (1995) and Tatum's (1997) *Nigrescence* model to African American involvement in sport has led many researchers to question the stability of racial and athletic identities for African American athletes (Harrison, Jr. et al., 2002). A study conducted

by Shelton and Sellars (2000) discovered that African American athletic identities can include both stable and situational properties. According to the researchers, racial identity comes to the forefront when it is an important factor in the individual's athletic experience (e.g., dependent upon stage development, demographic make-up of team, familial attitudes) (Shelton & Sellars, 2000). Interestingly, Brown, Manuel, Jackson, Keiper, and Sellars (1997) examined the significance of racial and athletic identities among college athletes. It was discovered that racial and athletic identities were negatively correlated among African American athletes, but positively correlated among European American athletes (Brown et al., 1997). The authors concur with conclusions drawn by Harrison, Jr. et al. (2002) that African American athletes are relatively protected from racism and discrimination which "allows their athletic identities to come to the forefront (p. 128). Research conducted by Jackson, Keiper, Brown, and Manuel (1997) also found evidence to suggest that as the importance of athletic identity went up there was a significant drop in racial identity importance. However, all of the studies conducted regarding athlete and racial identity salience cite the need for increased research and more validated measures of both athlete and racial identity adherence. However, given the apparent fluidity of competing and intersecting identities, just as described by postmodern theory, finding more reliable and valid measures of identity acceptance and adherence may not be possible. In such a case, it is critical to utilize the current identity scales with critical reservations while using the theoretical frameworks of critical feminism combined with the methodological underpinnings of qualitative research to better understand an individual's identity at a given point in time.

The Intersection of Gender, Race, and Sport

From the intricate web of mythology which surrounds the black woman, a fundamental

image emerges. It is a woman of inordinate strength, with ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. Less of a woman in that she is less "feminine" and helpless, she is really *more* of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman. (Wallace, 1979, p. 107)

What has been shown are ways in which both female identity development and racial identity development interact with sport. It is clear that the social and psychological concepts of gender, race, and sport are highly interconnected. The integration of the various models of identity development would be extremely useful for practitioners working with African American female athletes. I strongly believe that the creation of a hybrid model is the only way to truly begin to understand the African American female athlete. A hybrid model such as this would need to include aspects from Layton's conception of female identity development, Cross and Tatum's *Nigrescence*, Collins' *Feminist Standpoint Theory,* and Crenshaw's (1993) *Critical Race Theory's* explanation of black identity development, and research from the field of sport psychology examining the strength and saliency of athletic identity development.

The connection of these various models is actually their adherence to postmodern ideals such as the combined influences of psychology, sociology, and culture, the situated ways we have of knowing something, and the fluidity and strength of multiple identities. As reinforced by Stuart Hall (1996):

identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and

> fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation." (p. 4)

Thus, practitioners must come to realize that the African American athlete is never simply a female, nor an African American, nor just an athlete. She is an amalgamation of beings and identities, moving between worlds, lived experiences, and expectations.

In accordance with my dissertation, in order to understand the complex and intersectional life of an African American female athlete, the sociological, historical, and ethnographic scholarship of the social construction of the African American female athlete as it relates to media representations and identity formation is a topic of distinct importance. The visual image is a highly influential resource of cultural knowledge (Kane, 1996). Images have the power to dynamically structure, reinforce, and construct oppressive attitudes toward female athletes and feminine models of athleticism (Kane, 1996). Thus, it is vital that sport media be critically examined as a potential vanguard for the creation and dissemination of stereotypically gendered and racialized messages regarding African American female athletes. In a time of mass globalization, the media becomes an increasingly important venue through which identities are constructed, modified, and re-constructed. It was Zaretsky (1995) who claimed that:

> mass consumption and mass culture emerged as basic spheres for the formation of personal identity. Through the globalization of culture and the spread of self-consciousness about the body, sport has become increasingly important in defining female identity in recent years. (as cited in Hargreaves, 2000, p. 8)

Therefore, the argument can be made that although identity formation negotiation is a multi-

layered process, in modern times the media has come to play a large role in its development. Furthermore, although Zaretsky (1995) alludes to the impact of the media on female identities he neglects to recognize its impact on racial and ethnic identities as well. The various ways race is socially constructed within American society are also crucial to understanding the double oppression faced by African America female athletes.

In fact, "media and sport construct and utilize gender [and arguably by extension racial] stereotypes to maintain gender [and racial] inequality, it is important to examine the ways in which these two powerful institutions interact with one another" (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004, p. 67). The general trend within mainstream media is to use gender in a way which both consciously and unconsciously trivializes the athletic efforts of female athletes in general and in particular African American female athletes (Douglas, 2003). And, while this approach has also impacted African American female athletes, they are additionally marginalized by stereotypical representations of their race. Often, African American women's athletic efforts are not only belittled through the sexualization of their bodies, but they are also made victims of exaggerated physicality used to reinforce their contradiction when compared to dominant notions of white hegemonic femininity (Douglas, 2003). It is this doubly negative treatment of African American female athletes that prompts the question: "How does the media effect the identities and self-concepts of these athletes?" Despite the amazing accomplishments and advancements of African American female athletes, sport remains a venue in which to reproduce racist and sexist stereotypes. To reinforce notions that these stereotypes have little or no impact on the identity formation of African American athletes is to silence the voices at the margins. By applying a hybrid model drawing on the various postmodern ways of conceptualizing female, racial, and

athletic identity development, practitioners might finally understand and be able to combat the sexist and racist layers of society's institutional structures.

Conclusion

The complexity of African American female athlete identity development is unique and enigmatic. To assume that any one model could adequately explain or explore what it means to be a female African America athlete in today's society is fallacious. However, by combining the numerous models of identity formation and development, it might be possible to more closely examine the African American female athlete's identity and how it is informed and changed by today's global media economy. By utilizing a postmodern and developmental approach to both gender and race we can come to understand how intercollegiate African American female athletes cultivate their identities over a lifetime and specifically how they come to define themselves as women, African Americans, and as African American women. Combining these conceptual frameworks with the sport psychology literature will allow us to more clearly understand how African American female athletes make sense of their many identities and navigate the multiple worlds from which they are a part. This knowledge is invaluable for those of us who desire to work with African American female athletes. As so clearly stated by Tatum (1997):

> Those of us who would work with young black women in a mutually empathetic relational mode must ask ourselves if we are prepared to hear, see, and understand their authentically told experience. Unless the answer is "yes," we will not be able to help

facilitate the empowerment of these young women as they move through the process of racial identity development. (p. 100)

In the next chapter, the methodology used in the current study is presented.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this chapter I explain the numerous aspects that make up the methodology of a qualitative approach to research which privileges the lived experiences of the co-participants. Throughout the first part I will introduce the specific topic of inquiry followed by a second part discussing the general and specific procedural processes. In Part Two, qualitative research will be discussed in general terms before moving to a more detailed description of postmodern feminist qualitative research methodology and its application to the research topic. In addition, the two theoretical frameworks, *Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST)* and *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* will be explained and their influence on the present study explored. Following this conceptual framework will be a statement of positionality in which I attempt to reflect on the role of the researcher within the study. The specifics of the data collection process will be outlined in detail including rationale for co-participant selection and the pros and cons of conducting research using semi-structured interview techniques. I will conclude the section by describing the type of data analyses to be employed including the use of sociologically constructed codes for analysis, explanations of thematic analyses and strategies for validating findings, and research claims and limitations.

Introduction

Qualitative Research

The term *qualitative research* is one that originated in the late 1960s within the fields of

anthropology and sociology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although both of the disciplines had been employing qualitative research methodology for at least one hundred years, it was not until well into the 20th century that the social sciences acknowledge its relative legitimacy. The term "relative legitimacy" is used to define the early stages of qualitative research's forays into the mainstream social sciences. Since its introduction into anthropological, sociological, and psychological research it has rested in uneasy opposition to quantitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To say that qualitative data analysis "deals with meaningful talk and action" or that it is "derived from a new paradigmatic, post-positivist approach, while in contrast quantitative data are derived from a traditional, positivistic paradigm" is too simplistic (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 5). As asserted by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) despite the uneasiness of researchers to distinguish and validate qualitative versus quantitative approaches, the two are not easily delineated. The distinction is "more arbitrary than a reflection of major, inherent differences" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 5).

There is no one single correct type of qualitative research and data analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). One of the greatest strengths of conducting qualitative research is the variety of investigatory styles and the unique talents and gifts of each researcher (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The standardization of methods which enhance the reliability and validity of quantitative methods and data analyses "would only constrain and even stifle social researchers' best efforts" (Strauss, 1987, p. 7). This is not to imply that qualitative research is "undistinguished and fuzzy," despite the breadth and depth of possibilities within qualitative research and analysis emerges persistent concerns.

For example, Silverman (1993, p. 19) maintains that from the strength of diversity comes

> a distinctive form of analysis that „is centrally concerned with avoiding a „social problem' perspective by asking how principals attach meanings to their activities and „problems.' In dealing with qualitative materials, then, analysts *make* problems, grounding them in the everyday realities and meanings of social worlds and social actors, rather than *taking* problems from policymakers, general theorists, or others. (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 5)

When one decides to conduct qualitative research, it is, thus, necessary to make certain individual assumptions in order to find the most effective method of data collection. Most often five philosophical assumptions drive this decision including each researcher's ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions (Creswell, 2007). Each decision requires the researcher to place him/herself within the research itself and consciously decide and then reflect upon how each philosophical assumption will influence the practice of the research process (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this paper I will make clear my own philosophical assumptions so that the reader might understand the standpoint from which the topic was chosen, the methodological movements made, and the ultimate significance of not just the research findings, but also the importance of the research *process* for both myself and co-participants.

Feminist qualitative research methodology (ontology). Feminist methodology [is] a field of inquiry united by membership in overlapping research communities-bound together not by agreement about answers but by shared commitments to questions (DeVault, 1996). According to DeVault (1996) feminist methodology is distinct in its shared commitment to three goals including:

1) Feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of "excavation," shifting the focus of standard practice from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women. 2) Feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process. And, 3) Feminists seek a methodology that will support research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women.

It is these goals which guide the direction of feminist research and action. Yet, despite these commonalities most feminist researchers would agree that "there has never been one correct feminist epistemology generating one correct feminist methodology for the interdisciplinary field of women's studies" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2213). Due to its interdisciplinary nature there are aspects of feminist methodology which are enacted specific to the disciplines from which they come as well as methods which apply across fields (Fonow & Cook, 2005). For example, feminist methodologies might include "survey and experimental methods, interview research, inductive fieldwork, Marxist and ethnomethodological approaches, phenomenology, action/participatory research, oral history, experimental ethnography, and methods based on poststructuralist insights just to name a few" (DeVault, 1996, p. 32). The multiplicity of feminist methodologies make it appealing to many researchers as it is often able to resist the major failing of most disciplinary methods, that of ranking. By "insisting on diversity, this approach avoids needless division and leaves open the future strategies that feminist researchers might want to adopt" (DeVault, 1996, p. 32).

That there is no one single feminist method is an important point at which to begin discussing feminist methodology (DeVault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 2005). In the 1960s and 70s feminists were beginning to struggle with a number of research and methodological concerns

such as understanding what feminist research should look like (Fonow & Cook, 2005). During this time many feminists were "critiquing the prevailing methodological wisdom, debated the usefulness of ,,using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house,' questioned the assumptions of science, analyzed the politics of knowledge creation--in essence, challenged the very epistemological foundations of what constituted knowledge" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2211). Despite many feminists early struggles agreeing on what feminist methodology should look like, most feminists agreed that they wanted to "produce the kind of knowledge that would liberate women" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2211).

In the early 1990s, during the shift from the second to the third wave of feminism, a number of methodological discussions began to take place. In fact, the 1990s proved to be one of the most energetic and fastest growing periods in feminist methods (DeVault, 1996). Most of the methodological discussions focused on questions regarding the best ways to capture and explore the intersectional nature of women's oppressions, how to conduct data collection and analysis, new ideals regarding research and methodological ethics, use of reflexivity, concerns regarding changes in social policy, implications of new forms of research, how to use these new methods to foster social action, forms and types of collaboration, and how best to disseminate research findings (Fonow & Cook, 2005). The answers to such questions were not simple, and their exploration took a great deal of thought and time. Today, the diversity of the epistemological and methodological positions within feminism serve as a testament to the vitality of the discipline fostered by early feminist discussions like those above.

Most of the major methodological debates in feminism during the 1990s concerned three primary areas: (a) the use of qualitative versus quantitative approaches; (b) entrenched social

structures within interview and ethnographic work; and (c) linking experience and knowledge in an academically rigorous manner (DeVault, 1996). Fonow and Cook (2005) teased out five principles of feminist methodology which guided researchers through the major theoretical debates of the time. These principles were:

> First, the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research. Second, the centrality of consciousness-raising or debunking as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation or way of seeing. Third, challenging the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from each other and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific. Fourth, concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploration of women as objects of knowledge. Fifth, emphasis on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research and research results. (p. 2213)

It is through the unpacking of these guiding principles that feminist methodology has been able to sustain and move forward with an ever changing global socio-cultural context.

Today, many feminists continue to grapple with a number of the methodological questions that earlier feminists debated. The greatest divide has often occurred between the efficacies of using quantitative versus qualitative approaches (DeVault, 1996). Although many feminists feel that qualitative methods are more suited to feminist goals and ideals, many others, especially those involved with feminist policy changes continue to espouse the many benefits of quantitative data (DeVault, 1996). Many feminists agree that no one methodological approach is

appropriate in every situation. Instead, feminists are learning to let the research question and potential outcomes determine the prescribed approach to conducting the research (Fonow & Cook, 2005). In addition, many feminists are now calling for triangulation or a mixed-methods approach so that no one methodology is unnecessarily privileged over another (Fonow & Cook, 2005). The use of a multi-faceted approach to feminist research offers a number of benefits such as increased reliability, range of voice, and the ability to explore the intersectionality of women's lives, just to name a few.

Early feminists, drawing on the "naturalist" assumptions and claims of the social sciences believed that reality could be accurately represented as long as the right method was employed Fonow & Cook, 2005). Therefore, little early work was reflected upon or scrutinized for the ways in which the authors themselves played a role in the creation of the social world. Both post-structuralist and postmodern feminists of the 1990s began to challenge such *certainties* about the social constructs of society (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Post-structuralist feminists began to unpack the ways in which "any research process is a construction of, not a reflection of, what reality is about" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2221).

Concurrently, postmodern feminist researchers began to question whether "knowing" anything about the social realities in which we live was even possible (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Using intertexuality, "the study of how the symbolic codes in one text are related to those in another, allowing the researcher to compare and contrast similar themes within or among different genres or media," postmodern feminists began to deconstruct social representations (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2221). The idea that research within the social sciences could draw finite conclusions about society began to deteriorate. As Lather (2001) contends "we cannot

solve the crisis but only trouble any claims to accurate representation" (p. 199).

As a postmodern feminist I agree with Lather's (2001) approach to constructing and disseminating representations. Within my own research I seek only to present the voices as they have spoken to me. I can no more claim their finite reality than I can claim to know their true realities. Thus, every picture created by research and investigation is incomplete and partial. That does not mean that we must abandon the paths of learning and knowledge forming, but only that we must critical reflect upon both. I will never be able to know everything about any person but myself, what they choose to, or not to tell, me and how they represent themselves is out of my control. Thus, I feel a deep commitment to Lather's (2001) call to action and intend to follow her lead by troubling "any claims to accurate representations" (p. 199).

As more attention was drawn to the concept of representation, feminist researchers drew on recent developments in anthropology and began to question the role of reflexivity within their research. As Fonow and Cook (2005) state, "understanding the role of the feminist researcher as an active agent in constructing knowledge has generated a large body of reflexive writing and reminiscence about the motivation, interpretation, and process of doing research and pursuing scholarship" (p. 2219). The questions of reflexivity within feminist research are vast and complex. Many researchers disagree about how much "they" should be present in their own work. For example, many qualitative researchers enter statements of positionality within their studies. By being reflective of their own thoughts and potential biases they are able to frame their work within a reflexive framework that allows the reader to access the source of the information.

Two issues have arisen from the concept of reflexivity among feminist researchers. First,

many researchers felt that by attempting to weave your own narrative throughout the research the data would simply become anecdotal claims made without the basis of any fact (Everhardt, 2004). In essence, the data itself would read like a consciousness raising session rather than a serious piece of qualitative data. Second, some researchers have begun to question the idea of presenting one's positionality at the beginning of the research assuming that since the author has put themselves "out there" that there is no need to reflect further (Collins, 2008). As Collins (2008) warned, we must be careful to reflect throughout our work and to continually engage in the process of identifying our own reactions and biases throughout the research process.

Although I understand the position of those who criticize reflexivity, I believe the negative experiences of Everhardt (2004) and Collins (2008) point to a larger issue of concern within qualitative research, a concern for legitimacy. The process of research has a long history grounded in empiricism and scientific "facts" which gave it authenticity and power. However, as society has evolved and the social sciences have flourished, presenting Truth has become obsolete. All research is subject to the experiences, thoughts, and desires of its investigator. The critics cited by Everhardt (2004) have little grounds for their claim that by entering the researcher's own narrative into the data decreases its significance. Even if an investigator were to carefully select passages from the data and present them using a solid grounding in theory and context, they would remain a fictive creation of his/her own representations. This is because the researcher chooses what to see and what not to see, what to report, and what to leave out. The truth is no more valid simply because it seen as "empirical." In fact, I think investigators who weave their own narratives within the data are far closer to representing the Truth. By opening up their lives to the co-participants and the reader, the researcher is offering a window into the

soul of the data, what is real for him/her *and* what is real for the co-participant. And as long as the investigator follows Collins's (2008) advice and continually engages in self-reflection throughout their representation of the data, the research is safely anchored in sound qualitative methodology. For example, feminists involved in critical race studies have become "increasingly reflexive about the ways race constitutes research" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2219). By acknowledging the dangers as well as the benefits of using reflexivity throughout their work, feminists are able to expand the borders of possibility within the feminist scholarship of the future.

As we move into the future of feminist scholarship, forms of research methodology must continue to grow and expand with the changing facets of society. The use, creation, and acceptance of new ways of exploring women's lived experiences must move forward. Today's feminist research calls for increased practices of exploring the intersectionality of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, etc. In addition, as societies continue to expand through global networks and markets methodologies incorporating decolonializing aspects and expanded policy foci must come to the forefront of feminist research. Although the future of feminist research and methodology will grow in an ever-changing global society it will be crucial that we continue to focus our efforts on the original issues that brought women together (e.g., domestic violence, poverty, employment discrimination, pay equality, political representation) while expanding our understandings of issues such as "national security, militarization, armed conflict, and free-trade agreements" (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2225). As stated by Fonow and Cook (2005) "it remains our task to reserve the tradition and history of feminists engaged in the conduct of inquiry, being ever mindful of its limitations and presuppositions yet, focused increasingly on its consequences

and the limitless potential for transforming human lives" (p. 2231).

Epistemological orientation. The nature and scope of knowledge claimed within qualitative research is of critical importance. In this instance I borrow from Donna Haraway's notion of „situated knowledge's':

> A feminist epistemological stance that privileges the historized and social location of the writer, where knowledge is always partial but also embedded in the differing visions of active subjects. [I] view [my] own knowledge as [a] critical feminist ethnographer as partial and situated, and, in analyzing women's and men's lives, [I] view [my] subjects as positioned actors who forge „situated knowledge's' in order to act within their material circumstances. (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 5)

I must realize that ethnography, and all other forms of research are gendered, raced, and "situated within relations of power and subordination" (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 5). As stated by Wolf (1992) the most important aspect of representing situated lives is ensuring that "their authority is intact: I do not speak for them but about them, even though I occasionally use their voices to tell my story" (p. 11).

My goal is aligned with a feminist critical ethnographic stance in which I seek to honor the identities of both myself, as the researcher, and my co-participants, privilege all lived experiences, pay critical attention to power, and collaborate with my co-participants in the construction and retelling of their stories (Lamphere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997). In order to do this I must "place gender in relation to the historical and material circumstance where gender, race, class, and sexual orientation intersect and shape everyday interaction" (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 1). This choice reflects the numerous changes which have occurred within a

modern global society. The structural transformations which have forever altered families, workplaces, and daily lives have necessitated a reevaluation of gender and race within society (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997). "Issues related to representation, conceptions of power, and alternative forms of portraying human agency and resistance" all must be taken into account as stories are gathered and meaning is made (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 1).

Specifically, in the last thirty years the globalization of capital has shaped cultural meanings around the world. And:

> The breakthrough in electronic technology has made possible the increased globalization of media through worldwide computer networks, satellite television circuits, and fiber optic connections. The conglomeration of media industries further contributes to the U.S.'s hegemony in the circulation of film, music, and television, including the creation of media icons. Cultural studies scholars often focus on popular cultural representations emanating from this last set of developments, examining film, rock music, and television. They interpret the power of representation, the multilayered nature of texts, and the translatability of images, at the expense of discussing the material relations and economic forces making possible these cultural representations and creating new forms of power." (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 3)

This makes the analysis of gender and race crucial for "understanding the recent global processes and the importance of culture in everyday lived experience" (Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 3). Although men and women may interpret these experiences in different ways "their location within the same institutional and social structures produces overlapping experience on the basis of such structural commonalities as class position, national identity, and racial status"

(Lamhpere, Ragone, & Zavella, 1997, p. 4).

Feminist orientation. Although I am a woman of Mediterranean descent, within US society I would almost exclusively be defined as White. I enjoy the privileges of a White, middle-class, heterosexual woman each and every day. I must necessarily acknowledge this fact because I am most interested in exploring the lives of African American women. Specifically, I am concerned with the lived experiences of African American female athletes and the intersectionalities or gender, race, social class, and sexuality. A framework that emphasizes the acceptance of many ways of knowing and meaning would align nicely with my work. In addition, a research methodology, which focuses on the telling of stories and the deconstruction of socially, constructed oppressive categories and labels would also fit my professional goals. It is for these reasons that I most often apply and identify with postmodern feminism and employ a variety of methods of qualitative research in my practices.

The social construction of the African American female athlete is not a concept easily explored. In order to understand the complex nature of the African American female athlete experience, it must be broken down into discrete categories only to be linked together again by its own contradictory intersections. To explore the being is to investigate the social constructions of gender and race and the ways in which they intersect within the sporting realm. In that sense, the most practical theoretical framework which allows for such an examination is postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism allows for the blurring of boundaries around race and gender. As noted by Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990)

> feminist ethnography that works with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and another that is also partly the

> self…feminist anthropology disrupts boundaries, brings to light what it means to be a woman in other places with different conditions, and replaces the presumption of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences. (p. 20)

The problemitizing of accepting a universal "meta-narrative" which assumes to know the core of women's oppression opens up space to hear the voices from the margins (Flax, 1987). Through the representation of other voices, postmodern feminism allows us to "deconstruct gender categories and reveal the ways in which they have been culturally constructed and to demonstrate that they are fictions rather than natural facts" (Jackson, 1993, p. 5). It is through the deconstruction of such categories that we are able to question the ways in which we explore and interpret the human experience (Flax, 1987).

Conceptual Framework

In order to properly examine the lives of African American female athletes in relation to the culture of US media and the evolution of identity formation in a postmodern era, I predominantly relied on two theoretical: Frameworks *Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST)* and *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*.

Feminist standpoint theory. "An ideal epistemological perspective to begin to understand different social identities and the impact of various group memberships is feminist standpoint theory (*FST)*" (Krane, 2001, p. 402). Aligned with postmodern feminist ideals regarding the social construction of identity, *FST* holds that all knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 1991). The different sociopolitical situations faced by each individual within society create multiple "truths" to be explored and known (Krane, 2001). According to Dewar (1993):

> *[FST]* assumes that individuals in oppressed and marginalized social groups develop both

an understanding of how the world operated from the perspective of the oppressor group(s) as well as the realities faced as a member of an oppressed group(s). (p. 219-220)

According to *FST* it is necessary to identify and locate the unique perspective or situation of a particular group before beginning analysis (Krane, 2001).

FST is most often recognized for its critical analysis of oppressed and/or marginalized groups of people (Krane, 2001). Because of their experiences of, oftentimes, multiple oppressions or dual marginalization, they have a unique standpoint from which they view the world (Krane, 2001). For the purposes of this research we must look at *FST* from multiple standpoints. *FST* assumes that people have different view society differently because of their different standpoints. Women, African Americans, Female Athletes, and all combinations of the three have distinct standpoints largely due to the power differentials they experience within the larger society (Krane, 2001). Their positions offer a unique look at culture, society, and history so long as their voices are valued enough to be heard which if of course to purpose of this study.

Although *FST* focuses on marginalized groups, the development of Black Feminism and the oppressive results borne of the second wave of feminism led to the development of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. It was through this theoretical expansion that the intersectionality of African American women's lives first became known. As stated by the Combahee River Collective (1977), "we often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (p. 65). Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks have often referred to the simultaneous experience of oppression and violence experienced by African American women at the hands of dominant groups (Collins, 2000). One of the most salient ways in which African American

women have been oppressed is through the suppression of knowledge (Collins, 2000). "Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization" (Collins, 2000, p. 3). It is the suppression of knowledge and the intersectionality of oppression which maintains the status quo and irrevocably alters the standpoints of African American women in American society.

Collins (2000) took the idea of standpoint theory and applied it to the interlocking web of oppressions faced by African American women and termed these the "matrix of domination" (p. 299). According to Collins (2000) Black feminist standpoints are almost universally based by three interdependent oppressions. These include:

> (a) The exploitation of Black women's labor representing the economic dimension of oppression; (b) the political dimension of oppression which has denied Black women the rights and privileges that are taken for granted by White males; and (c) the controlling images applied to Black women. (Ross, 2006, p. 91)

It is only by exploring and coming to terms with the intersectionalities of African American and all women's lives that liberation will come.

In order to "…move Black women's voices to the center of the analysis, to study people, and by doing so, to reaffirm human subjectivity and intentionality" (Collins, 1986, p. 75) I intend to follow Collins advice and use *FST* as the foundation of this dissertation. *FST* allows me to privilege the lived experiences of my co-participants while guiding and grounding my own positionality and data analysis.

Critical race theory. Throughout my research, data collection, and data analysis I also

relied on *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* (Crenshaw, 1993; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995, Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). I am introducing the basic tenants of *CRT* and/or its politics because *CRT* themes emerged in the data due to the nature of my research. In addition it provided me with a potential theoretical interpretation of the data as well. I preface my use of *CRT* only because unlike *FST* it was not instrumental in driving my dissertation ideas, set-up, questions, and design. My use of *CRT* is merely guidance for potential thematic elements which surfaced during data collection and observation. In addition, *CRT* provided an excellent lens through which to expand *FST* in order to more appropriately understand the intersectionality faced by African American female athletes:

> *CRT* can be described in a variety of ways. Delgado (1995) considers *CRT*:
>
> a dynamic, eclectic, and growing movement in the law, instigated by young writers, many but by no means all of color, who have been challenging racial orthodoxy, shaking up the legal academy, questioning comfortable liberal premises, and leading the search for new ways of thinking about our nations intractable, and insoluble, problem-race. (p. xiii)

Crenshaw, et al. (1995) expanded upon this definition by stating that *CRT* "challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and society as a whole" (p. xiii). And finally, more current research by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated that although *CRT* is seeded in legal tradition [it] has rapidly spread to the fields of education, political science, ethnic studies, and American studies. It is these last two definitions of *CRT* that influence my conceptual framework the most. Although *CRT* is grounded in legal theory, I am more interested in the more modern explorations of the discipline which examine

race and racial power within society as well as *CRT*'s relationship with a variety of other academic disciplines such as education and women's studies.

CRT was developed in the mid-1970s by Derrick Bell (an African American) and Alan Freeman (a White) (Delgado, 1995, p. xiii; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Both Bell and Freeman had begun to see the recidivism of racial inequality creep up as the civil rights era began to wane. The slow pace of racial reform led these two men to question the motives of racial equality and inequality in the United States (Delgado, 1995, p. xiii; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It was also becoming increasingly apparent that discrimination was taking on a new structure and place within society and "new approaches were needed to understand and come to grips with the more subtle, but just as deeply entrenched, varieties of racism that characterized [the] times" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiii; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

It is important to recognize that "unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, CRT questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). The development of the *CRT* movement owes a great debt to Critical Legal Studies *(CLS)* and radical feminism (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). From *CLS*, *CRT* borrowed the concept of "legal indeterminancy" – "the idea that not every legal case has *one* correct outcome (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5). From radical feminist *CRT* incorporated the insights discovered regarding relationships of power and the construction of social roles, as well as "the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5).

According to Delgado (1995) *CRT* accepts three basic tenants including:

1. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity-rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites (for example) alike--can thus, remedy only the more extreme and shocking sorts of injustice, the ones that do stand out. Formal equality can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair." (p. xiv; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)
2. CRT sometimes challenges the status quo through storytelling, taking a postmodern stance that reality is a social construction. "Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world." (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)
3. The idea of interest-convergence-developed by Derrick Bell, "this idea holds that white elites will tolerate of encourage racial advances for blacks only when they also promote white self-interest." (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)

Crenshaw et al. (1995) expanded the first tenant, explaining the ingrained nature of racism within our society, to state that:

> with its explicit embrace of race-consciousness, CRT aims to reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness, and to recover and revitalize the radical tradition of race-consciousness among African Americans and other peoples of color--a tradition that was discarded when integration, assimilation, and

the ideal of colorblindness became the official norms of racial enlightenment. (p. xiv)

The second tenant which highlights the importance of counter-narrative and legal storytelling with *CRT* was also extended by Crenshaw, et al. (1995) to explain that *CRT* is always interested in the "pursuit of engaged even adversarial, scholarship [and] the development of counter accounts of social reality by subversive and subaltern elements of the reigning order" (p.xiii). Like all postmodern theories *CRT* "rejects the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be neutral or objective" (Crenshaw, et al., 1995, p. xiii).

Although there is no one set of doctrines or methodologies to which all scholars of *CRT* subscribe, all are unified by two common interests:

1. To understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America, and in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as the "rule of law" and "equal protection. (Crenshaw, et al., 1995, p. xiii)
2. A desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it. (Crenshaw, et al., 1995, p. xiii; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)

Thus, unlike most theoretical frameworks focusing on discrimination, *CRT* is unique in that it requires an *activist* approach to understanding and changing society.

Today there are two primary schools of *CRT* scholarship led by current scholars such as Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The first group calls itself "the real world group." The scholars from this theoretical "camp" write about issues such as globalization, human rights, race and poverty, immigration, and the criminal justice system (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2001, p. 120). The second group of scholars, and those who more aptly fit with my current research are called the "discourse analysts." Discourse analysts focus on:

> the system of ideas and categories by which our society constructs and understands race and racism. Writers in this camp are apt to emphasize issues, such as identity and intersectionality that have to do with words and categories. They are likely to examine the role of ideas, thoughts, and unconscious discrimination. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 120)

In fact, the term "intersectionality" critical to my own research was first used by a *CRT* scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw. She used the term to describe the single categorical axis of identity confronting African American women within the legal system (Crenshaw, 1993). The women were forced to claim either race or gender discrimination, but not both, which oversimplified their experiences of discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw, 1993). The concept of intersectionality is now being used among a number of academic disciplines.

Combining the theories of *FST* and *CRT* makes for a very strong conceptual framework through which to understand the lives of African American female athletes. Like *FST* in *CRT* there is that same notion of a unique voice of color:

> Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because their different histories and experiences with oppression…. Minority writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9)

Thus, my own desire to privilege the lived experiences and voices of my co-participants fits my

conceptual framework. As a White researcher I cannot presume to tell the stories of African American female athletes; however I can help them share their experiences and give voice to what has previously gone unheard.

Role of the Researcher

Statement of positionality. I have a deep, personal investment in social advocacy and developing within society a critical consciousness towards the person, the political, and the moral compasses we all use to guide our lives. My greatest concerns within feminism revolve around issues of intersectionality and the ways in which women are both similar and, yet, all very distinctively different. Through a socio-cultural and historical lens I use postmodern feminism and post-critical ethnography to explore these issues in depth. I care deeply about sharing voices and encouraging critical reflexivity within my work. I am open to all forms of meaning making and knowledge sharing.

My entire academic collegiate career has revolved around women and children. As I have grown and changed as well as learned more through education and experience, I have come to expand my focus to not only women in general, but the intersectionality that all women face. It is my contention that to be a woman means nothing on its own. Gender is inextricably linked to social class, race, religion, sexuality, and able-bodiness just to name a few. Thus, the foundation of my work throughout my career has involved exploring the ways in which the intersectionality of women's lives impacts their sense of self, their identities, and how it informs who they are and eventually who they will become.

On a more critical level I am the only daughter from a working-class family raised in Northern California. I grew up in a highly racially diverse suburb of middle-class families. It

was not until I attended a private liberal arts college that I realized the whole world was not diverse, that there existed pockets in which only some were privileged to exist. That I stood out among the White, middle to upper-class students at my university was an understatement as economics seemed to be the defining factor of fitting in. I moved among them never fully comprehending the privilege I was enjoying simply by being in the spaces which they had known their whole lives. Navigating the homogeneous environment was difficult; however what I found most shocking was how difficult it became to navigate my former life when I returned to it. Years of isolation and privilege had poisoned my once open and accepting positionality. I no longer knew how to interact in a racially and economically diverse space. I say this only to point out that it is a factor from which I am still attempting to recover. Ever conscious of my own whiteness and privilege and neither fully belonging in either space I still feel enormously self-conscious in both.

The one venue which has always brought to me the greatest relief is sport. It was through my intercollegiate sporting experiences that I enjoyed the familiarity of the heterogeneous life in which I grew up, tempered with the safety of a commonality of purpose. As an athlete I was always impressed by the ways sport could bridge some of the largest gaps socially, politically, and economically. I discovered that sport had the universal effect of transforming the people around me and the women in particular. The sense of agency and empowerment derived from these experiences was profound. It is the idea that the development of empowerment is or can be true for all women who participate in sport is what caused me to pursue higher education. It was not until I combined the disciplines of women's studies, sport studies, cultural studies, and qualitative research that I discovered both the empowering and sometimes destructive power of

the convergence of gender, race, social class, and sport.

Last year, I conducted a document analysis which examined media portrayals of African American female athletes on the covers of the *University* media guides from 1977-2007. What I found shocked me. My data led me to realize that African American female athletes were treated in drastically different ways by the media and by extension the university (who publishes the guides) than White female athletes. A casual scan of the covers would lead most viewers to the contention that African American women were featured in much more empowering and physical postures while White women were relegated to the role of model, passive and weak. Yet, this is to take the covers out of the historical, social, and political context in which they were created. What at once appears empowering is actually much the opposite when we come to understand that African American female athletes' bodies have been used in extreme ways to reinforce both sexist and racist notions. Their poses in fact convey the very messages of non- or super-human natures that were used to justify the institutions of slavery and racial and sexual domination.

Although my ancestors did not exist in this country until the 1920s, I cannot deny the role my race played in the objectification, marginalization, and exploitation of the African American peoples. To ignore my own connection to the darkest parts of the American past would be to present a false position. As such I am constantly aware that as a researcher I must never assume I have Knowledge to impart. It was not my intention to call African American female athletes together and point to the destructive forces of the media and the university represented by these media guides. It was more my desire to understand the African American female athlete experience within the contexts of media and NCAA Division I athletics. Did the women whom they represent find them oppressive or empowering? That is what truly matters. And, if they did

not see their own media representations in the same historical, social, and political light as I, then how *did* they see them? That I, personally, find these guides oppressive and the women who I interview do not would be a disheartening yet, highly significant finding. In light of notions of "false consciousness" developed by conflict theorists and "taken-for-granted-notions" as proposed by hegemonist theorists the co-participants' lack of critical thought regarding such images could prove extremely damaging to their present and future senses of identity and self. Hopefully, in the act of encouraging personal reflection through interviewing and by recording their words and stories the spark of developing a critical consciousness will be struck and a desire for change begun.

It was my expressed purpose to explore and understand more about the intersectionalities of race, gender, media, and identity. I am a feminist and social activist and, thus, my connection to my project is clear; it must have a purpose grander than expanding my own awareness and contributing to the academic knowledge base. It is my desire that through these interviews I will present in an indirect way the necessity of developing a critical consciousness of the media. I do not care to tell any woman *what* she is to think about these images. However, given the influential role the media plays in our lives, it is vital that we all become critical consumers of the messages presented to and about us lest we reproduce rather than combat the oppressive social structure which restricts our bodies and identities.

Procedure

Data Collection

Co- participant selection. Co-participants were selected from the student-athlete population at the *University*. I selected this site because of proximity and connection to co-

participants and because my previous media research came from this university. Although future studies might examine if this phenomena is universal among all southern universities or more broadly universities in and across the US, for the purposes of this research I found it critical to be consistent with regards to data collection, venue, and background demographics of co-participants.

Eight Division I African American female athletes were interviewed. The rationale for interviewing African American female athletes was based on previous research by Crenshaw (1993) which suggested that women of color are frequently marginalized and their perceptions and experiences framed in terms of singular exclusion, that of woman or of person of color. Acknowledging the intersectionality of African American women's unique oppressions encourages the selection of African American women who can speak to media perceptions in light of both race and gender.

Initial contact with the co-participants was made via the *University's* scholar-athlete counselors working with student-athletes at the *Student Success Center* after initial approval was granted from both the *University's* Women's Athletic Director and the respective coaches. Once the co-participants agreed to participate they were contacted via e-mail to discuss the parameters of the study as well as to schedule interview times. After gaining informed consent, the principal investigator and co-participants met individually once for the interview. Co-participants were then sent copies of their transcripts in order to member check responses and representations as well as discuss suggestions for future study. Interviews lasted from 40-75 minutes in length. All of the interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. In addition to a semi-structured interview guide developed by the principal investigator and her advisor, several *University* media

guide covers gathered during the previous semester were used in order to explore questions regarding self-representations as well as gendered and racial representations of African American female athletes in the media. The co-participants were advised of their rights to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. Participation was voluntary, and the co-participants did not receive payment or class credit for their involvement in the study.

Specific risks and benefits. I believe the two greatest benefits of participation were: (a) to add a voice to the limited body of research concerning African American female athletes; and (b) to expose co-participants to media as it can be viewed through a critical lens. The potential risk to the subjects could be that as high profile athletes a guarantee of anonymity might not be possible, although every available precaution was taken. Each co-participant was asked to select a pseudonym for this study and all identifying comments and responses were adjusted in order to protect each subject's anonymity. Further, in an effort to preserve confidentiality all data was shared only between the researcher, her faculty advisor for the project, and one additional research who helped thematize the data.

Interviewing. Co-participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach. This form of interviewing crosses over two distinct lines of question including the interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). The standard interview guide approach was used for the design and construction of the methodological instrument and interview setting. The topic and issues explored have already been determined and the co-participants given a brief outline of the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). However, although I, as the interviewer, decided on the wording and sequence of the interview questions, I worked to maintain a certain lack of structure so that some of the questions

are asked in an open-ended format (Patton, 2002). In addition, although I had control over the interview process, as in open-ended interviewing, I did not consider myself tied to a specific line of questioning and I was happy to let the interviews take on their own direction based upon each individual's response(s).

By using semi-structured interviews in order to explore my co-participants' lived experiences, I hopefully avoided many of the pitfalls of utilizing solely a structured interview guide approach or a standard open-ended interview. By having an interview guide, the collection of data was relatively systematic and comprehensive (Patton, 2002). The interviews themselves remained "conversational and situational" in nature (Patton, 2002, p. 349). The open-ended nature of the interviews allows the respondents to share their experiences fully even if certain accounts diverged from the expressed purposes of the interviewing (Patton, 2002). Also, all co-participants answered the same questions which allowed for easy comparison across interviews and "reduced interviewer effects and bias" (Patton, 2002, p. 349).

Despite the benefits of using a semi-structured interview process, the use of an interview guide at all can inadvertently omit certain important aspects from the co-participants' statements (Patton, 2002). For example, the use of specific wording and or rigid adherence to the order of questioning may compromise the depth of the responses (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, allowing co-participants to engage in open-ended responses can potentially make comparing data across co-participants extremely difficult and certain salient factors may be lost (Patton, 2002).

Although the use of semi-structured interviews has its share of positive and negative impacts, my own interviewing style was driven by the tenets of critical feminist pedagogy already described above and constant comparative methodology. The constant comparative

method, like all qualitative research designs, requires the combination of simultaneous data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The constant comparative method "is a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73). This form of data collection and analysis works best with multi-site and/or multi-co-participant studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Because of the nature of simultaneous data collection and analysis there is no set number of co-participants which must be interviewed to ensure the validity or reliability of the study. The decision to stop is based on the researcher "assuring she has exhausted the dimensions of the categories of study-[arriving at] the point of „theoretical saturation'" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 75).

As outlined by Glaser (1978) the steps to employing the constant comparative method are as follows:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories of focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus, with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.
4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships.

6. Engage in sampling coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on core categories.

Although the above list appears to reduce the constant comparative method to a series of steps, it is critical to realize that all of what is described occurred simultaneously and continuously as more data was collected and coded (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Eight African American female athletes who currently participated on one of the *University's* athletic teams were interviewed through the course of the study. All co-participants were NCAA division-I athletes on teams with either a majority or minority African American total demographic make-up. Consent was obtained from each of the athletes before interviewing began. Throughout the interview process I was open and honest about my positionality and privilege as a researcher and graduate student, an outsider in terms of race, level of sport participation, and media attention; however I was also an insider in terms of gender, social class, and intercollegiate sporting experience. I worked to establish a rapport with my co-participants that reflected a collaborative project which honored their identities as well as my own. I was diligent about member checking and collaborating with each of my co-participants so that the voices which I was allowed to represent were honored. All interviews were audio-tapped. See Appendix B for a copy of the interview guide.

Data Analysis

Transcribing. All interviews were transcribed from audio-taping. Each co-participant's words were taken down verbatim and emphases placed in the appropriate places. Transcripts were then given back to the co-participants in order to check the validity of the transcripts as

well as to assess their reactions to the transcript content. All co-participants were given the opportunity to amend their transcripts at any time throughout the research process. None of the co-participants made any changes to their original transcripts.

Coding. Coding at a very general level "is the first step toward organizing the data into meaningful categories" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coding can act as a form of both data reduction as well as data complication (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The act of breaking data into simpler segments also allows the researcher to expand the data and formulate additional questions and expand upon existing interpretations (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coding here means "going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30).

Throughout data collection coding informed and influenced understanding the data and the ways in which the co-participants understood their lived experiences. Coding included the use of both in vivo as well as sociologically constructed codes. In vivo codes are those codes which are derived from the data themselves, the co-participants' own words. In vivo codes were employed when the data deviated from my conceptual and theoretical expectations and filled categories for which my sociologically constructed codes could not account. For my initial coding I relied primarily on pre-set sociologically constructed codes informed largely by the conceptual framework. *CRT* and *FST* provided the necessary coding language and guidance throughout the coding process. Although the use of these two theoretical orientations could create hundreds of codes the project began by focusing on fourteen selected codes which were the most relevant to the socio-historical and cultural contexts of African American female athletes. The following sociologically constructed codes were based on the foundations of *CRT*

and *FST* and included: *Athlete identity, race identity, gender identity, intersectional identity, disempowering, cultural inhibition, empowering, transformative potential, double consciousness, liberation, oppression, challenging status quo,* and *reinforcing status quo*. Additional sociologically constructed codes which informed data collection and analysis can be found in Appendix B.

Strategies for validating findings. I followed the processes outlined by Glesne (1999) for ensuring validity among qualitative research practices. These included:

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation: Time and effort spent working in the field and with co-participants in ensure the greatest scope and depth of information. (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006)
2. Triangulation: A technique in which the researcher gathers information from several different sources in order to ensure the data and experiences are fully explored and developed. (Bodan & Biklen, 2007)
3. Peer review and debriefing: The "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308)
4. Negative case analysis: The process of searching the data for instances which do not appear to support the main themes and patterns emerging from the data in order to more fully understand the phenomena in question. (Creswell, 2007)
5. Clarification of researcher bias: The recognition of the impact a researcher's own subjectivity has on potentially biasing results. Although qualitative researchers

cannot objectively evaluate data anymore than quantitative researchers can, many engage in the act of presenting their biases before beginning the research process. By examining their own positionality and biases qualitative researchers are able to become more objective through the implementation of various other research methods. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007)

6. Member checking: Ways of increasing validity by having co-participants evaluate their own data and the coding structures, analyses, and conclusions assigned by the researcher. (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006)
7. Rich, thick description: A form of embedded rhetorical structure which is used to produce within the reader the feeling of presence within the experience described. (Cresswell, 2007)
8. External audit: In which a researcher not involved in the research process evaluates the procedure and results of the study. External audits are used to evaluate "whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data." (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, n.p.)

As Glesne (1999) stated, "attending to all of these means increasing the trustworthiness of your findings" (p. 38). Peer review and debriefing was conducted a total of three separate times. The peer reviewers consisted of one doctoral student and the researcher's advisor both of whom were trained in qualitative research, coding, and methodology. Review sessions provided a more thorough examination of the data and ensured inter-rater reliability among codes and themes.

Every effort was made to engage in valid research which most accurately reflected the lived experiences of the co-participants.

In the next chapter I discuss the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the social construction and psychological impact of media representations on African American Division I intercollegiate female athletes. In order to achieve these goals three primary questions were used to guide the semi-structured interviews: (a) how do Division I African American female athletes perceive their own identities?; (b) how do Division I African American female athletes' perceptions of their own identities relate to how the media represents them?; and (c) how do Division I African American female athletes perceive the media's representations of them in terms of empowerment and/or disempowerment? Over eight hours of interview data was collected and analyzed by the investigator and two additional coders in order to achieve reliability within the developed thematic structure.

In the end, this study became less about the impact of media representations and more about the saliency of gender, race, and athletic identities. The media ultimately played a role in providing conceptual frameworks for identity formation, but did not impact athletes in the ways initially thought. In addition, the post-modernist lens through which I planned to guide the study became more about my own positionality than results. This moved the research from a more ethnographic stance to one of a more structured theoretical nature.

Three major themes characterized co-participants' experiences of their own social and psychological development of identity. The major themes included: *Self Perceived Identity and Construction, Socially Perceived Identity and Construction, Simultaneous Empowerment and*

Disempowerment of the Self. In addition, numerous sub- themes were also found. For a visual depiction of the final thematic structure see Table 1.

Table 1: Thematic Structure

Research Question #1	Self Perceived Identity and Construction
Major Theme	Intersectional Identities: Related to Gender, Race, and Athletics
Subthemes	University Female Athlete Identity Media Representations Role Models Physical Presence Punishment
Major Theme	Academic Identity
Subthemes	Academic Choice Perception of Professors Gender Differences
Research Question #2	Socially Perceived Identity and Construction
Major Theme	Racial Stereotypes of African American Females
Subtheme	Raced, Sexed, and Classes
Major Theme	Racial Stereotypes of African American Female Athletes
Subthemes	Natural Athleticism Behavioral Issues Intelligence
Research Question #3	Simultaneous Empowerment and Disempowerment of the Self
Major Theme	Structure of Athletics
Subthemes	Separate Athletic Departments Team as Family Coach-Athlete Relationships
Major Theme	Effects on the Individuals
Subthemes	Institutionally and/or Coach Constructed Identities High Standards
Major Theme	Rationalization
Subthemes	Quantitative versus Qualitative Equality Color-Blindness Equality of Sport Success

Research Question #1: Self-Perceived Identity and Construction

The ways in which the co-participants perceived their own identity and its construction was a vital component of understanding how they did or did not interpret and internalize media messages regarding their identities. Two major themes and multiple themes emerged from the *Self-Perceived Identity and Construction* research question. The first major theme was entitled *Intersectional Identities: Related to Gender, Race, and Athletics* and included the five general subthemes of *University Female Athlete, Media Representations, Role Modeling, Physical Presence, and Punishment*. These subthemes explored how co-participants made sense of their intersecting identities as women, African Americans, and Division I athletes. The second major theme was labeled *Academic Identity* and included two subthemes: *Academic Choice* and *Perceptions of Professors*. This sub theme examined the self-perceived academic identities of the co-participants and their influence over the athletes' own sense of identity and self.

Major Theme: Intersectional Identities Related to Gender, Race, and Athletics

When co-participants reflected on their personal sense of identity and its construction each noted how aspects of their gender, race, and status as athletes were often intertwined. Rather than speaking specifically to their gender or their race as the unique factor which most strongly influenced their own self-perceptions of identity, co-participants merged the three aspects of their identity as if they were one whole that could not be separated. Although gender differences played a key role within their responses, the intersectional nature of their lived experiences was also quite clear.

Subtheme #1: University female athlete identity. Seven out of eight co-participants suggested that being a female athlete at *University* greatly impacted their identities. In fact,

when questioned about some of the stereotypes regarding *University* athletes, they mentioned how well respected they were in comparison to female athletes from other universities. Karah said, "[people believe] we are amazing. That we are all amazing. Then, it makes you feel bad for the sports that don't do well because you are a female *University* athlete…it is expected." In addition, when each was asked why she came to *University* and what it was like to be an African American female athlete at *University* all eight had overwhelmingly positive responses. The strength of *University* female athlete identity was a great source of empowerment for most of the co-participants. As Tasha states:

> [I came to *University*] mainly for the sports. I have always been interested in the *University* tradition. Also to see a different part of the country. I am from [State] and it is different than [that region] obviously. It is cool to go back home wearing [school colors]. And everyone is like, "How is it? How do you like it?" That kind of thing. There is something different. I like [being a female athlete at *University*]. Especially like being a *University* female athlete in general. I go back home and people recognize the logo and the first thing they will ask you is if you know any famous players. That is pretty cool. I get to say that I went to the same school as them. People recognize the [school colors] too.

It appears the athletic notoriety of the co-participants' school adds to their sense of athletic identity both socially and psychologically.

Gender, race, and participation in athletics impact an athletes' self-perceived identity as well as play a role in its construction. The elements of gender, race, and athletics are made ever more salient by co-participants' attached value to their university identity, the way the media

represents them, their perceived job as role models, concern with their own physical presence, and the various ways in which they experienced punishment. Consistent with the literature, it was impossible to separate the various aspects of athletes' identities into discrete parts (Hall, 1996). Previous research has shown the influence of gender, race, and athletic participation on female athletes' self-identity and construction; however, very little research has described how actual athletes experience these components as intersectional identities. Described gender identity development was consistent with Layton's (1998) model, racial identity development was consistent with Cross and Tatum's (1997) hybrid model, and athletic identity development was consistent with studies conducted by Brewer et al. (1993) and Webb et al. (1998). However, not one of the aforementioned studies or models was able to account for the unique experiences of African American female athletes as intersectional beings.

Research conducted by Peretto-Stratta (2003) on the ability of African American female collegiate athletes to express their culture offers support for the precarious line African American female athletes walk trying to balance their gender, race, and athletic identities. Peretto-Stratta (2003) examined how the cultural diversity of a team influenced cultural expression. In her findings teams which had a low representation of African American female athletes were least likely to express African American cultural tendencies or mention race at all (Peretto-Stratta, 2003). In these cases gender and athletic identity came to the forefront and recalled identity was "sacrificed for the good of the team" (Peretto-Stratta, 2003, p. 89). As the percentage of African American athletes on the team increased, cultural expression and even cultural celebration was heightened (Peretto-Stratta, 2003). For teams with at least 50% or more African American representation race became an allowable and significant aspect of their team dynamics (Peretto-

Stratta, 2003). However, the percentage of African American female athletes on any given team did not change the order of self-identity expression. All athletes continued to present their gendered and athletic identities first and foremost while either down.p.laying or embracing their racial identities accordingly (Peretto-Stratta, 2003).

Peretto-Stratta's (2003) findings suggest that African American athletes live intersectional lives which are influenced dramatically by their gender, race, and athletic identities. In addition, although race is a salient aspect of an African American female athlete's identity, it was not expressed as strongly as both gender and athletic identities in both this and in Peretto-Stratta's study. To avoid the denigration of African American female athletes' culture it is vital that cultural expression be fostered both on and off the field. Athletes need to be seen as an amalgamation of their self-perceived identities and not as discretely gendered, raced, and athletic individuals.

Subtheme #2: Media representations. Co-participant perceptions of the media's influence on their identity development was complex. In certain circumstances they felt empowered, where in others they felt their power was stripped away. Roxanne explained how the visibility of certain African American female athletes made her feel empowered; however, the sexualization of female athletes --both African American and White-- stripped away some of that power:

> I'll start with [how the media makes me feel] empowered. I am going to use Marion Jones as an example. When I was younger I was obsessed with Marion Jones…I wanted to be just like Marion Jones when I grew up. [Unfortunately] there is also the other side, like with Venus and Serena Williams. When they first came into tennis…you saw them being these amazing athletes and so much competition and just completely turned the

> world of tennis around. Then, after getting complacent I guess with being as good as they were…I don't even remember the last time I watched a Venus and Serena tennis match because it is not about tennis anymore. It's about Venus or Serena's Reebok or Nike contract or whatever. It is about what she is wearing and how stylish she is and what cat suit she has on for this match, stuff like that. It has become just about sexual image and not about athletics and talent. They are just bringing too much stuff into it; I don't even want to watch them play anymore.

Roxanne's concerns over the ways African American female athletes had become glamorized to the point at which they were hardly athletes anymore, but became supermodels is well documented. To use her own example of Venus and Serena Williams' exposure as international tennis stars we look to research conducted by Schultz (2005). Schultz's (2005) research focused on the rhetoric and media attention surrounding the 2002 U.S. Open at which Serena Williams wore what was later described as a "catsuit." Schultz (2005) found that the media often constructed Serena Williams in "oppositional terms" (p. 338). Thus, by "setting her multiple identities in contradistinction to other women on the tour, [it is argued] that the popular media reproduces the hegemonic racialized order [already in place] in women's tennis" (Schultz, 2005, p. 339). This continual focus on appearance, sexuality, and constructed femininity has changed the way many African American female athletes look at professional athletes (such as Roxanne's views of the Williams' sisters). Rather than providing empowering images, as they did initially with the entrance into the tennis circuit, these professional African American female athletes have been caught up in a carefully constructed media ambush to denigrate their athletic prowess. Their accessibility as athletic role models becomes markedly diminished and athletes

such as Roxanne are forced to find alternatives for a sense of strength and empowerment. When asked if the sexualization of female athletes was specific to African American female athletes, Roxanne continued:

> …it happens with White female athletes, too, like with Anna Kournikova. She went from tennis to music videos and like this other Sharipova girl is on all these cameras now. It is not even just African American women; it is like if you are a pretty face then they are going to try to get you to go in that direction more so than to continue to perfect your craft in your athletics. That is for women in general…it is like an added bonus that you are a good athlete, but we are going to try to make you a model...

As Roxanne so astutely pointed out, female athletes have become cultural icons in today's society. Despite the positive aspects of this shift in cultural ideals, the female athlete has become caught between the powerful, athletic body she needs in order to be successful in competition and the new "perfect body" that is slender, muscular, and toned (George, 2005). The concept of being both a stellar athlete while simultaneously having the build of a model is not easy to obtain. As George (2005) points out, "this physique requires most women to rid themselves of all fat through exercise and diet and then train to build just the right amount of „sexy, feminine' muscle" (p. 317). However, "the intensity of training for most sports often demands musculature and body mass that surpass the ideal figure" (George, 2005, p. 318). This trick maneuvering of body composition and image is something with which female athletes are now trying to contend. George's (2005) findings indicated that a number of NCAA Division I female athletes felt extremely self-conscious and even negative towards their bodies because of muscles. Thus, even if sport served as a vehicle for the empowerment of female athletes, it

appears always tempered by the knowledge that unless they looked like "Anna Kournikova" they are not fitting the feminine sporty ideal. This continual failure to "measure up" can cause significant psychological distress and contradiction between what female athletes want to achieve athletically and what they look like.

Additionally, five co-participants also mentioned the ways in which the media representations of male versus female athletes were inadequate if not damaging to their own image as female athletes. As Karah stated:

> The guys get a lot more attention than us. I think…for example…we just had our write-up in the newspaper about us winning the [conference] championship and literally word for word the guy copied what our media person put on the website and then added a few sentences. It was the exact same article. And, like, football loses and they write something big. I mean I don't know…I know it is going to be that way at any university, but it is definitely irritating.

Subtheme #3: Role modeling. Acting as a role model for other female athletes and young women was a role that three of the African American female athletes felt they must assume. They did so with excitement and a desire to inspire African American youth in ways they perceived were not expected of African American male athletes. Adalia said, "Yeah, I think that female athletes are looked to as role models and male athletes are looked at because of their skills in whatever it is that they do." Nailah thought being a role model within the community was a critical part of her identity: "I just try to stay humble and portray a positive image and be a role model for younger kids who want to play. Especially since here a lot of our fans are younger kids from around the community."

Professional African American athletes were also cited as important role models, for better or worse, for the co-participants themselves. However, several of them felt the media played a significant role in diminishing professional African American female athletes' athletic talents by focusing on their race and/or by emphasizing their hegemonic femininity. As previously stated, those few role models of the African American female athlete were often subject to contradictory and, at times, malicious media attention (Schultz, 2005). Although celebrated for their athletic prowess, African American female athletes were simultaneously subjected to being despised (Banet-Wesier, 1999). Co-participants in this study mentioned that African American female athletes who served as role models for young athletes of every race and ethnicity were condemned by both the media's portrayal of their extreme physicality or hypermasculinity and their attempts to fit the dominant hegemonic (and White) female role (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Douglas, 2003). This simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment made it extremely difficult for the African American female athletes in this study to draw their own empowerment from the great women the media so readily tarnished.

Subtheme #4: Physical presence. Three co-participants mentioned how important physical presence was in helping them to feel empowered and/or disempowered as an athlete. Layla described her image as "being very dominating." When asked why she would think she was "dominating" she explained it was how she was always described by others and that it, in fact, impacted the way she and others saw her as an African American female athlete:

> Why do I think that??? Because I have always been told that… (laughs), I don't know…like in reality that is how many female athletes…Black female athletes are perceived, in the media, which it really is…very dominating or athletic. I [do] think that

> I am smart and athletic *and* dominating. When you are an African American female athlete you are seen as being very athletic; [they say] „she's very strong, she's… you know… it all came natural…' but a female athlete, you could say the same, but… you play our game with much more finesse…as opposed to guys who get all big and strong and no finesse.

In contrast, Jaisyn felt highly positive about her own physical presence:

> I just want to put it out there. I am an African American student and I am proud. Student-athlete, or athlete and I am proud to be who I am. Despite the comparison to the males saying how they are dominant or whatever…I see myself as perfectly compatible to them. I don't see nothing wrong with some distinctions. But, at the same time, I am a female and you are a male. There are certain things expected of you and certain things expected of me and I think our coach has a clear understanding that I am a female. I mean, there is many times I tell him…„After sports I want to have a life.' He says, „I won't make you lift enough weights to make you look like a dude or anything.' I mean we just joke around with conversations like that sometimes. But I don't see myself humbugged by the media or by stipulations by any guy or anything, I am me.

However, the conclusion of Jaisyn's quote combined with her uncomfortable body language during this line of questioning, demonstrated the anxiety she felt about her physical presence becoming too muscular as to be considered masculine. Her clearly stated desire to "have a life" after sports reflected her off-handed comments, later stated by her own coach, of becoming *so* muscular as to look "like a dude." The intense feeling and meaning behind these words almost counteracted the empowerment she felt from being a physically and mentally strong African

American female athlete.

Jaisyn's reaction to her training and her "new" body is not uncommon among female athletes from every race and ethnicity. As George (2005) explained, there is a "culturally produced glass ceiling, or upper limit, [that] restricts the amount of musculature that is acceptable for women" (p. 321). Thus, while athletics has empowered many women in the numerous venues of their lives, it is too often tempered with the fear of becoming "too big" or "too strong." There is an ever-present tension between femininity and athleticism that "equates muscles and strength with masculinity [and] ultimately discourages women from fully pursuing physical activity" (George, 2005, p. 322). Women like Jaisyn who embrace these body negotiations and challenge gender norms by training to be the best they can at their sport often find themselves the victims of "devaluation and stigmatization" (George, 2005, p. 322). Unfortunately, there is little understanding on the part of many coaches of the various ways in which a female athletes' physical presence impacts their own senses of identity (George, 2005).

Subtheme #5: Punishment. Although not asked directly, nearly all of the co-participants at one point mentioned the difference in the ways female and male athletes were treated in regards to compliance with rules and regulations. The specter of being "punished" was very real to each of them and their fears impacted the ways in which they conducted themselves as well as how they thought of both themselves and African American male athletes. As Karah stated:

> I know that last year a lot of the football players had alcohol-related incidents or drug-related incidents and they were punished. But, the same instances on the girls' side resulted in much harsher punishments. I mean, I know two girls got kicked off [teams] in the past three years for stuff related to that. Whereas I think the football players were

[just] suspended for a few games…so…it is definitely not equal.

Comments such as this reflected the commonly held belief among co-participants that they should not have lower standards as African American female athletes, but that African American males should be made to adhere more strictly to the rules imposed on African American female athletes.

The concept of punishment within intercollegiate and professional sports has been a topic of great debate for a number of years. Although many deny race and/or gender have anything to do with punishment, perceptions of female African American and specifically African American female athletes influence the ways people feel about them and how they are ultimately treated. Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, and Jensen (2007) found that the "dumb jock stereotype" traditionally associated with male football players were often transferred to all athletes in general. When perceptions of faculty and non-athlete college students were assessed, male sports were perceived significantly more negatively than female sports (Simons et al., 2007). Additionally, African Americans were more likely to be perceived more negatively than White or "other" athletes (Simons et al., 2007). As the researchers stated, "the closer athletes are to the archetypal African American male football or basketball player the more they are stigmatized and more likely they are to receive negative treatment" (Simons et al., 2007, p. 266). Negative perceptions such as those found in Simons et al.'s (2007) study, therefore, provide validation for the White supremacist insistence of controlling, regulating, and punishing African American bodies within sport (Leonard, 2006). Thus, punishment and control become not only issues of gender but also issues of race.

Major Theme #2: Academic Identity

Although all but one of the co-participants was recruited to attend *University* based on her athletic talents, many of them had strong academic identities which impacted the execution of their athletic identities as well as provided them with another lens through which to view themselves. This second major theme of *Academic Identity* included the three subthemes of *academic choice*, *perception of professors*, and *gender differences.*

Subtheme #1: Academic choice. The ability to invoke choice within their academic settings was very important to seven of the eight co-participants. Even those who saw themselves playing professional sports after completing college took enormous pride in the control they had over their academic lives as well as the futures they would thereafter create. As Roxanne explained:

> I am graduating in May…and then I will play professionally. Then, I am going to coach and do counseling and stuff like that for kids. [I want] something else [besides sports] because I *know* I am going to get burnt out pretty quick. I definitely want to coach like the club sport level…people who are getting recruited and stuff like that. Because I know a lot about the process since I went through it. You know, just helping them pick the right college and what to look for and what is best for them and stuff like that.

Leticia also shared Roxanne's appreciation for her academic opportunities. As she stated:

> In school I am trying to get a degree. I am striving for all A's. In the future I plan on being either a physical therapist or an occupational therapist. Something in the medical field…I haven't quite got it yet…In school I want to do the best at whatever I do. I want to go really far…I really don't see myself doing much after college, like going pro or

anything like that. I don't see that. It might change, but…I am happy with how it is.

African American female athletes' self-perceived identity construction was also significantly impacted by their academic identities which existed beyond the confines of gender, race, and athletics. The ability to choose an academic path, their perceptions of professors and professors' perceptions of them, and the differences between the ways African American male athletes and African American female athletes perceived their own academic identities were of more critical importance. These findings went against traditionally held stereotypes as well as literature which indicated that the athletic success of African American athletes was more vital than academics to the African American community as well as to the athletes themselves (Gates, Jr., 1993).

Subtheme #2: Perceptions of professors. Three athletes felt that how they were perceived by their professors had both a negative and positive influence on their academic identity. Jaisyn talked about her first semester at *University* stating what a difficult time she had largely because one of her professors did not like athletes. As she explained:

> My first semester here was stressful, trying to adjust culturally and trying to fall back into school…I felt targeted by one of my teachers last semester because she didn't like athletes…But, I mean, being an athlete and… to me, I think professors should respect the fact that you are an athlete because it shows that you have some kind of discipline. But, some others…some sports [football] make it hard for others (laughs)…I'll just put it like that.

However, it is important to note that Jaisyn also had a very positive experience with another professor and because of that felt her entire collegiate experience was turned for the better. She

said, “I’ll be honest…I wanted to go home. I didn’t want to return. But, now I am here and it is good and summer school turned my life around. Ms. [Name] turned me around. She is…oh my gosh…she is a wonderful person, for real.” It is critical that professors realize the role they play in shaping African American female athletes’ academic experiences.

Jaisyn’s negative experience during her first semester in college was not unique. In fact, numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that professors hold negative perceptions of athletes and often more specifically of African American athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom, Sedlack, & McEwen, 1995; Leach & Conners, 1984; Sailes, 1993; Simons et al., 2007). Simons et al. (2007) reported that athletes were stigmatized by faculty whose negative perceptions were more likely to be confirmed as the negative behaviors they were intent on finding were, in fact, discovered. In fact, “while athletes’ negative academic behaviors may not occur any more frequently than with non-athletes, they become more salient to faculty members because of [these] negative expectations” (Simons et al., 2007, p. 256). Athletes recognize these negative perceptions and are then forced to find ways to placate professors such as by “proving them wrong” or hiding their athletic identities for as long as possible (Simons et al., 2007). The “dumb jock” stereotype ascribed to athletes attributed them with “low intelligence, little academic motivation, and the receipt of undeserved benefits and privileges” (Simons et al., 2007, p. 251). It is easy to understand Jaisyn’s distress over being perceived as such. Luckily, not all professors feel the same way about athletes.

Subtheme #3: Gender differences. Although gender differences were only mentioned by three co-participants, each were very emphatic in their belief that male athletes (African American or White) had much lower academic expectations placed on them than the female

athletes. As Roxanne reported:

> I feel like we have it just as hard as the guys do…we have to do workouts every day, three times a day, we have games, we have to travel, we have to get all our study hall hours in…but for some reason, like all of my friends who are like male athletes tell me how like they never have to do anything and like how they get all these people to do their work for them…not all of them, but a lot of them do. I have never once since I have been here heard, ‚Roxanne, let me write your paper for you because you are an athlete.'

Some research regarding the perceived value of academics versus athletics for African American student-athletes suggests that there may be gender differences which influence the traditionally held belief that sports is a way "out of the ghetto" for African American male athletes (Gates, Jr., 1993). For example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1993) one of the primary researchers in the area of African American student-athlete conflict between academic and athletic success stated:

> Decidedly image-conscious, members of the black community have seen the triumphs of individual black athletes as crucially important because these achievements presumable helped break down the prevailing opinions of black people's inferiority, had an uplifting effect on blacks themselves, and could possibly hasten progress in race relations generally. (p. 381)

However, many African American scholars and community members --including Gates-- continually warned against the overemphasis placed on sport at the sacrifice of education and long-term social stability. Despite such efforts:

> …too many African American youngsters still believe that they have a better chance of becoming another Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan than they do of matching the

> achievements of Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke or neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson, both of whom, like Johnson and Jordan, are black. (Gates, 1993, p. 382)

Despite spending over the majority of his life fighting for African American athletes to finish their college degrees and put academics before athletes, Gates still sees much work to be done. However, a closer analysis of Gates' entire career demonstrates a focus completely on *male* African American athletes without any consideration of the aspirations of African American female athletes.

The major findings of the current study showed that African American female athletes viewed their athletic and academic careers in very different lights as compared to how they thought African American male student-athletes did. Most co-participants were adamant about pointing out, without prompting, that they were at *University* for a reason. With only one exception, each had a clear academic future planned, even those who had decided to try to play professionally. Co-participants made it clear that they were not like African American males when it came to valuing their education. They felt African American males, like Gates (1993) stated, believed they were all going to get picked up by professional teams and, thus, there was no point in setting academic goals. The women in this study cared about their academic futures and placed a high value on the educational opportunities they were being offered. African American female athletes' reluctance to focus solely on professional play at the expense of academics made sense considering the short amount of time, 35 years, women have been allowed to participate in organized sports (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007). Further, there are only two current venues of professional play for women in team sports and the US: The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS). This

means there are drastically fewer numbers of potential post-collegiate opportunities for women (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007).

Research Question #2: Socially Perceived Identity and Construction

The ways in which co-participant identities were perceived as constructed by society was the second major research question. Two major themes and a number of subthemes emerged from this theme. The first major theme was *Racial Stereotypes of African American Females* with one subtheme of r*aced, sexed, and classed*. And the second major theme was *Racial Stereotypes of African American Female Athletes* with the three subthemes of: *natural athleticism, behavioral issues,* and *intelligence*.

Major Theme #1: Racial Stereotypes of African American Females

When co-participants reflected on the most prevalent racist ideologies still present within today's US society, all of them were able to name a number of stereotypes which pertained to African American females. These racial ideologies, based on historical stereotypes, were reinforced by all forms of media and, in some cases, African American males as well.

Subtheme #1: Raced, sexed, classed. All of the co-participants felt that African American females in general were subjected to racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes. The intersectional identities enforced by such societal norms influenced the ways co-participants viewed themselves as African American females. For example, Roxanne explained the ways African American females' identities posed a triple threat to developing a solid sense of self:

> [People think] that African Americans in general are not as driven and less educated. And maybe they don't go out and use all the resources they are given. You don't even go out and find out what resources you are given. African Americans are just lazy when it

> comes to it. If someone puts it in your face and does it for you, then you'll go for it. But, when it comes to doing things yourself you won't necessarily get it done. I think that is probably a lot why [the student-athlete academic center staff] stay on my case so much about getting my study hall hours and having these meetings and stuff. Because they want to make sure it gets done. Because they feel like if they let me do it on my own it won't get done.

Adalia suggested the same thing by asserting that the media *can* have a positive influence over the way African American females are seen by society. However, she believed, that in many cases this was not enough to change the way people saw herself and other African American females: "I think…people think that Black women are outspoken and aren't well spoken. African American women [are supposed to be] real concerned with material things and not maybe a job or things like that." When I asked Adalia to reflect on where those stereotypes originated from she answered quite simply, "They probably come from boys and TV" (laughs). I then had her take our discussion a step further by asking her how African American women are portrayed in the media, to which she said:

> Well, the last movie I saw was *The Secret Life of Bees*. And in that movie they were portrayed…kind of like the women of the town who „made it'. They were the women who were kind of the strong group of the African American population in a mostly White town. But besides that movie…I think [African American women] are glamorized…Black celebrities and things like that…they are kind of glamorized so that the typical Black woman everybody thinks of is kind of hidden.

Adalia was right to feel as though the "real" African American women of US society

remained hidden, the most common modern stereotypes regarding African American women include the *Bitch, Bad Black Mother, Welfare Queen, Black Lady, Hoochie,* and *Cassandra*. Each stereotype carries with it its own unique condemnation and oppressive circumstances. Because of the prevalence of such stereotypes most "real" African American women are unknown. Society cannot find them nor do they know them in any way. Thus, the absence of portrayals of African American women in US society allows the replacement of real women with stereotyped stand-ins. Finally, as Tasha stated, people often classify African American females as "lower class" because of patterns of speech such as Ebonics:

> [They think] we all speak Ebonics and we're not necessarily polite in public…at least where I am from, we are not very friendly or social towards other people. We are biased and we talk about people and we are very offended when people ask us questions about our ethnicity or hair or that kind of thing.

Consistent with Collins' (2004) research, co-participants in this study found themselves subjected to a number of racial stereotypes associated with African American females. Not only are African American women stereotyped by their race, but also by their gender, class, and in the end a combination of all three. The most commonly held beliefs about African American females noted by co-participants was that they were "loud, pushy, and aggressive". By being viewed as such, they felt they were classified by stereotypes usually associated with working-class African American women, especially to being "the *Bitch*" (Collins, 2004). Characterized as "loud, aggressive, pushy, and rude" this stereotype has been used to "defeminize and demonize" poor and working-class African American women. Although African American pop culture has recently attempt to appropriate the "*Bitch*" stereotype in order to use it as a source of

empowerment, co-participants in this study reacted to the negative associations of the stereotype and did not necessarily find strength within such a label (Collins, 2004).

Given the pervasive nature of media in today's society, African American women are constantly subjected to public scrutiny and regard. Their identities are socially constructed in order to undermine any power they might assume. When African American females fight for themselves they only serve to reinforce the socially perceived notions. The double-edged sword facing African American females as gendered and raced beings is difficult to face. A few co-participants even mentioned the need to have strong family support in order to deal with the various ways society portrays and perceives African American women. Without support co-participants felt it would be easy to let the power of the media infiltrate their own self-perceived identities and modify their very sense of self.

Major Theme #2: Racial Stereotypes of African American Female Athletes

All co-participants were able to quickly identify the most common stereotypes associated with being an African American athlete and more specifically an African American female athlete. The co-participants felt *University* media guides in addition to other influential sources of media (e.g., television, movies, news, magazines, commercials, etc.) reinforced these stereotypes which were consistent with certain gendered, racist, and classist ideologies.

Subtheme #1: Natural athleticism. Nearly every co-participant mentioned feeling as if society believed their athleticism was "natural". A biologically essentialist view of natural talent rather than hard work and training to achieve athletic greatness was attributed to all African American athletes. The natural athleticism attributed to them was present in every type of sport, whether African Americans were in the majority or minority.

In sports not dominated by African American female athletes, co-participants felt people saw them as not only extraordinary but as exemplary. As Layla stated, the fans think, "Oh, she must be *really* good because she is playing…a White-dominated sport". Others cited the reason they were seen as such an oddity was because they participated in sports which emphasize skills not typically attributed to African Americans. As Layla went on to explain, "…I would say many people think that I can jump, which I can. They think most Blacks, they can jump. And *it is* true; I *am* very powerful, like I [work with my sport implement] really hard…People think it is racist to think of African American females that way, but it's true. We are very athletic…" In Layla's quote it was clear that the widely held belief that African Americans are naturally athletic was based in some truth and was not in any way racist. However, later in her interview Layla was angered by the media's representation of her athletic talents as 100% natural and not because of a strong work ethic and hard work. She wanted people to know how hard she worked to get where she was.

As supported by the research findings of Collins (2004), Douglas (2003), and Schultz (2005) African American female athletes have been traditionally seen as natural athletes. While such a stereotype may seem harmless on the surface, a deeper meaning permeates. Just as many of the co-participants described, they were often seen as less intelligent both on and off the court…a embodiment of raw and untrained strength that needed to be "tamed and trained." In addition, the notion of "natural" athleticism combined with traditional stereotypes of African American women as lazy has allowed society to perceive that African American female athletes do not have a strong work ethic. Rather than being praised for the effort exerted into perfecting their sport and/or position, African American female athletes are seen as natural athletic entities

who without proper guidance and training would never amount to anything (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Schultz, 2005).

Subtheme #2: Behavioral issues. Five of the co-participants also felt African American female athletes were seen as suffering from behavioral issues. As Nailah stated, "Stereotypes of African American female athletes? (laughs)…you are loud, you are bossy. Let's see…you have attitude towards White women or other women. And you've always got an attitude like you have got a chip on your shoulder."

Old notions of the "black body" being associated with "black pathology" prevail. Such ideals once again reinforce the traditionally held belief regarding African American women as loud, aggressive, obnoxious, etc. (Douglas, 2003). Thus, the African American female athlete is thought to suffer from a wide array of behavioral issues which strengthen the socially held belief that she must be "trained" in order to be successful on and off the court. Often, African American female athletes are treated as purely physical beings subject to acting on their own emotional impulses without thought or regard for others (Douglas, 2003).

Subtheme #3: Intelligence. Half of the co-participants felt that others perceived them as unintelligent both on or off the court. As Roxanne described:

> Sometimes, I feel like my coach doesn't think I know as much…or [that] maybe I am just like a ‚fast black girl' who can be tall. I was always told…that I had potential. Like I did [the highest level of] development… and the first year I tried out they were like, ‚You are fast, you are dynamic, you are really athletic, you are one of the most athletic people out here and you have potential…you just have to learn the game.' I hate that word ‚potential' because of that. I hate it, I hate it when people say I have ‚potential'. It is like

> you are not good enough, but you have enough attributes to where if *we* mold you, you could be…rather than just letting me kind of do it on my own, or even trusting me enough to make the right decision on my own. I know for a fact that my coach says my name on [during practice] more than anyone else. She is coaching me through the games: „Roxanne, do this, Roxanne, do that. Roxanne, Roxanne, Roxanne.' And the stuff she is telling me is the stuff I am already going to do anyway; she just beats me to it…on the team it is like a joke that she is constantly saying my name, we tried to count it one day… how many times in one game she said, „Roxanne, Roxanne, Roxanne, Drop back, watch this person, watch your back.' And she doesn't do that to other people, but…I don't know. I don't know why.

As Leticia explained, there is also the perception that African American female athletes' lack intelligence is not limited to the field:

> [People think] the reason [African American female athletes] are at *University* is because we know how to play sports…that is the number one thing. And we are not really smart…teachers give us grades and we just get whatever we want because we do good at what we do sport-wise…

And, Roxanne stated:

> I feel like I maybe get *more* help, people are checking on me more and making sure that I am getting my tutors every week – I meet in the Study Center and I talk about all the stuff I have to do. We sit down, we write it down, I write out my objectives and then check in the next week. It is almost like…I don't know how to say it without it sounding bad…Because I am an African American female athlete they expect me to have more

struggles…It is like they feel like they have to watch out for me more...

Rather than see the extra help enforced through the Study Center as an example of the enforcement of a stereotypical notion of African American female athletes, Roxanne felt this stereotype, though negative, could be used to her advantage. However, in the end it was hard to know what sort of impact this will have on her future sense of accomplishment and academic ability.

The stereotype that African American athletes lack intelligence is quite common. Although perceived as "natural" athletes, African American athletes have consistently been thought of as rooted in the body and not the mind (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Schultz, 2005). This stereotype reinforces the notion that African American athletes must be trained, their "animalistic natures" reigned in and focused appropriately (Douglas, 2003). Thus, the feelings of many of the co-participants were reflected in the literature. African American female athletes are uplifted for their gifted athletic talents while simultaneously degraded as lacking the intelligence necessary to succeed at both athletics and academics without significant help.

Research Question #3: Simultaneous Empowerment and Disempowerment of the Self

As co-participants spoke about their experiences with both individual and social identity development, a powerful theme of contradiction emerged. They could not say their experiences as African American females and African American female athletes were strictly empowering or decidedly disempowering. In fact, throughout each of the eight interviews, co-participants often contradicted their own perceptions making what seemed empowering disempowering and vice-versa. In fact, it was common to hear co-participants justify the various ways in which they felt disempowered through media representations, sports, the *University*, and as women with

conflicting identities.

Three major themes developed which helped explain both the empowerment and disempowerment felt by co-participants as they navigated their personal and social identities as African American female athletes: (a) *Structure of Athletics*; (b) *Effects on the Individual*; and (c) *Rationalization.* The first theme reflected the unique structure of the athletic department at *University*. This theme was divided into three general subthemes (*separate athletic departments, team as family,* and *coach-athlete relationships*) which helped to explain both the empowerment and disempowerment experienced by the athletes. The second theme was made up of two general subthemes including, *institutional and/or coach constructed identities* and *high standards*. Most of the athletes were not only held to very high standards which related to their institutional and athletic identities, but they were also monitored and "policed" in such a way as to ensure the promotion of a certain type of "ideal *University* identity." Finally, all eight co-participants found some way of rationalizing either their own self created identity and/or the identity society and *University* created for them. A number of factors came into the co-participants' rationalizations, especially age. General subthemes included, *quantitative versus qualitative equality, color-blindness, equality of sport,* and *team/university success.*

Major Theme #1: Structure of Athletics

One of the most unique aspects of interviewing African American female athletes from *University* was that they participated in a gender-divided athletics program. At *University* the men's and women's athletics departments were two completely separate entities. This proved to play both a positive and a negative role in the way co-participants viewed their place within the institutional hierarchy of sport.

Subtheme #1: Separate athletic departments. Six of the co-participants felt *University* was atypically special because of its separate athletic departments. As Nailah stated:

> It is definitely special just because the history behind women's sports at *University* as well as having two separate athletic departments, which played a big part in coming here when I was being recruited…it is an environment that is just as supportive of female athletes as male athletes. You don't feel like the men overshadow you or that they get preferential treatment, because the women get just as much support and we have our own department that takes care of female athletes only. And then the men take care of theirs. It is really neat and there is a lot of support and it is a very warm environment.

When questioned as to whether her experience was specific to *University* Karah said:

> I think it has been pretty much just like if I was any other athlete here. I think the school loves women's sports, so just the fact that I am a female athlete here makes me cool I guess…the separate women's athletic department is huge. We are still a big deal, football is not God. I don't know…I have not gone to any other colleges seriously so I don't know. But I would kind of like to think so.

Therefore, one of the most significant sources of empowerment for African American female athletes was derived from the structure of athletics, particularly at *University*. The separation of men's and women's athletic departments as well as the emphasis on teams as "extended families" and the strength of most coach-athlete relationships gave many co-participants the strength to move beyond the negative stereotypes associated with their identities. Although each of these variables may be specific to *University* itself, it is important to note just how critical each was in fostering a strong sense of individual identity as well as promoting a

positive sense of community identity. Although the majority of athletes found that the structure of athletics contributed to their sense of empowerment as athletes and as African American females, some also found it to be disempowering as well. For example, some felt that the separation of the athletic departments meant it was easier to give more to men's programs than to the women.

Subtheme #2: Team as family. After talking with co-participants it became clear that over half (five) attributed their positive experiences at *University* to the way their teams had become their surrogate families to them. In fact, all five who mentioned the importance of a team acting as a family chose *University* specifically because of this trait. As Layla said:

> It's amazing. I am really blessed to be here at *University* and their fan support and donor support. It is amazing, you don't have to pay for anything. You have the best treatment. Our trainer is one of the best trainers in the country. We have the best coaches and in my opinion they are really good…And I have just… I don't know I can't complain to be honest. This is like an athlete's dream. I never expected it to be anything like this. It is amazing…I considered a lot of the other [Conference] schools and when I came on my official visit here…the team…that is what made me come here, because we are one big family. And that made a huge difference to me, because we are close like that… because I am close with my family and I am far away from them, so I needed somebody else to be close with and that is what my teammates are for.

Like many college students, athletes find themselves away from their families and social structures. Due to the competitive nature of college athletics (year-round training, travel, etc.) many athletes are unable to return home for extended periods of time. An obvious solution to

this dilemma is to make teammates and coaches into a surrogate family throughout the college athletic experience.

Literature suggests that the importance of team cohesion also often necessitates the creation of a "team-family". Athletes who experience positive climates within their teams, especially when it is fostered by the coach, report "higher enjoyment, effort, team satisfaction, positive relationships with coaches and parents; and less tendency to avoid practice and experience worry/tension" (Smith, Fry, Ethington, & Li, 2005, p. 171). In this way, teammates and coaches temporarily take the place of biological family members by providing adequate support and love to athletes during their intercollegiate athletic careers.

Subtheme #3: Coach-athlete relationships. Based on co-participants' comments, addressing the discontinuity between personal and social identities could be either helped or made worse by their relationship with their coach. For some, their relationships with coaches were positive. For others, a compilation of negative experiences with coaches led to a tenuous academic and athletic experience at *University*. While some wanted to play professionally once they graduated, many felt burned out, largely because of their experiences with coaches during college. For example, on three separate occasions Roxanne was forced to make academic as well as personal sacrifices in order to fulfill the "employee" role she had to on her team. In the first instance she was forced to fail a course in order to maintain her team's position in the [conference] rankings:

> Well…coaches here…I'll say, from my experience. Me and my coach do not have that great of a relationship. It is kind of like I work for her. And my job is sport…And in season as much as they say it is academics first, in season academics are never first. I

have had several classes were I have had to fail the class because of athletics. For example, my sophomore year I was in a [certain] class, and it had an attendance policy. And the Study Center gives us this sheet and it says all the classes you are going to miss…My teacher signed it and said, „Fine, you are going to miss one more class than on my attendance policy…I usually never break my policy, but you have an A in the class so I am going to let you do it.' When we get to the Tournament…my teacher e-mails me and says, „Roxanne, you haven't been in class the last two days and I am going to have to either drop you with a WP or you are going to have to fail the class because the Study Center did not put the major tournaments on there'…And I had an A in that class…She was the nicest teacher… I mean it was just her rules and you know teachers are not always going to break the rules for athletes. And if I took the withdraw-pass, then the hours wouldn't count and I would be under my hours for NCAA. So, the team would have to forfeit the rest of our games and then they make take some of those games back that I played in…and I am a starter so that would be every game. So, my coach was like, „It is completely up to you.' [But] we were *at* the Tournament. The championship game was the next day …So I just failed the class and kept the hours and then I had to retake it. Stuff like that…it is a job. I don't have a close relationship with her [coach].

On another occasion Roxanne was denied the ability to pursue her desired major because one of the required courses conflicted with practice times. This hurt Roxanne deeply and the tone and demeanor of this portion of her interview was one of anger and frustration. In this case, Roxanne was sacrificing one of the most important elements African American female athletes valued about their student-athlete experiences- "choice." As she said:

> There has been a lot of stuff. I had to change my major because my coach wouldn't let me take an English class that I needed to be a Communications Studies major. The class was from 2:30-4 something and that is when we have practice and she was like, „You can't do it.' She wouldn't let me do it. And now they say, „Roxanne, it was up to you, it was up to you.' But it's not up to you when you have all these adults swaying you one way, but then saying, „It is still up to you, but if you do this it is really going to affect the team…you might not get to start because you are not going to watch film…' When it comes to the Study Center and stuff like that and the Assistant AD, it is academics first. And I guess the coaches kind of undermine that. It is this unspoken…you don't really say anything about it.

Lastly, one of the most devastating effects of Roxanne's relationship with her coach came about during her last season of play. It became obvious during her interview that the following experience had significant negative effects on her. As she explained:

> …there has been a lot of stuff that probably shouldn't have happened…there have been games I wasn't supposed to play in because of NCAA stuff and my coach let me play anyway. And then we end up getting caught. There was like this one game. I wasn't supposed to play in it because I was ineligible until my classes came in and she called me the night before and said, „You are going to come with us and play in this game.' And I went and I played and then I guess I wasn't supposed to say anything about it. Then I went to the Study Center Monday to meet with my counselor and she was like, „Why didn't you go to study hall on Sunday?' I told her I was with the team…because we had a game. And she was like, „You are not supposed to be playing.' And I was like, „Well

look, nobody told me that and Coach said I could go so I went.' And I didn't think to say, „Oh wait no I can't go, I figured she is the coach, she knows.' So she ended up getting fined, she had to miss the first game of the season and everyone got mad at me and said that I did it on purpose and that I knew I wasn't supposed to go…it was this really big deal and I really haven't talked to her since. The last game of my season…she didn't say anything to me on the bus; she didn't say anything on the plane ride all the way home and once we got back I have not spoken to her since…she was really mad about that whole NCAA thing. I guess it was in [the media] and everything. And I had no clue or any idea that that had happened. All I knew was my counselor asked me why I missed study hall and that was the last of it. She never said she was going to tell the Assistant AD or the NCAA or anything like that. And they like [reported in the media] that it was self-reported so everyone assumed it was self-reported by me. And I was like, „Come on guys.' We never had a very good relationship though.

Despite some of the negative aspects of coach-athlete relationships reported from a small number of co-participants (three), a majority of athletes found their coaches empowering in multiple aspects of their lives. As Jaisyn discussed, when making the transition from having a female to a male coach, it just took a little time:

"… having a female coach and now having a male coach. I mean it was difficult at first, but I have learned to respect him like a father. And understand what it is that he is saying and what standpoint he is coming from…it is good."

Teams frequently acted as surrogate families. Despite the positive outcomes of many such relationships sometimes strained coach-athlete interactions made positive team experiences

nearly impossible. The result of such negative experiences was a feeling of loss and complete disempowerment from not only sport but also within the athlete herself. It is vital that athletic departments, universities, and coaches know just how influential (both positively and negatively) the structure of athletics and particularly coaches can be on an athletes' overall experience.

Major Theme #2: Effects on the Individual

The level of empowerment and/or disempowerment felt by each of the co-participants largely determined how their personal identities were ultimately affected. Some co-participants suffered more than others depending on a variety of variables. However, the effect of this simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment ended up playing a significant role on the co-participants' identities were constructed personally, socially, and institutionally.

Subtheme #1: Institutionally and/or coach constructed identities. Five of the co-participants felt the media (both institutionally and generally) was used as a means of creating constructed identities for the athletes themselves. Beyond controlling the female athletes' use of web-sharing programs like Facebook, they perceived that they were often specifically instructed to uphold a higher moral code and project a more polished image than the male athletes at *University*. As Roxanne, Nailah, and Karah explained, being an African American female athlete at *University* was no easy job and, at times, came at a steep price. They were asked to sacrifice their own sense of personal identity to create a collectively gendered and raced identity for their team and the institution. As Roxanne stated:

> We are [held to a higher standard than the male athletes]. For instance, if your coach finds out that you are staying [in the male athletes' dorm]…even with your boyfriend of like four years or whatever… you would get in so much trouble. You are just not

> supposed to…you just have to hold yourself to a higher standard than anyone else. You don't want any possibility of anything negative…your reputation…because you know you are representing *University*. Every year our coach has this talk with us and we have this [time together] and we sit around in a circle and she gives us this talk about how all guys want the same thing from you and don't take a drink from a guy even…no matter what… even if he gives you money to go buy the drink yourself, don't take it. But…and it just…it's…you have to hold yourself…you have to basically have to be a saint. Our coach will find out about everything, everything…anything that happens they find out about it.

This was in stark contrast to co-participants' perceptions of male athlete proscriptions for behavior as Roxanne went on to explain:

> And then the guys on the other hand…a girl will go and do something or something will happen with a guy and he will go and tell his friends, they'll talk about it in the locker room and the [men's] coaches will hear it and then they will go back and tell our coaches and then *we* get into trouble. But the guys don't. Their coaches just sit there and laugh with them about it …There are a lot of rules [for female athletes] that I am sure the guys may have but they are not monitored as much.

Nailah mentioned the more positive outcomes of living with an institutionally constructed ("moral") identity when she stated:

> I think once again [female athletes here] are special because of the tradition our athletic department has built and their morals and their standards and what *Athletic Director* has done and *Coach*. I think at *University* African American female athletes, they are known

for their hard work and their work ethic and especially because we have so many athletes who have the opportunity to go pro or further their careers after…as in all sports.

Despite the clear empowerment derived from participation in athletics, African American female athletes have to face a number of unique issues that challenge their sense of identity both psychological and within the general society. Using the media as a medium for constructing the "perfect athlete" universities and coaches have found ways to regulate African American female athletes' public identities. Newspapers, television, and especially the internet are public domains in which African American female athletes are particularly susceptible to external constraints. At all times they are required to discipline their identities being careful not to be seen with the wrong people, doing the wrong thing, or even existing in the wrong space.

Whether consciously or not all of the co-participants engaged in some form of identity management/control. Those few athletes who ignored the unspoken guidelines of portraying the institutionally and/or coach-constructed identity were ostracized by their teammates, coaches, and even the university itself. Although cast off, many co-participants knew they were valuable enough to keep on the team and the resulting feelings were one of an employer-employee relationship rather than a mutually beneficial relationship. As the various forms of technology and media become more accessible it is hard not to wonder how the African American female athlete of the future will be anything but what her institution and coach constructs her to be.

Subtheme #2: High standards. Three of the co-participants felt they were held to extremely high standards. These standards were largely influenced by media presence. As Roxanne explained, this could be a highly disempowering experience:

[You can control how the media represents you] if you make sure you are doing the right

thing and go to all your classes and make good grades. If you uphold yourself to a higher standard, then the media can't really place negative images upon you. But if you do one thing wrong you will be in the *University* Paper, don't you worry…or the [City News]. They had a thing in the [City News] with my friend Jasmine. What happened was the [City News] guy has a Facebook account and Jasmine had pictures from when she was back home hanging out with her friends and it was pictures of her holding [weapons] and like posing…just being Jasmine. She put it on her Facebook. Jasmine has never [used weapons] in her entire life. She was just up there being silly and taking funny pictures and they took the pictures; it was a couple of the male athletes and they did a huge article. And the thing about it was that it was mostly African Americans; the article, the pictures, and the images were mostly of African Americans. And they had Jasmine on there with the [weapons] like this [gestures and laughs], posing and that was just one of the most embarrassing things that happened to her. That was pretty bad. After that [all of the athletes] had to get off Facebook. You can have Facebook, but we can't have anything bad; no swear words, no pictures where you have any kind of alcohol, no red cups, nothing…nothing where you are showing too much skin. And [*University* officials] look at our pages. You have to be friends with your coaches and they go in every week and check. If one of your friends goes in and writes something bad on your wall you have to go in and delete it. Yep, Facebook is definitely not as fun anymore. You are dodging out of pictures and stuff at parties…otherwise, someone might tag you.

On the other hand, Nailah reflected on the more positive side of adhering to higher standards than regular students and the ways in which media can empower African American female

athletes. As she stated:

> I feel like now [media] is very empowering, whereas like…I can just remember growing up…some images you would see of African American Women were not so…I think that comes from the media and how we've seen a change in the way African American Women portray *themselves* in the media and some of the roles they chose to play. And, you know, also I think Oprah has a big impact on that and how she portrays the African American Woman and the standards she sets for her show and who she invites on her show. So, I think they are very empowering images, especially when you look at athletes, you know…Lisa Leslie or Alela Ali…and you know, I think they are very empowering images or Didi Trotter. And how they carry themselves as far as being role models for other African American and so I think we [African American] don't give the media opportunities to portray us [African American] in a negative light because of the previous stereotypes. I feel like a lot of African American Women are very conscious of what they do and how they portray themselves because it can be easily portrayed differently in the media.

Major Theme #3: Rationalization

In order to account for the inherent contradictions of living with an intersectional identity which included facets of gender, race, class, and athletic status, all eight co-participants felt the need to rationalize their experiences as well as *University's* positions on African American female athletes. Interestingly, age played a significant role in the various levels of rationalization in which co-participants would participate. The four youngest athletes were most likely to believe racism, sexism, and classism no longer existed in the US, or if they did, it was on an

insignificant scale. Older athletes were much more measured in their rationalization of the media and institutional/coaching treatment of African American female athletes. Although all four believed racism, sexism, and classism were handled better now than in the past, they still acknowledged the presence of such oppressions and were careful not to praise change too loudly.

Subtheme #1: Quantitative versus qualitative equality. When asked what it was like to be an African American female athlete, the four youngest co-participants often turned to the quantitative gains made within sport such as equal opportunities to play, a decidedly liberal feminist view of progress though none of the athletes in this sample described themselves as "feminists" of any type. In many instances these younger athletes were not as reflective about the roles gender, race, and class played in their everyday lives. As Karah explained:

> I think…[sexism, racism, classism as an athlete] is not something I personally ever think about from a day-to-day basis. But, I guess it is just the same as being another athlete. You are just…whatever…I don't know.

Leticia held a meritocratic view of sport and stated:

> I feel empowered with the number of African American athletes who are good at what they do…that is empowering. I guess I just feel the same way. Not being an athlete…like in the pictures…they had a lot of pictures of just the Whites on the cover, but I know the Black people on the team…little stuff shows. As a person it makes you work harder I guess or try to be better at what you do and hopefully you'll get on the cover somewhere.

Tasha explained that the equality of numbers of African American and White female athletes across sports demonstrated the end of sexism, racism, and classism within intercollegiate sports:

> Well, with [Sport] there are a lot of African American women in the sport. So well…even, it depends on your [position] too. We [African Americans female athletes] are more [certain positions], but there are a few who do [other positions]. But, here at *University* there is equal representation with Caucasian women and African American women on the team. So, we are all one family; it is not „us' and „them.' We are all mixed together.

In contrast to the four younger co-participants, the four older co-participants saw instances of continued racism in sport and the lack of qualitative equality. As Nailah stated:

> I would say there are minor differences [between being a White female athlete and being an African American female athlete] just because I am African American and then I am a female and then I am an athlete…so I feel like I may not have a lot of the same opportunities that some…that other female athletes have that are not Black. And I mean I have experienced that before when I was in eighth grade I was on the [highest level] team and I was trying out for the regional team and so I was at try-outs and the…one of the coaches had already picked me to be on the team and then the other coach who didn't like my brother and also didn't like me because of the situation, because he was Black, and, so, therefore, he chose three other players over me that he trained himself that were White. Therefore, I didn't really get to go. So, I feel like I don't really get the same opportunities a lot of times just because of my color when really my talent or my work ethic speaks for itself. So, I mean, it's frustrating. But, at the same time, you know I don't…you just keep working and you don't let that get to you.

It was clear that the younger co-participants felt gender and race had much less to do with

their athletic opportunities and experiences than did the older co-participants. The belief in the power of quantitative equality and a life lived in a meritocracy are dangerous concepts to which to adhere. The impact and scope of not only social norms, but also laws which provide for such equity should not be overestimated. Laws like Title IX based on liberal feminist theories and formal equality *have* made dramatic changes for women (Carpenter & Acosta, 2007). But, there is a limit to the amount of difference that can be made using philosophies which promote an equal treatment standard. The concept of *reforming* rather than *transforming* athletics, as inherent in liberal feminist and formal equality perspectives, does not allow for public law to change private attitudes. There will come a time when the semantics regarding the meaning of *equality*[6] are called into question.

The seductiveness of reaching *qualitative equality*[7] has and will continue to cause women, and particularly women of color, (despite continued discrimination and disparity); to disengage from civil rights movements once *quantitative equality*[8] has been achieved. It is already happening as demonstrated by much of the rhetoric of the post-feminist movement which to a certain extent implies that feminism and the fight for gender and race equity is no longer needed. Further, the belief that we live in a meritocratic society, in which a person need only to work hard to gain success ignores the structural disadvantages faced by many people of color, and again, particularly women of color (Harris, 2004). Women's belief in a meritocratic US society and that *quantitative equality* would eventually lead to *qualitative equality* has been one of the most devastating downfalls of this generation and the potential power behind legal interventions such as Title IX (Harris, 2004).

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[6] Equality: 1. State of being equal: rights, treatment, or value equal to all others in a specific group. 2. Equal in number (as in opportunities)

[7] Equal value; free from all forms of oppression and discrimination both overt and covert, intentional and unintentional

[8] Equal numbers of opportunities, scholarships, etc.

Subtheme #2: Color-blindness. In order to rationalize their positions within an overtly if not sometimes covertly racist society, six of the co-participants actively engaged in what Collins (2008) called "colorblindness." Using the meritocratic philosophy of US society nearly all of the co-participants believed they lived in what has recently been called a "post-race" age. Jaisyn explained it plainly when she said:

> I mean, now…the world, I think it is equal. Some people just don't want to let go of the minorities and this and that and upper-class ways. I think once you are eating and drinking, you are carrying on a good standard of living you are a human being you are fine. The definitions and classifications does not matter to me.

Several co-participants strongly believed that they lived in a "color-blind" society in which hard work and determination, rather than the color of one's skin determined how they were perceived by others (Collins, 2009; Schultz, 2005). The rationalizations used to justify the contradictions experienced were strong. Only the four oldest co-participants were critically reflective of this disconnect. They regarded the "supposed" equality brought on by equal opportunities and access to sport with suspicion. Instead, they focused more on how their experiences were qualitatively different from those of previous African American female athletes. The history of oppression faced by earlier African American female athletes was critically compared to their own situations. Co-participants then found reason enough to believe in the decrease in sexism and racism within the sporting arena. However, despite their more developed senses of critical consciousness, even the older co-participants believed they lived in a newly color-blind society in which sex and race had begun to cease to matter and where sport as a social institution and success within sport provided protection from the negative stereotypes of old.

Despite the strength of co-participants' belief in the existence of a color-blind and post-race society it was clear that a number of personally and socially enforced standards affected their own senses of self as African American female athletes in US society. In fact, almost all co-participants spoke of the need to be strong in order to not allow the conflicts of living intersectional lives negatively affect them. Layla demonstrated this most clearly when she said:

> There is just that stereotype of being strong, naturally strong and athletic and we can jump high and we are very fast, but it is not always like that. Sometimes we are smart *and* athletic, it is not either/or, it can be both. I just think that is how the media makes people think of us that way… I think I have really good self-esteem. My parents have done a great job at that. If I did not have parents who told me I was this and that, that you know not to just listen to other people, I probably would have low self-esteem because of what people have said. It depends on who you are and what kind of person you are…your personality. So I think it would affect people who had low self-esteem, who did not have that, or people to motivate you. They did not have people in their lives to motivate them.

Thus, even a critically reflective consciousness did not guarantee that African American female athletes could see themselves differently than others stereotyped them to be.

Subtheme #3: The equality of sport. Sport acted as a particularly significant arena for color-blindness. As an institution sport was seen as a "safe haven" from gender, race, and class issues. When asked about the influence of race on playing time, Layla said, "I think it's similar because we get the same opportunities [to play]. It is not like just because you are Black you are not going to play. If you are good you *are* going to play and it's like that."

Adalia furthered this notion when she stated:

> My team…most of us are Black and everybody loves us just because we are the Team. They don't look at color or how we look or things like that. The majority of our team is Black girls and [from the region]. Some people still have their differences in [the region] as far as race. But people just don't care anymore…some people.

Thus, six of the eight co-participants strongly believed that as long as they worked hard and demonstrated their talent they would participate in practices and games no matter the color of their skin. Unfortunately, most of the interview data contradicted the actual existence of a post-race society as well as co-participants' belief in it.

Despite their acute awareness of the negative socially projected notions of African American female athlete identities, nearly all co-participants believed these ideals existed only outside the norm. The concept of the meritocratic nature of sport and American society persuaded them to ignore the sexist, racist, and stereotyped experiences they encountered (Collins, 2008; Schultz, 2005). Unlike the overt racism of old, the ideology of color-blindness [especially in sport], is "particularly powerful because it „otherizes softly'" (Schultz, 2005, p. 339).

Subtheme #4: Success. The success experienced individually and collectively among three of the co-participants also served as a way to rationalize covertly sexist, racist, and classist experiences within the media and within sports. As Nailah explained:

> I think over the years [media representation] has gotten a lot better with African American female athletes, just because you have so many African American female athletes that are changing the game… I think it's getting a lot better and they are

portrayed as being smart, having an education, working hard… it is not just "natural talent" or "oh, she has an extra bone in her leg so she can jump, or she is just fast." So, I think it has become more of an equal playing field when you look at Venus and Serena Williams and how they have changed the game of tennis. So I think it is a lot better.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the social construction and psychological impact of media representations on African American Division I intercollegiate female athletes. In the current study, it appeared that African American female athletes existed in a space of psychological and sociological dissonance in which their two identities were constructed and executed within a patriarchal, racist, and classist system disguised as "a level playing field." It was found that the ways in which African American female athletes perceived their own sense of self-identity and worked through its construction was heavily influenced by their positions as intersectional individuals and not by media representations. Dealing with the repercussions of their gender, race, and athletic participation, African American female athletes were essentially *athletic intruders*. Unlike their male counterparts they cared greatly about their educations and future academic success no matter how committed they were to their sport. Additionally, African American female athletes were acutely aware of the ways society perceived their identities if they were not completely clear on how society influenced the construction of their own personal identities. Stereotypes of African American women and African American female athletes abounded never allowing the co-participants to simply and fully express these aspects themselves.

The impact of such pervasive negative stereotypes was countered by the ways African

American female athletes simultaneously drew both empowerment and disempowerment from their lives. Unique to these co-participants' situation was the way in which athletics was structured at their university. The division between men's and women's athletics allowed a gender freedom for African American female athletes rarely experienced by other female athletes. Despite this empowerment, some co-participants were disempowered by coach-athlete relationships, shown to be a critical component of athletic identity development (Becker, 2007). The effects of existing in a space in which one was both empowerment and disempowered led to a number of coping strategies the most critical of which was a form of rationalization which allowed co-participants to believe in the progress toward a color- and gender-blind world. Based on the aforementioned results it can be concluded that these African American female athletes existed in a nebulous space that was simultaneously empowering and disempowering. The strength of their experiences with societal institutions such as university structures, with coaches, the media, etc. provided both positive and negative experiences within athletics.

In the next chapter, practical implication of the current study as well as directions for future studies will be explored in depth.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions, Practical Implications and Future Directions

Often seen as a bastion of equality, sport remains a sexist, racist, and classist venue often perpetuating stereotypes and maintaining society's status quo. I strongly believe in the ability of sport to act as a vehicle for social justice and as a source of empowerment for young girls and women. However, I remain convinced that the subtle structures and covert messages sent to female athletes, particularly African American female athletes, prevent the advent of true empowerment. And if it is the case, as I so conclude, that African American women cannot use their sporting experiences to strengthen their identities, then the only possible effect is rendered negative and disempowering.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how African American female athletes construct and maintain their individual and social identities. More specifically the purpose was to investigate Division I African American female athletes' perceptions of media portrayals of themselves and other African American female athletes against their own and others' identity constructions using semi-structured interviews. In order to achieve this six primary research questions were used to guide the research process. These questions included: (a) How does sport media portray African American Division-I collegiate female athletes via sport media guides? (b) How do African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of such portrayals? (c) What influences how African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of their identities? (d) What influences how African American Division-I collegiate female athletes make sense of the media's representations of their identities as African American women, African American female athletes, and as individuals? (e) What role does the media

play in empowering and/or disempowering African American Division-I collegiate female athletes? (f) What is the relationship between sport media guide portrayals and African American Division-I collegiate female athletes' self-perceptions? This chapter will discuss the conclusions and practical implications of the results found during this research project as well as future directions for further study.

Through thorough coding and analysis of co-participant interviews it was discovered that African American female athletes experienced three simultaneous movements inherent in their athletic participation. These aspects included construction of a self-perceived identity based on the ways gender, race, athletics, and academics intersected; construction of a socially perceived identity based on gendered, raced, and classed stereotypes of both African American women and African American female athletes; and the experience of a simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment of the self. In conclusion, African American female athletes were continually trapped negotiating their own sense of self against that of what society determined for them. This often caused conflict between the empowering aspects of sport participation and the disempowering aspects of the social control of the self. Although all co-participants cared deeply about their sporting experiences, as African Americans and as women, the benefits and strength derived from their participation often came at a steep psychological and sociological price.

The sexist and racist stereotypes which affect African American women represent just the tip of the iceberg for African American female athletes. Triply marginalized, African American female athletes are subject to a number of negative stereotypes which portray them as "natural" athletes with little work ethic, lacking intelligence both on and off the court, and suffering from a

wide variety of behavioral issues (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2003; Schultz, 2005; Spencer, 2004; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). These stereotypes were readily apparent to nearly all co-participants in the current study. Although they often felt empowered by their sport experiences they were all too aware of how they were perceived by the general public as well as how they were represented by the media. In order to suppress the negative feeling associated with being characterized in such demeaning ways, each of the co-participants had to move past her resentment. Sometimes, this took the form of relying on friends and family to bolster self-esteem or ignore the more capricious stereotypes by focusing on the progress already made by African American women in sport. Either way, African American female athletes were impacted by the traditionally held notions of what constitutes an African American female athlete in American society.

Practical Implications

It is hoped that the results of this study are of critical importance to those persons who work closely with women who exist in intersectional spaces and, more specifically, with African American female athletes. By gaining a window into the paradoxical experiences of the psychological and sociological identity development of African American female athletes practitioners may be better equipped to understand and support their athletes. Universities, especially athletic and media directors could learn about the various ways in which multiple identities impact, both positively and negatively, female athletes of color. By working to reduce rather than reinforce stereotypes of African American females and African American female athletes in particular, Universities, media departments, coaches, and the athletes themselves could be freed from such destructive forces. In order to provide an empowered experience of

identity construction athletes, coaches, and sport psychology practitioners need to be willing to see the whole athlete and the various ways intersectionality dramatically shape their perceived experiences.

Future Directions

Although a number of important conclusions can be drawn from the research conducted in this study, more can still be done. Future studies might focus on varying populations at different levels of sport participation such as youth sport or alternative NCAA divisions. Specific sports could be targeted and compared, especially those which have higher than average participation levels for women of color. Additional research could also be done which examines African American female athletes' experiences across time such as interviewing women who are former collegiate athletes and comparing them to the new generation of African American female athletes. Another critical venue would be to track African American female athletes longitudinally and see what differences and/or similarities arise from those who go on to be professional athletes and spend more time in the media versus those who discontinue sports participation after college. The possibilities of where this research could go are limitless since so little has yet, been done.

Final Thoughts

African American female athletes care about their academic and athletic careers. Every day they face the harsh reality of sexist and racist stereotyping, even within the field of sport; yet, they hold their heads high and draw empowerment from their experiences. Despite the oppressive forces they face, African American female athletes work hard to prove themselves both on and off the court. Their determination and drive to be successful in every meaning of the

word are heroic feats. The various ways in which they construct and view their own identities may contrast with the identities society constructs for them. However, they are all the stronger for choosing their own paths. Although, myself, like Collins (2008) believe their faith in a color-blind and/or post-race society is a bit premature, it is a nice thought to have and certainly a goal for which to strive. I think we all look forward to a day when a woman's strength, an African American woman's strength, and an African American female athletes' strength can be fostered without ever having a disempowering experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

DEVIANT EXISTENCE: STEREOTYPES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY

In this omitted section of the literature review I will discuss scholarship relating to the social construction of African American females throughout American history. Specific focus will be given to the various ways African American women have been stereotyped in relation to their appearance, behaviors, moral character, and intellectual capabilities. Beginning with African American women's first introductions to the United States before and during slavery, moving through the early 20th Century, the Civil Rights era, and ending in the modern period, I will attempt to place into socio-historical context the power of such myths. In order to analyze the depth of the social and cultural gendered practices as they occurred throughout history it is critical to be "mindful of a globalized world [which is] increasingly interconnected and multi-layered with meaning" (Lamphere et al., 1997, p. 16). By situating the experiences of the African American female in time and place it is possible to position "gender in relation to the historical and material circumstances where gender, race, class, and sexual orientation intersect and shape everyday interaction" (Lamphere et al., 1997, p. 1).

The multi-layered nature of an intersectional life requires a non-linear approach to its exploration. Therefore while a number of concepts are investigated as discrete categories such as era, stereotype, myth, socio-cultural and/or historic conditions, they often fold back upon each other and intersect in unexpected ways. This section begins with a theoretical explanation of the history of the African American female as a deviant woman which informs the analyses and then

aides in the examination of the historical and socio-cultural ways in which these myths influenced and impacted the identities of African American females. We discover that what it means to be an African American woman has both changed and not changed over time, varying across cultures, and shifting from one social context to another (Jackson, 1993).

Deviant Women

For African American women, the "memory of oppression is vivid, palpable, and hurtful. In a Foucauldian sense, the fracturing is at once painful and productive, capable of causing debilitating psychic pain and yet, producing willful memory of an oppressive past" (Owen, Stein, & Vande Berg, 2007, p. 3). African American women in the United States have experienced doubled and often tripled oppressions since colonial times. Although colonial White women were often viewed with suspicion and distrust, the advent of slavery and the creation of a racial binary elevated the status of White women while replacing the bottom position of society with African and African American women (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). White women became,

> Celebrated as the ‚nobler half of humanity' and depicted as goddesses rather than sinners. White women were thereafter represented as virtuous, pure and innocent. The historical and social experiences of African women during slavery resulted in numerous images that defined African American women as deviant. (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 633)

African American women were often contrasted with White women who were thought to embody the Victorian notion of ‚true womanhood' (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). White women were thought to possess the highest moral character while African American women were seen as immoral and sinful (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). It is important to note of course, that "to White men of the era, women of all races were considered property to use and abuse"

(Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 634). The immorality of African American women was often extended to include such claims as to label them "ignorant, crafty, treacherous, thievish, and mistrustful" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 635). Such stereotypes often "justified" the use of verbal, physical, and sexual violence against African American women.

Slavery (Prior to 1865)

The hottentot Venus and the breeders. The relationship between African American women and deviance easily turned to a notion of sexual deviance, especially under the conditions of slavery. As explained by Collins (2004) and further reiterated by Yarbrough and Bennett (2000) "Under chattel slavery, people of African descent occupied a particular place in class relations--their bodies and all that was contained within those bodies (labor, sexuality, and reproduction) were objectified…" (p. 56). For example, Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who came to be known as *The Hottentot Venus*, was brought to Europe and put on display for her "pathological steatoptygia" (protruding buttocks) (Schultz, 2005, p. 350). Her body openly dissected by onlookers and physically dissected after her death served as a powerful symbol of racial demarcation (Schultz, 2005). "Framed within a context of freakery, White fascination with Baartman's backside contributed to prevalent ideas of Black female deviance and hypersexuality" (Schultz, 2005, p. 350).

Besides the blatant objectification of African American peoples were efforts to both dehumanize and commodify them (Collins, 2004). The dehumanization of African American people was an essential feature of racial oppression and contributed to the creation of their animal--like status in the market place (Collins, 2004).

African women suffered a particular fate because to the White master she was „a

> fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hand and divided from her womb and vagina.' (Omolade as cited in Collins, 2004, p. 56)

Despite the norms of decency at the time, African American women were often exposed and physically handled on the public auction block (White, 1999). Assessing an African American woman's capacity for childbearing was also frequently appraised in public or with a thorough physical exam conducted not far from the public eye (White, 1999). Although beyond their control, African American women were unconsciously socially punished for their public nudity. The exposure of slave women's bodies "led to the equating of African American women with promiscuity" (White, 1999, p. 32).

The importance of female slaves' childbearing capabilities was critical since American slavery depended upon an increasing slave population (White, 1999). "Through the use of innumerable incentives, planters made sure that slave women were prolific. Since causal correlations have always been drawn between sensuality and fecundity, [any] increase of the slave population seemed to be evidence of the slave woman's lust" (White, 1999, p. 31). Furthermore, the conditions of slavery almost always ensured that slave women were semi-clad, which only furthered notions of their promiscuity (White, 1999). The propagation of the myth of the slave woman's sexual lascivious nature and the constraints of slavery made it nearly impossible for African American women to be protected against the sexual abuse of their masters (White, 1999). Many people of the time even believed that African American women intentionally tempted White men of superior social class into liaisons as it was thought that no White man would ever enter into such a relationship himself (White, 1999). White masters often

took advantage of the constructed stereotypes and powerlessness of female slaves frequently resulting in the birth of mulatto children (White, 1999).

Although a lesser known stereotype, the *Tragic Mulatto* or *Mullata*, was frequently applied to slave children of uncertain patronage.

> Half-White children told a story of a White man's infidelity, a slave woman's helplessness (though this concerned few Whites), and a White woman's inability to defy the social and legal constraints that kept her bound to her husband regardless of his transgressions. (White, 1999, p. 40)

Although these children could sometimes expect to be given special treatment and privileges most of these children were often exposed to some of the worst treatment of all. Serving as a symbol of shame signifying the powerlessness of African American men and women, they could be looked down upon by both slave mother and surrogate slave father. At times they were treated more violently by the master in punishment for their existence. Further mistresses who knew the results of such transgressions could also be counted upon for punishing the children for their mere existence. These children soon found themselves the unwitting objects of a powerless White woman's frustration with her own powerlessness (White, 1999). Yet, the *Tragic Mulatta* herself was often depicted as "alluring, sexually arousing, seductive, and tainted (by one drop of African blood" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 636).

Jezebel. The obvious extension of the deviant and promiscuous African American woman and slavery's chattel breeder was the *Jezebel.* The *Jezebel* was seen as the "bad-Black-girl, who is depicted as alluring and seductive as she either indiscriminately mesmerizes men and lures them into her bed, or very deliberately lures into her snares those who have something of

value to offer her" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 636). The promiscuous African American female with an insatiable sexual appetite was named for the Biblical story of King Ahab of Israel (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The *Jezebel* came to embody lust and was assigned to any woman who engaged in "lewd sexual acts and who would take advantage of men through sex" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 637-638).

The "easy ways" of the *Jezebel* gave slave owners an excuse to abuse their female slaves and provided an acceptable excuse for their mulatto children (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). In fact "some were convinced that slave women were lewd and lascivious, that they invited sexual overtures from White men, and that any resistance they displayed was mere feigning" (White, 1999, p. 30). The prevalence of the *Jezebel* myth and stereotype was especially exploited by the court system. It was often used to make racism and sexism seem natural and to control African American women. The legal construction of the *Jezebel* ensured doubtful credibility *any* time sexual exploitation was involved whether by White or Black men (Collins, 2004). For years during and after slavery the *Jezebel* label was used to justify the rape and unethical medical experimentation of African American women (Collins, 2004).

Mammy. If the *Jezebel* represented the hypersexualized African American female, then the *Mammy* was the complete opposite, an asexual house slave or servant (White, 1999). The typical *Mammy* was characterized as asexual, fat, with a dark complexion, extremely large breasts and buttocks, maternal, deeply religious, loyal, faithful, worthy, reliable, and a member of the family who always knew her place (White, 1999; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). "Mammy was the woman who could do anything better than anyone else. She was the premier house servant and all others were her subordinates" (White, 1999, p. 47). She was "everyone's favorite

aunt or grandmother…ready to sooth everyone's hurt, envelop them in her always ample bosom, and wipe away their tears" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 635-636). *Mammy* was the symbol of African American womanhood that became "inextricably integrated into the folklore of American culture" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 636).

In historical accounts of slave life both by slave and master children, *Mammy's* occupation is infused with great emotion. "So respected was Mammy that she often served as friend and advisor to master and mistress" (White, 1999, p. 48). Her main task was caring for the master's children and she was often represented as being more loving and nurturing to her charges than her own children (White, 1999; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000).

> Mammy was, thus, the perfect image for antebellum Southerners. As the personification of the ideal slave, and the ideal woman, Mammy was an ideal symbol of the patriarchal tradition. She was not just a product of the ‚cultural uplift' theory, she was also a product of the forces that in the South raised motherhood to sainthood. As part of the benign slave tradition, and as part of the cult of domesticity, Mammy was the centerpiece in the antebellum Southerner's perception of the perfect organized society. (White, 1999, p. 58)

There was a great deal of truth to the accounts that life in the master's house, such as would be the case with the *Mammy* figure, was an easier existence than working in the fields. The romantic notion of female household help was based somewhat in fact. For example, household chores required a degree of physicality far less demanding than that of a field hand. *Mammy* was often seen as the best cook, seamstress, emotional confidant, pious, and privileged of the slaves (White, 1999). And in many accounts she was noted for carrying herself with "courage, compassion, dignity, and self-respect" (White, 1999, p. 55). "She was ever mindful of

her own family. [And] Mammy knew that by becoming a friend, confidante, and indispensible servant to the Whites, she and her family might gain some immunity against sale and abuse" (White, 1999, p. 55).

However, the flip side to her "privileges" was that she was always available (day or night), she enjoyed far less privacy than field hands, was constantly scrutinized by the master and mistress of the house, as well as subject to their mood swings, and at great risk of sexual assault (White, 1999). Because of the asexual nature endowed upon the myth of the *Mammy* it was almost ensured that if charges of sexual exploitation were ever brought up she would never be believed (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Furthermore every house servant, even *Mammy,* lived in constant fear of encountering sexual abuse not just from the master, but oftentimes from the master's adolescent sons as well (White, 1999). Thus, the life of the antebellum *Mammy* was in every way just as precarious and dangerous as that of a field hand despite her iconic status.

Implications. There is no way to qualify the implication that slavery had on African American women. Despite their obvious powerlessness within society, existing as both gendered and racialized beings, their experiences were still held against them.

> In speeches and in writing [African American women] expressed their own views on the meaning of their history. As [the educator Anna Julia] Cooper noted, there was "shame" about their experience under an institution that Fannie Barrier Williams had described as depending upon ‚the degradation of everything human.' But Black women may have been the only group in America able to see not only the degradation but the triumph of transcending what the system would make of them. In their minds, the experience of slavery provided evidence of the Black woman's moral strength and resiliency.

(Giddings, 1984, p. 87)

Throughout history this strength and resiliency would be tested again and again as the myths and stereotypes associated with African American women evolved, changed, and were (re)created by American society.

Early 20th Century (1900-1950)

The end of the Civil War and the end of slavery marked a turning point in American history. For the first time in United States history *all* people were "free." However, it is critical not to over exalt the results of the War Between the States. Despite the Union victory and the abolishment of slavery as it had historically been conducted, the legacy of slavery lived on, especially in the South. Terms casually thrown around during this time including freedom, choice, political standing, ownership, etc., all came with strings attached. The South had been virtually decimated by the war and little remained to sustain the population. Furthermore, the deep seated racism which had created, fed, and sustained slavery for more than 150 years could not be abolished over night. During the early 20th century many freed slaves soon discovered that their lives had not radically changed.

No longer able to hold onto the very foundation of their beliefs, many Southerners had to find new ways to oppress African Americans. The only world that made sense to them was the one in which *Mammy* was in their kitchens, *Sapphire* was in their fields, and the *Jezebel* lived on (White, 1999). Thus, the early 20th century marked significant change for both White and African American, Northern and Southern peoples alike. Eager to escape the rampant racism of the south which took the form of lynching, Jim Crow laws, and a caste system of employment in which African Americans were at the bottom, many former slaves migrated North for better

opportunities to support their families. In addition, "sexual exploitation was so rampant that it compelled thousands of women to leave the South, or to urge their daughters to do so" (Giddings, 1984, p. 86). Despite the move to "freer" territories and states, many African Americans found themselves continuing to face discrimination if not overt racism.

Jezebel. African American women were particularly vulnerable to the legacies of their stereotypes and myths. Forced into either domestic work as house servants (consistent with the *Mammy* role) or as sharecroppers for wealthy land owners (consistent with the *Slave* role) African American women found themselves facing many of the same atrocities as under slavery. The role of the *Jezebel* had not changed in the 50 years after slavery and African American women's enforcement into domestic duties and lack of legal recourse left them again open to sexual exploitation and oppression. In fact, the image of the *Jezebel* was unaltered in most ways during the early 20th century as African American women continued to be seen as sexual deviants and temptresses. During this time it was impossible for African American women to seek any form of legal recourse against White or Black men for rape or attempted sexual assault (Collins, 2004).

Mammy (re)constructed. After slavery African American women could either work as sharecroppers or domestic servants, however "either way you still bore the similar stamp of slavery" (Davis, 1981, p. 90).

> Black women worked as cooks, nursemaids, chambermaids, and all-purpose domestics, White women in the South unanimously rejected this line of work. Outside the South, White women who worked as domestics were generally European immigrants who, like their ex-slave sisters, were compelled to take whatever employment they could find.

(Davis, 1981, p. 90)

Thus, the *Mammy* stereotype of slavery had been (re)created within the domestic sphere of "free" house servant. In the South, "domestic work was synonymous with Black girls and women which paid low wages and exposed them to the constant threat of not only sexual harassment but also abuse" (Ross, 2006, p. 51). In many ways the perception of the new *Mammy* became divided between the asexual grandmother and the hypersexualized house servant.

The reconstruction era *Mammy* still upheld a behavior that "connoted satisfaction and comfort with her station in life, wherein she was consigned to performing domestic duties" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 637). She was still as faithful, trustworthy, grateful, and obedient (Collins, 2004; Davis, 1981) as ever and she became the standard of the "good Black woman" and therefore used as a "normative yardstick" (Collins, 2004, p. 72). The *Mammy* of the early 20th century was charged with the ever present and on-call care of the slave *Mammy* but also with the task of "influencing Black maternal behavior, which in turn could potentially lead to Black women perpetuating racial oppression among their children and families" (Ross, 2006, p. 52). By teaching their own children their prescribed place within the White power structures of society, *Mammy's* were consciously brought into collusion with the dominant socio-cultural forces to aid in the oppression of their own people (Collins, 2000). So immortalized was the myth and stereotype of the *Mammy* that in 1915,

> The United Daughters of the Confederacy petitioned Congress to erect a granite monument to [her]. American films, pancake boxes, and syrup bottles imprinted Mammy on the American psyche more indelibly than ever before. So entrenched was she that for most of the century following emancipation Black women were virtually locked out of

every occupation except work in White people's fields or homes. (White, 1999, p. 188) Even today remnants of the *Mammy* stereotype exist in every aspect of our history, society, and culture.

Sapphire. Although the stereotype and myth of *Sapphire* existed during slavery, it was not until the early 20th century that it was truly immortalized as a part of American eye-conic history. *Sapphire* was traditionally the label used for a no-nonsense field hand. She was the "wise-cracking, balls-crushing, emasculating woman, usually shown with her hands on her hips and her head thrown back as she lets everyone know she is in charge" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 636). The situation comedy, Amos „n Andy, popular in the United States from 1920-1950, breathed life into the *Sapphire* stereotype (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Characterized as "evil, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful," the brown or dark brown *Sapphire* robbed her men of all integrity and masculinity (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 638).

Unique to the *Sapphire* stereotype is the necessary presence of an African American male, "whose lack of integrity and use of cunning and trickery provides her with an opportunity to emasculate him through her use of verbal put-downs" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 638). Thus, the *Sapphire* myth served a dual purpose of oppressing and silencing both African American women *and* men. In holding traditionally with the use of stereotypes to sexually exploit women and African American women in particular, the characteristics of the *Sapphire* (e.g., deception, lying, and lack of loyalty) would always overshadow claims of sexual abuse (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 639).

Implications. The early 20th century began to witness the "eclipse of Victorian standards [which] encouraged men to appreciate, and respect, a wider spectrum of women" (Giddings,

1984, 185). During the 1920s the emphasis was on glamour. "The January 1924 issue of *The Messenger* reflected the general thinking when it announced that from then on it would "show in pictures as well as writing, Negro women who are unique, accomplished, beautiful, intelligent, industrious, talented and successful" (Giddings, 1984, p.185). However, Black was considered beautiful only in accordance to White standards. It was during this time that Madame CJ Walker invented a number of beauty and hair care products, the first African American woman to do so (Giddings, 1984). During this era many African American women worked hard to conform to traditional White standards of beauty by using skin whitening creams (which had been around since Colonial times), straightening their hair, and dressing in accordance with White respectability. Often this led to what Giddings (1984) called confused identity. She wondered aloud as an African American woman attempting to (re)create herself in the dominant image. "But are they really her people? She feels alienated even from "Negro Society," which while professing racial pride and disdain for Whites, still imitates White values" (Giddings, 1984, p. 191). Although 1920-1950 marked a time of great development within African American culture, it also created significant psychological tensions as they struggled to live within American society, or more accurately, to live within the niche ascribed to them and which continued to oppress them.

Civil Rights Era (1960s-1970s)

The 1960s and 70s marked an especially poignant time during American history. At no other time has the United States seen such rapid and widespread social, cultural, political, economic, and technological change. At the heart of this era were a number of movements, most importantly the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements. Many African American women faced

particular dilemmas as they attempted to participate in both the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the time. Like the African American women involved in the abolitionist and club movements pre-, during, and post-slavery, who had faced both the sexism and racism within each of the movements, women during the Civil Rights era encountered much of the same.

Repeating the historical events of the First Wave of feminism, the Second Wave feminist movement of the 1960 and 70s was predominantly a White, middle-class woman's movement. Once again, African American women found themselves in a "double bind" attempting to fulfill their role as both loyal to the feminist movement which affected the sexism they faced *and* the civil rights movement which fought the racism they encountered. Despite their best efforts, the Second Wave of feminism remained homogeneously focused on White women's causes and remained blind to the plight of African American women and women from lower social classes. Although African American women continued to fight for feminism and actively participate in the movement, they realized from past experiences that increasing women's freedoms meant nothing if African American men were not given additional freedoms as well. With that many African American women put their full efforts behind the values and beliefs of the Civil Rights movement.

Sexism in the Civil Rights movement. At the beginning of the Civil Rights movement many women were "not only fighting alongside Black men, but leading the fight to end racial oppression" (Ross, 2006, p. 54). Relying on the leadership skills they had acquired during the women's club movement, many African American women played a significant role in furthering the cause of racial equality and later began to create their own movement, the Black Feminist Movement (Ross, 2006). Fostered by the advent of historically Black colleges (HBCs), powerful

leaders, and college student initiative, numerous student movements began to speak out and fight for Civil Rights.

One of the most important student groups for African Americans, especially African American women, was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). "Both the structural nature and the goals of SNCC propelled women into the forefront of the struggle in a way that was not possible in more hierarchical male-led organizations" (Giddings, 1984, p .277). In fact, many of the women involved in student-led organizations had been raised by formidable role models and were "encouraged to be independent, to do what had to be done, regardless of prescribed gender roles (Giddings, 1984, p. 278). As young, African American women activists they had been raised with strong convictions and self-confidence and had support for their involvement in the struggle for civil rights (Giddings, 1984).

"During the first heady years of the civil rights movement, Black men and women shared a unity of purpose and camaraderie--particularly in the student movement…" (Giddings, 1984, p. 311). However, it was not long before the conditions of society infringed upon even the most egalitarian of organizations and male chauvinism began to present itself. Even Martin Luther King, Jr. was said to have an uneasiness with strong-willed women. As he once stated:

> We had a hard time with domineering women in the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], because Martin's mother, quiet as she was, was really a strong domineering force in the family. She was never publicly saying anything but she ran Daddy King, and she ran the church and she ran Martin, and Martin's problems in the early days of the movement were directly related to his need to be free of that strong matriarchal influence. This is a generality, but a system of oppression tends to produce strong women and weak

men. (Young as cited in Giddings, 1984, p. 313)

Unfortunately, as the civil rights movement began to deteriorate after 1964 the male chauvinism only increased (Giddings, 1984). "At the same time, with the movement in decline, Black women were less willing to tolerate such attitudes and became more openly critical of men, as they had done a century before" (Giddings, 1984, p. 311). The combination of increased male domination and female resistance to being oppressed pointed to a potentially explosive situation within the Civil Rights movement.

As the Civil Rights movement went on African American women began to more openly challenge the male chauvinism within civil rights organizations. They resisted African American males' attempts to feminize them, to force them to "conform to normative ideals of womanhood, or ladylike behavior" (Springer, 2005, p. 21). Unfortunately,

> An implicit, sometimes explicit, goal of the movement was the reassertion of the male breadwinner as head of household which essentially allowed Black men to rise above Black women in order to break the myth of matriarchy and establish patriarchy within the Black community. This goal combined with sexism and authoritarianism were factors that contributed and prevented Black women from having public leadership roles within the latter half of the Civil Rights movement. (Ross, 2006, p. 54-55)

And although many African American women were aware of the paternalistic trend within the organizations and the civil rights movement itself, they were often reluctant to confront it for fear of dividing the struggle from racial oppression (Springer, 2005).

The masculine decade.

A male-conscious motif ran throughout the society in the sixties. Commentators attribute

> this to the male revolt against the societal expectations of the postwar years. Postwar manhood demanded a docile breadwinner whose primary role was to support the consumers who were his wife and children. Hen.p.ecked, trapped by family responsibilities, pushed around by his boss, [the African American male] was ripe for rebellion. (Giddings, 1984, p. 314)

The theme of the sixties became "Black Power" as Northern and Southern African Americans attempted to form a common bond (Giddings, 1984). And although the idea of Black Power "may not have been consciously conceived out of the need to affirm manhood, it became a metaphor for the male consciousness or the era" (Giddings, 1984, p. 315). Angela Davis (1974) wrote of her work in the Los Angeles chapter of SNCC:

> Some of the brothers came around only for staff meetings (sometimes), and whenever we women were involved in something important, they began to talk about „women taking over the organization'--called it a matriarchal coup d'etat. All the myths about Black women surfaced. (We) were too domineering; we were trying to control everything, including the men--which meant by extension that we wanted to rob them of their manhood. By playing such a lead role in the organization, some of them insisted, we

were aiding and abetting the enemy, who wanted to see Black men weak and unable to hold their own." (p. 161)

Soon all of the positive stereotypes African American women had been taught to value in themselves were turned viciously against them by members of their own race.

In addition, shortly before the era of Black Power gained significant momentum a Black Muslim Organization led by Elijah Muhammad began to take hold of the African American community. Within this religious sect women were supposed to take on a very specific role. "To become good Muslims, Black women must become chattel once again, with good and loving masters, to be sure, but chattel nevertheless" (Giddings, 1984, p. 318). The poignant sexism and unending focus on establishing patriarchy within the Black community alienated many African American women during the end of the Civil Rights movement. Also, frustrated with their exclusion from the White feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, African American women began to meet and discuss their unique positions within society (hooks, 1994). These meetings were called consciousness-raising sessions. These sessions allowed Black women to realize they were not alone "in seeing the disparities between the rhetoric of both the Civil Rights [and Feminist] movements and the treatment of African American women within both those movements" (Ross, 2006, p. 56). It was during this time that African American women came together to create a Black Feminist Movement and it is also when the myth of the *Matriarch* truly took hold.

Matriarch. In 1965 a study of the Negro Family, which came to be known as the Moynihan Report, was conducted by the United States government (Springer, 2005). The results of the study called "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" were widely reported and

"directly linked the contemporary social and economic problems of the [b]lack community to a putatively matriarchal family structure" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 143) by arguing that "the state of the Black community was „pathological'" (Springer, 2005, p. 37). Moynihan (1965) blamed the lack of male authority within the African American community which he dated back to slave times, as the main cause of African Americans' oppression. He asserted that racial discrimination was not to blame for the poor housing, unemployment, inadequate education, and substandard healthcare which faced African Americans of the times (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan alleged that "[B]lack women were matriarchs because they fail[ed] to fulfill their traditionally womanly duties and were guilty of emasculating Black men" (Springer, 2005, p. 38). It was this trend of seizing undo authority from African American males by African American females that had "effectively destroyed the Black family (Davis, 1981, p. 13).

What truth there was behind the myth and stereotype of the *Black Matriarch* originated during slave times. Slavery followed *partus sequitur ventrum* in which the condition of the child follows the condition of the mother (Davis, 1981). This effectively set up a matriarchal genealogical system. Essentially all slave children were "fatherless" which went a long way to hide the number of children who were conceived of White fathers. Unfortunately, "most historical and sociological examinations of the Black family during slavery have simply assumed the masters' refusal to acknowledge fatherhood among their slaves was directly translated into a matriarchal family arrangement of the slaves' own making" (Davis, 1981, p. 12-13). Such a myth was created by White men in order to keep Black men subordinate to them and "create the appearance that Black women held the power" (Ross, 2006, p. 47).

The *Matriarch* is effectively the *Mammy* "gone bad." She is a symbol of the African

American woman in her home. She is a "failed" *Mammy.* "She has spent too much time away from home, has not properly supervised her children, is overly aggressive, and emasculates the men in her life" (Ammons, 1995, p. 1051). Even African American intellectuals of the time accused *Matriarchs* of "castrating not only their men but their sons; of having low self-esteem; of faring badly when compared to the virtues of White women. Black women were unfeminine, they said…" (Giddings, 1984, p. 319). The image of African American women inflicting senseless pain upon their sons has been a powerful marker of the *Matriarch* (Giddings, 1984). Corporal punishment and un.p.redictable and severe mood swings were strongly associated with the *Matriarch* image (Giddings, 1984). The motivations of the *Black Matriarch* were "a desire to prepare their sons for manhood by blunting their assertiveness and aggression. The result of which was that Black men developed considerable hostility toward Black women (Giddings, 1984).

Implications. At the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, many African American women took pride in being strong and responsible. But as the movement progressed they began to wonder if they were "too strong, both for the good of their men and the good of the race" (Giddings, 1984, p. 324). The bad relationships between African American men and women that followed were described by Toni Morrison who stated that they "resulted from men's inability to deal with a competent and complete personality and the Black woman's refusal to be anything less than that" (Morrison, as cited in Giddings, 1984, p. 323). The hostility and distrust between African American men and women which grew out of the tumultuous end of the Civil Rights era left a space open for the creation and (re)creation of new and old myths and stereotypes alike.

Modern Period (1980s-Present)

Only fifteen years after the end of the Civil Rights movement the number of myths regarding African American women skyrocketed. The *Hottentot Venus,* the *Breeders,* the *Jezebel,* the *Mammy,* the *Sapphire,* and the *Matriarch* became reworked and renewed in the modern era, not just by White men and women, but also by African American men in today's pop culture. As described by Patricia Hill Collins (2004)

> Because racial desegregation in the post-civil rights era needed new images of racial difference for a color-blind ideology, class-differentiated images of African American culture have become more prominent. In the 1980s and 1990s, historical images of Black people as poor and working-class became supplemented by and often contrasted with representations of Black respectability, used to portray a growing Black middle class. Poor and working-class Black culture was routinely depicted as being „authentically' Black whereas middle and upper-middle class Black culture was seen as less so. Poor and working class Black characters were portrayed as the ones who walked, talked and acted „Black', and their lack of assimilation of American values justified their incarceration in urban ghettos. In contrast, because middle- and upper-middle class African American characters lacked this authentic „Black' culture and were virtually indistinguishable from their White middle-class counterparts, assimilated, propertied Black people were shown as being ready for racial integration. (p. 122)

In the 1990s, Collins (2004) asserts, Black culture became a commodity and "representations of African American women and men became increasingly important sites of struggle (p. 122).

Essentially the myths and stereotypes associated with modern African American women

can be divided into three categories, those applying predominantly to poor and working-class African American women, those which apply to middle- and upper-middle class African American women, and those which have become applied universally to all African American women, especially by African American men.

Working-class women. No matter the stereotype poor and working-class African American women are often imaged as cornrow wearing, gum chewing, cursing women who wear miniskirts and plunging necklines (Collins, 2004). The foundation of the poor and working-class African American female stereotype is the *Bitch*. The *Bitch* is loud, aggressive, pushy, and rude (Collins, 2004). She is a reworking of the chattel slave woman image (Collins, 2004). Every aspect of this stereotype is used to "defeminize and demonize" poor and working-class African American women (Collins, 2004, p. 122). It is important to note, that recent pop-cultural appropriations of the *Bitch* stereotype have allowed African American women to change the meaning to represent "super-strong, super-tough, women who are celebrated" (Collins, 2004, p. 124). However, the negative aspects of the myth remain ever present and in fact provide a foundation for additional stereotype building.

> The *Bad Black Mother (BBM)* is an extension of the *Bitch* stereotype. *BBM*s are those who are abusive (extremely bitchy) and/or who neglect their children either in utero or afterward. Ironically, these *BBM*s are stigmatized as being inappropriately feminine because they reject the ideology associated with the American family ideal. They are often single mothers, they live in poverty, they are often young, and they rely on the state to support their children. Moreover, they allegedly pass on their bad values to their children who in turn are more likely to become criminals and unwed teenage mothers.

(Collins, 2004, p. 131)

These women are often constructed as failures, having made poor choices, putting forth insufficient effort, coming from irresponsible families, bad neighborhoods, and lazy communities (Harris, 2004). The crack mother is a common visual representation of the *BBM*. She is described as a woman who once had the world at her feet in what is constructed as a meritocratic society. As Harris (2004) states,

> although the socioeconomic conditions of late modernity have created unequally distributed opportunities and impediments for young women, it is the idea that good choices, effort, and ambition alone are responsible for that success that has come to separate the can-dos from the at-risks. (p. 16)

Thus, modern society, much like during Colonial times, fails to acknowledge the context and socio-historical significance unique to African American women's lives and then in turn blames them for their struggles.

While the *Matriarch* has turned into the *BBM* in modern times, the *Welfare Mother* and/or *Welfare Queen* have been constructed as the opposites of both. The *Matriarch* is too aggressive, yet, the *Welfare Mother* is not aggressive enough (Collins, 2000).

> [The *Welfare Mother*] shuns work and passes bad values onto her children. Unlike the breeder slave woman who was most valuable when she bore children, the welfare mother must be discouraged from producing because her offspring are a threat to economic stability. (Ammons, 1995, p. 1051)

The extension and obvious extreme of the *Welfare Mother* is the *Welfare Queen*.

> The 'Welfare Queen' is a phrase that describes economic dependency--the lack of a job

> and/or income (which equal degeneracy in the Calvinist United States); the presence of a child or children with no father and/or husband (moral deviance); and, finally a charge on the collective US treasury--a human debit. The cumulative totality, circulation, and effect of these meanings in a time of scarce resources among the working class and the lower middle class are devastatingly intense. The welfare queen represents model aberration and an economic drain, but the figure's problematic status becomes all the more threatening once responsibility for the destruction of the „American way of life' is attributed to it. (Lubiano, 1992, p. 337-338)

The use of these images makes African American women's suffering into a spectacle that eventually desensitizes its viewers (Collins, 1998). The *Welfare Queen* has often been used in modern times as the scapegoat for the deterioration of the state or as a sign which "logically" explains the current state of federal, state, and local affairs (Collins, 2000). The use of such imagery makes it easier for public policy makers and voters to attack African American women specifically when welfare reform is mentioned (Collins, 2000).

Middle- and upper-middle class women. Changes brought on by Civil Rights and the Feminist Movements of the 1960s and 70s led to small but significant increases in the African American middle- and upper-middle class. From the *Mammy* refigured, emerged the *Black Lady* stereotype used to characterize "middle-class, professional African American women who stayed in school, worked hard, and achieved much" (Collins, 2000, p. 80). The *Black Lady* role is most poignantly remembered by the portrayal of Claire Huxtable's role on the 1980s television sitcom, *The Cosby Show*. Claire Huxtable was beautiful, smart, and sensuous. She was dedicated to the hearth and home (Collins, 2000). Her role required a "delicate balance between being

appropriately subordinate to White and/or male authority yet, maintaining a level of ambition and aggressiveness needed for achievement in middle-class occupations" (Collins, 2004, p. 140).

However, unlike Claire Huxtable most *Black Ladies* are stereotyped as tough, independent, smart, and (like the *Mammy* before them) asexual (Collins, 2004). In devoting herself to the advancement of her job, active participation in organizations, and dedication to her boss, the *Black Lady* "is said to have become less feminine by competing with men as well as too assertive, which explains why she cannot find a man to marry her" (Collins, 2000, p. 80-81). And while many might equate Oprah, and her ability to sell herself, with this second image of the *Black Lady*, she continues to "reinforce an individualistic ideology of social change that counsels her audiences to rely solely on themselves" (Collins, 2004, p. 143). In this way, Oprah appropriates the *Black Lady* image and uses it to create an alternate and empowering discourse for African American women.

Cassandra is the label given to the *Black Lady* who strays too far from her prescribed role as a successful yet, "powerless African American woman expected to be servile, lusty, obedient, and available" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 640). A cross between the *Jezebel* and the *Sapphire, Cassandra* is the epitome of confidence run amok. As stated by Yarbrough and Bennett (2000) "the Clarence Thomas hearings exemplify[ied] how an accomplished African American woman is susceptible to attack when she challenges the truthfulness of an accomplished African American man" (p. 641). The burden of the *Cassandra* is her social position of protection conflicts with the "unwritten code that prohibits the reporting of African American violence against African American females, and keeps the ‚intra-community oppression of [African American] women suppressed'" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 642).

The final stereotype and myth applied to any African American woman in modern times is actually a mixture of multiple labels and libels ranging from the (re)created *Jezebel* and slang from modern day rap and street culture. The *Jezebel* label, always used as a means of controlling African American women and ensuring their lack of credit any time sexual exploitation was involved, has recently evolved to include a number of sexist and racist terms evolving from the single word *Hoochie.* There are the *Plain Hoochies, Club Hoochies, Gold-Digging Hoochies,* and the *Hoochie Mamas* (Collins, 2000, p. 82). Beyond the *Hoochies* are the stereotypes created and propagated by rap music and street culture such as *Bitches, Hos, Freaks, Skeezers, Gold-Diggers,* and *Chicken heads* (Collins, 2004, p. 82).

The stories of Desiree Washington who sought the conviction of Mike Tyson for sexual assault and Tawana Brawley,[9] kidnapped and raped by six New York policemen, echo the impact these stereotypes have played on the psyche of African American men and women. For both women there will always exist a lack of credibility to their claims as "the notion of a Black woman being raped has always been considered patently absurd by White society" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 652). Yet, it is,

> [The] casual references to rape and other forms of violence and the soft-porn visuals and messages of many rap music videos are seared into the consciousness of young Black boys and girls at an early age. Despite the misogyny that takes the form of Black women-blaming that permeates American culture, Black mothers who struggle to retain „decent' families remain justifiably worried about the effects of „street culture' on their

[9] Tawana Brawley's story was later discredited. I include it here to emphasize that while *her* story may have been fabricated, thousands of others like it were not and more than that they were never told.

sons. (Collins, 2004, p. 82)

Despite the prolific misogyny within rap music and much of modern music in general, what is most worrisome is the lack of critical reflection on such aspects of pop culture and their influence on young people's identity and the identity of society.

Implications. Modern stereotypes are no longer just a White patriarchal problem; they are both used and abused by men in general to oppress African American women. As was evident from the Anita Hill case

> [Black women] have been programmed to believe that racism always trumps sexism, and that the ‚hierarchy of interests within the Black community assigns a priority to protecting the entire community against the assaultive forces of racism. Many [Black women] fear feeling disloyal, shunned, or vilified' [by their communities]. (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 643)

This code of silence surrounding African American women is formidable. It creates a community in which not only will the members of your race not believe you, but neither will the sisters of your gender. It serves as a constant reminder to African American women that "your concern about your bodies and how males inflict pain on you has to be subordinated until the racial problem is resolved" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 647).

The Impact of Stereotypes

To be an African American woman is to exist in a world full of contradictory space and hidden subtexts. An African American woman must speak a variety of languages and understand numerous perspectives (Sweeney, 2008). If she is to survive economically and socially in American culture she must be particularly fluent in the language and perspective of

the dominant white male culture (Sweeney, 2008). An African American woman's understanding of what necessitates her survival is augmented by her need to be able to "also navigate the languages of [her] many-layered subcultures" (Sweeney, 2008, p. 96). The broad concept that encompasses an African American woman's life is then complicated by the role stereotypes and myths have played in developing, altering, and dictating her multiple identities. In fact, today's media often plays a part in such perpetuation. It "is a commercial tool, a social language, a genre of spectator/reader experience, a technique of persuasion; in fact, it is almost a world in its own right, with its own languages, customs and history, and one that sets the tone and pace for large parts of our lives" (Davidson, 1992, p. 3). It is therefore safe to assert that media is yet, another layer the African American woman must navigate in order to achieve success in today's society.

Identities

Being a member of a marginalized group means that identity as a concept embodies both sameness and difference. According to Stuart Hall (1996),

> identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions. They are subject to a radical historization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation." (p. 4)

Like the stereotypes and myths of the past, in a time of mass globalization, the media becomes an increasingly important venue through which identities are constructed, modified, and re-constructed. It was Zaretsky (1995) who claimed that

> mass consumption and mass culture emerged as basic spheres for the formation of

> personal identity. Through the globalization of culture and the spread of self-consciousness about the body, sport has become increasingly important in defining female identity in recent years. (248; as cited in Hargreaves, 2000, p. 8)

Therefore, the argument can be made that although identity formation negotiation is a multi-layered process, in modern times the media has come to play a large role in its development. Furthermore, although Zaretsky (1995) alludes to the impact of the media on female identities he neglects to recognize its impact on racial and ethnic identities as well. The various ways race is socially constructed within American society are also crucial to understanding the double oppression faced by African America females.

African American Female Bodies

The disciplining of women's bodies, particularly African American women's bodies, by White men, is a concept dating back to American slavery. Even when joined under the banner of abolition and women's rights, African American women's bodies and the experiences they endured with them were relegated to the margins of history. Two hundred years later the method is still to "treat White, Western, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied women's experiences as the norm and other women's experiences as different" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 6). Feminists are arguably just as guilty of universalizing whiteness. Whether intentionally or not, many feminists continue to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness described the world (Hargreaves, 2000). Rather than acknowledging a diversity of experience, White women use their power to "make it seem as if their own experience is wholly representative of all women's experience. Black women, Native women, disabled women, in fact, most other women, are left without anyone noticing they were absent" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 6).

Conclusion

The effect of stereotypes and myths has significantly impacted African American women's lives throughout history and continues to do so today. How African American women view themselves, their bodies, and their athletic capabilities all flow through a 250 year old filter of sexualized and racialized oppression. The ability to endure such hardship and yet, find strength is a testament only those who face the intersectionality of oppression can ever truly know. Their struggle to move beyond the effects of racism, sexism, and classism demonstrate a clear philosophy that:

> One must do more than embrace a philosophy of equality for all people, but must be personally committed to this precept, so much so that one becomes disconcerted when institutional policies and practices, as well as individual and collective behavior result in the unfair treatment of an individual or group of individuals… (Yarbrough & Barrett, 2000, p. 656)

Professor Hine described the strength of African American women throughout history in her assessment of Anita Hill:

> The magnitude of her courage to tell her story is revealed most effectively when viewed against the historical reluctance of Black women to draw attention to their inner lives. Because of the interplay of racial animosity, class tensions, gender role differentiation, and regional economic variations, Black women as a rule developed a politics of silence and adhered to a cult of secrecy. They cultivated a culture of dissemblance to protect the sanctity of the inner aspects of their lives. The dynamics of dissemblance involved in creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings,

while actually remaining enigmatic. Only with secrecy, thus, achieving a self-imposed invisibility, could ordinary Black women acquire the psychic space and gather the resources needed to hold their own in their often one-sided and mismatched struggle to resist oppression. (p. 168)

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Demographic Questions
    - What is your gender?
    - What is your race/ethnicity?
    - What is your year in school?
    - What is your age?
    - In what sport do you participate?
    - What is your mother's highest level of academic achievement?
    - What is your father's highest level of academic achievement?
    - What is your parent's marital status?
    - Did you mother participate in sports? Explain.
    - Did your father participant in sports? Explain.
    - How many brothers and/or sisters do you have?
    - Did they participant in sports?
    - What are your future academic goals/plans?
    - What are your future sporting goals/plans?
    - Why did you come to *University*?
    - What's it like to be a female athlete at *University*?

- Personal Experiences
    - Describe your experience of being an African American female athlete (at *University*?)?
    - What does it mean to be an African American female athlete (at *University*?)?
    - In what ways do you see your experience as an African American female athlete as similar to or different from that of a White female athlete's experience?
- Image
    - When you think of yourself as a female athlete – what image comes to mind? Can you describe it to me?
    - When you think of yourself as an African American female athlete – what image comes to mind? Can you describe it to me?
    - In what ways are those two images similar? In what ways are they different?
- Stereotypes
    - What stereotypes exist regarding African American women?
    - What stereotypes exist regarding African American female athletes?
    - What stereotypes exist regarding *University* female athletes?
    - What are the similarities and/or differences amongst these stereotypes?
- Media
    - How are African American women portrayed in the media?
    - How are African American female athletes portrayed in the media?
    - How are African American female athletes portrayed at other universities?
    - How are African American female athletes portrayed at *University*?

- In what ways do you see your experience with the media as similar to or different from a White Female Athlete's experience?

- Media Guides
  - What stands out for you when you look at the images of yourself?
  - What stands out for you when you look at the images of other African American female athletes?
  - What stands out for you when you compare the images of White female athletes to the images of African American female athletes?

- Empowerment/Disempowerment
  - In what ways do you feel empowered by media representations of African American women?
  - In what ways do you feel empowered by media representations of African American Female Athletes?
  - In what ways do you feel empowered by media representations of African American Female Athletes at *University*?
  - In what ways do you feel empowered by media representations of yourself?
  - In what ways do you feel disempowered/hindered by media representations of African American women?
  - In what ways do you feel disempowered/hindered by media representations of African American Female Athletes?
  - In what ways do you feel disempowered/hindered by media representations of African American Female Athletes at *University*?

- In what ways do you feel disempowered/hindered by media representations of yourself?
- Do you have any control over how the media represents you here at *University*? Who does?

- Concluding Questions/Comments
    - Is there anything else you think is important that I did not ask you?

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by me - Jenny Lind Withycombe, a Ph.D. student in Sport Studies - from the University of Tennessee. The purpose of this study is to ask you questions about your perceptions of media portrayals of female athletes.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study will consist of 1 interview that will be conducted with you in the location of your choice. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the impact of media portrayals on female athletes.

Participation in this study will require approximately 1-2 hours of your time. You and I will meet once with the interview session lasting about 1-2 hours. All interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. You will be given a copy of your transcript and/or any write-up should you desire it.

RISKS

You will be asked to select a pseudonym - a fake name - for this study and all identifying comments and responses will be adjusted in order to protect your anonymity. Further, in an effort to preserve confidentiality all data will be shared only between the research and my two faculty advisors for the project.

BENEFITS

Potential benefits from participation in this study include allowing the researcher and you to: (a) add voice to the limited body of research concerning African American female athletes; and (b) to expose you to media as it can be viewed through a critical lens.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The results of this research will be presented during the final class meeting of Advanced Qualitative Research in Education, Spring 2008. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that your identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches you with your answers, including audio tapes, will be destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Jenny Lind Withycombe at (865) 974-8868. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed you data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

VITA

Jenny Lind Withycombe was born in Fremont, California. She attended Willamette University in Salem, Oregon achieving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology. She soon after completed a Master of Arts degree in Teaching at Willamette University. She taught in the Walla Walla Public School District for several years before attending the University of Tennessee to complete her graduate education. Jenny completed a graduate certificate in Women's Studies at the University of Tennessee where she also received her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education with an emphasis in Sport Studies and a concentration in Sport Psychology.