

Illinois State University

ISU ReD: Research and eData

Theses and Dissertations

10-4-2022

Do “You Have To Be Better? ”: a Narrative Inquiry Exploration of Black Female Former Ncaa Division I Student-Athletes’ Experiences in Athletic Departments

Jessica Jeanne Brown

Illinois State University, brownjess144@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Brown, Jessica Jeanne, "Do “You Have To Be Better? ”: a Narrative Inquiry Exploration of Black Female Former Ncaa Division I Student-Athletes’ Experiences in Athletic Departments" (2022). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1629.

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd/1629>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact ISUREd@ilstu.edu.

DO “YOU HAVE TO BE BETTER?”: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORATION OF
BLACK FEMALE FORMER NCAA DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES’
EXPERIENCES IN ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS

JESSICA J. BROWN

117 Pages

The purpose of this study was to explore how former National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) Black female student-athletes experienced their mid-major athletic departments and to better understand how they navigated these anti-Black spaces. BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) comprised the theoretical framework used to examine Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes’ lived experiences with athletic departments that lead, cultivate experiences, develop policies, and monitor the safety of student-athletes. Seven Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who played at mid-major colleges or universities for four consecutive years participated in the study. Data were collected via interviews, and data analysis revealed five emerging themes: Title IX Dynamics, Issues of Race, Lack of Intuitional Support, Perceptions of and Relationships with Athletic Administration, and Anti-blackness. The identification and interpretation of these themes allow for a deeper understanding of what Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experienced during their collegiate playing careers. Recommendations for practical and leadership levels and directions for future research to continue needed conversations with Black female current and former NCAA DI student-athletes are provided.

KEYWORDS: Black female student-athletes, athletic departments, athletic directors, Division I, BlackCrit, mid-major

DO “YOU HAVE TO BE BETTER?”: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORATION OF
BLACK FEMALE FORMER NCAA DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES’
EXPERIENCES IN ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS

JESSICA J. BROWN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2022

© 2022 Jessica J. Brown

DO “YOU HAVE TO BE BETTER?”: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORATION OF
BLACK FEMALE FORMER NCAA DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES’
EXPERIENCES IN ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS

JESSICA J. BROWN

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Lydia Kyei-Blankson, Chair

John Rugutt

Gavin Weiser

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project is dedicated to the next Black queer girl who is uncertain if they can provide life and community for themselves after learning how deep their trauma is.

Thank you, Sherry Jeanne Brown, for bringing me into this world. Your absence in my life taught me how to navigate life before I truly understood all of what you were able to do for me as a parent. Dad, Jessie Lynn Brown, thank you for teaching me how to grow, how to learn, how to work hard, and how to have fun while doing those things. Without your leadership, love, and knowledge, I would not be where I am today—may you continue to rest in power, OG. Dr. Tiffany Bumpers and Dr. Norris Chase, thank you all for supporting and loving me through this process. I cannot see this journey without you all—I truly believe God placed us into this program for many reasons beyond the letters behind our names. I love you both and have so much respect for both of you and your families. To Dr. Jamel S. C. Wright and the Wright family, you were one of the first individuals who probed me to see life outside of athletics. Thank you, Jamel, for your mentorship and unconditional love. To my Eureka College community—you all provided the space and support I needed to embark on this journey. A special thank you to the Eureka College faculty and administration, who held me accountable and cheered me on throughout this process.

To my chair, who carried me through the majority of this process; Dr. Mohamed, thank you for encouraging me to feel comfortable in this journey. Thank you for being supportive, and critical. You are hands down the best chair any doctoral student can ask for. Dr. Lydia, thank you. You stepped in to see me through this process as my chair. Your guidance and understanding through this process helped me not judge myself but to continue to get better. Thank you for stepping in when things became so unclear as to what my next steps could be for

this journey. Your intentional focus on developing the scholar is needed and truly valued. Thank you. Dr. Rugutt, thank you for holding me accountable and supporting me through this process. Dr. Weiser, thank you. I was so unsure about who could join my committee at such a late point in the process—you provided clear, direct, and supportive feedback. Your ability to make students feel comfortable through this process is so needed in higher education. Dr. V, thank you for being in the classroom during my journey. You helped me to see myself in this space but also taught me how to stay true to who I am as a Black queer woman. Brittney Williams, my safe space, my soundboard, my anchor—thank you for pushing me to grow during this journey. Your support means so much to me; you are up next! To my sister, Jamie, my Gemini twin and all of my siblings, Janelle Williams, my mentee who holds me accountable, my tribe of friends and family members who checked in about my process, mentors, and colleagues—thank you all for the endless support.

Finally, praise God! Without you, Father God, this process looks and feels significantly different. Thank you for allowing me to complete this journey with grace and gratitude.

With respect and love,

J. J. B.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
TABLES	vii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of Athletic Departments	4
Statement of Problem	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	7
Significance of the Study	8
Theoretical Framework	8
Key Terms	9
Summary	11
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Theoretical Framework	12
BlackCrit Theory	13
Black Feminist Thought	16
Intersectionality	18
Black Student Experience in Higher Education	21
Interest Convergence	22
Financial Challenges	23
History of Athletic Departments	24
Athletic Governing Structure	26
Athletic Department Leadership	27

Historic Perspective of Black Student-Athletes	29
Gender Matters	30
Black Male Student-Athletes	30
History of Title IX in Athletics	32
Black Female Student-Athletes	34
Stereotypes of Black Women	36
Isolation	36
Summary	37
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	38
Research Questions	38
Research Design	38
Narrative Inquiry	39
Participants and Recruitment	39
Ethical Considerations	41
Limitations	42
Delimitations	43
Assumptions	43
Data Collection	44
Data Analysis Techniques	45
Trustworthiness	46
Summary	48
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	49
Participants' Demographic Profile	50

Participants' Profile Narratives	51
Thematic Findings	53
Title IX Dynamics	53
Issues of Race	56
Lack of Institutional Support	59
Representation and Mentorship	59
Athletic Training Care and Lack of Medical Support	61
Relationships with Athletic Administration	64
Relationship with the Coach.	64
Relationship with the Academic Support Staff.	67
Academic Support	67
Relationship with ADs and other Administrators	69
Anti-blackness	71
Summary	74
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	76
Summary of the Study	76
Interpretation of Findings	76
Title IX Dynamics	77
Perceptions of Athletic Administration, Race, and Anti-blackness	80
Lack of Institutional Resources	82
Limitations of the Study	83
Recommendations for Practice, Leadership, and Future Research	84
Recommendations for Practice	85
Establish Trust and Seek Feedback	85

Provide Mentorship	85
Create Safe Spaces	86
Establish Culturally Responsive Support Services	86
Establish Pathways for Recognition	86
Recommendations for Leadership	87
Appoint Black Women Leaders	87
Implement Professional Development	88
Restructure Reporting Lines	88
Recommendations for Research	88
Summary	89
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX A: PARTICPANT INITIAL COMMUNICATION	112
APPENDIX B: PARTICPANT CONSENT FORM	113
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	115
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	116

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Participants' Demographic Summary	51

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to center former National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) Black female student-athletes' experiences and 2) to analyze how Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experienced the anti-Black spaces of college athletic departments. This research is birthed out of my own student-athlete lived experiences and on-going curiosity about Black female student-athletes and their NCAA DI sports experiences. In order to fully understand how I landed on this research it is important to properly contextualize my Black female student-athlete experience. I provide insight into my positionality from adolescent until present day.

I am a Black queer woman who grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where my childhood days were marked by difficulties. My mother left my sister and I at a very young age. As a result, my father did something uncommon for a Black man during the early '90s: he raised two Black girls on his own. My epistemology has been rooted in the foundations of being raised by a hard-working Black man. It has also shifted due to involvement from other cultures.

When I was about 9 or 10, my father started a serious relationship with a White woman who soon became my stepmother. Having my stepmom in the house with my sister and I was a major transition for us as kids. My sister and I quickly learned we were different from my stepmom, with some of those differences showing up in the food she cooked, how she cleaned the house, and what items she bought to place in the house. Shortly after my dad and stepmom's marriage, I realized that we as a family would be officially adopting new traditions from my stepmom's Polish side of the family. Holidays, birthdays, and other family functions would never be the same.

I share this context because it is important to understand that I am a Black queer woman raised in a home deeply rooted in Black culture, but also shaped by whiteness. The dichotomy of these racial elements resulted in a confusion that I felt for much of my childhood. Gender also contributed to my understanding of the world. My father often told my sister and I, “I will teach you everything you need to know. You don’t need a man to do crap for you.” Early on, my father started to teach me things I would need to know to survive. His teachings and my hard work paid off in the short-term when I was awarded opportunities as a college athlete and continues to this day in my capacity as a collegiate Vice President for Student Affairs and Athletics.

I was not interested in boys, clothes, and other stereotypically feminine things like my sister. On the contrary, I gravitated to athletics and excelled. Athletics was deeply rewarding, and in many ways, saved my life. Basketball was my first athletic love, but my father used basketball to control me, which made me very unhappy as a teenager. So, when a former teammate asked me to play volleyball with her, I gave it my full attention, despite not knowing a single fact about the sport.

As previously described, my hard work paid off. I was the first person in my family to receive a “full ride” scholarship to college. The award was granted by the athletic program and covered all of my college expenses, including tuition, meals, room and board, and books. Not only did I receive a full ride, but I also had the opportunity to play at the DI level, the highest athletic level in the NCAA. I had a unique situation as a DI athlete: I was a starter as a freshman, which is uncommon in most collegiate sports. I have often communicated how amazing of an experience I had at Western Michigan University. Not only did I play some of the best teams in the country at that time, but I also had the opportunity to travel both domestically and

internationally. As a first-generation college student, some of my experiences were unheard of amongst my family.

Although I had a mostly positive experience, there were often situations and conversations that were undesirable for me, especially as a Black woman. These situations and conversations comprise this research's premise. Numerous experiences in my journey as a Black female student-athlete shaped my epistemology both then and now. Whether it was in the form of daily microaggressions I had to deal with or the added stress I had from not knowing where to get my hair done to make sure I was presentable for a volleyball function, I did not have adequate social, economic, or emotional support. My experience was vastly different from that of my White teammates.

Vertinsky and Captain (1998) wrote about the Black female student-athlete experience and how Black female student-athletes are in a "double bind." In other words, they wrestle daily with oppression based on both their race and their gender. Collins and Bilge (2016) suggested intersectionality of experiences must be a part of the conversation when discussing the Black female experience. Although scholars like Collins, (2000), Crenshaw (1989), and Nash (2019) wrote about the importance of an intersectional analysis, Memmi (1965) argued one must decolonize the mind to facilitate progress among oppressed peoples. However, decolonization of the mind is not a reality for many Black female student-athletes who have assimilated into the mainstream Eurocentric athletic structure to avoid experiencing some racism and othering.

Since 2016, when I left my position as a volleyball head coach, athletics has been a tug of war on my soul. I wanted to understand higher education on a larger scale than my capacity at that time, as a Senior Woman Administrator (SWA). I quickly learned there was more to the higher education hierarchy and transitioned to a Title IX and Student Life department position.

In this role, I shifted my approach to create an atmosphere which intentionally supported and uplifted Black student-athletes, especially Black female student-athletes.

While engaging in this level of intentional work, I still pondered about Black female student-athletes. I thought about all the Black female student-athletes I had come into contact with. I thought about my Black female student-athlete friends who also played NCAA DI sports like I did. What kinds of experiences did they have? How did playing at DI schools shape the Black female student-athletes' experiences? How do Black female student-athletes leverage their athletic departments? Did other Black female student-athletes have the same experiences I had playing in an NCAA DI sport? These questions inspired this academic inquiry into the Black female student-athlete experience in NCAA DI sports and their relationships with their athletic departments. The voices of this group are significantly absent from research literature. My hope is that my research would shed light on these important voices by sharing the existing narratives of Black female student-athletes in NCAA DI sports.

Background of Athletic Departments

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) athletic departments are a part of several conversations. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on conversations around their lack of ethical behavior and failure to center student-athletes' needs above departmental needs (Vermillion, 2014). An example of these behaviors is the Title IX case management at the University of Michigan where, in 2012, a star football player was temporarily expelled for rape (Hernandez, 2021). The expulsion was not upheld – the football player was reinstated to the team, returning to the field – and a settlement was reached with the victim (ESPN, 2016 & Hernandez, 2021). Athletic departments have had these problems for a long time and likely will continue to have them because of how they were established.

According to Lewis (2013), athletic departments grew out of grassroots organizing by students who saw a need for physical engagement. Students' needs and demands forced college administrators to create and manage a structure of collegiate sports. With the development of athletic departments, sports became the foundation for many issues among faculty, students, and administrators. Some faculty and administrators argued adding sports would draw greater attention to colleges and universities; others argued sports would move colleges and universities away from their missions and purposes (Lewis, 2013).

Athletic departments were developed, designed, and produced through the lens of whiteness (Smith, 2000), giving way to the creation of anti-Black spaces (Guess, 2006). Much like the prison-industrial complex, athletic departments could be characterized as a modern-day slavery structure that deeply disenfranchises Black Americans. Black athletes are recruited into athletic departments primarily from an interest convergence perspective (Bell, 1973). Donnor (2005) and Samad (2021) contended athletic departments heavily recruit Black athletes because of the consistent success Black athletes provide a program. In collegiate football and basketball programs, Black athletes perform for billion-dollar events (i.e., March Madness, College Football Playoffs, etc.) where donors and fans expect these premier athletes to show up for game day and perform at high levels (Axson, 2020; Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021). For example, in 2021, Texas A&M University's Black student enrollment was 3.1%; however, Black males made up 75% of its football program. These players were expected to play and compete at a high level to maintain Texas A&M's football program standards (i.e., stay in the national championship conversation) (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021). Black athletes are recruited to participate in their desired sport, but are often penalized, ordered around, and disposed in the same way Black

Americans were during the era of slavery. Black athletes walk about college campuses now, but they are not free.

In many ways, athletic departments operate on a sharecropping framework, allowing Black student-athletes to “rent” the resources the athletic departments provide (i.e., writing centers, training facilities, playing facilities, etc.). According to Reid (1975), sharecropping was a strategy used to increase the work production of formerly enslaved people. The sharecropping framework is one that tricks the oppressed into believing that they have something, blinding them to the fact that they do not have anything at all. Athletic departments provide Black student-athletes with a similar false hope. Specifically, the sharecropping framework results in Black student-athletes receiving full tuition for their higher education experience with the caveat that, once on campus, they cannot have or share opinions or demonstrate self-advocacy. Black student-athletes are forced to drop their academic classes to ensure they are fully present for their sports (Kalman-Lamb et al., 2021). This framework is solidified through the false hope offered during the recruitment process when coaches convince Black student-athletes that the coaches have an intense focus on education. The education focus is not always the reality once Black student-athletes arrive on campus and research needs to be conducted to bring to light this experience.

Statement of Problem

Most of the existing research on Black athletes in NCAA athletic departments is designed to support the Black male experience, leading to an erasure of the Black female experience. There is very little literature on holding athletic departments accountable for Black female student-athletes’ experiences. In order to conduct this research, the current athletic department

structure must be highlighted, and context given to how Black female student-athletes manage multiple identities.

Black women have been barely surviving in a space that is blind to their issues. My objective is to bring their voices to the forefront during a pivotal time in athletic history. I narrow this objective by focusing on mid-major NCAA DI athletic departments. Mid-major NCAA DI athletic departments are traditionally athletic departments that lack financial support from their institutions, are usually smaller in enrollment numbers, and traditionally create a significantly different experience for the average student-athlete (i.e., access to facilities travel, equipment, etc.) (Bennett, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to center NCAA DI Black female student-athletes' experiences and 2) to analyze how Black female student-athletes experience the anti-Black spaces of college athletic departments. I argue that athletic departments are the modern-day enslavers, implementing a structure which consistently disenfranchises their Black female players. This study will provide scholars, administrators, and athletic staff with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and implement change for Black female student-athletes as a result.

Research Questions

The key questions that guided this research study are:

1. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experience their athletic departments?
2. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes navigate these anti-Black spaces?

Significance of the Study

This research aims to hold administrators and practitioners accountable for serving all students, which includes Black female student-athletes. This research will open new conversations and clarify preexisting conversations for which other Black scholars (Carter-Francique, 2014; Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Carter et al., 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2011) have laid the foundation. Finally, I hope this research will force athletic staff to think differently about their current systems to allow for a more inclusive space and allow Black female student-athletes to start healing from their lived experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars continue to develop theories that capture the accounts of Black people of the moments in history that have—or sometimes have not—been documented. BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) are theories comprising the theoretical framework for this study.

BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019) is centered first because blackness matters (Ross, 2019) and is usually the first layer of a Black female student-athlete's identity that is challenged when they enter predominantly White spaces. BlackCrit scholars further the importance of BlackCrit theory by drawing upon the claim that the Black experience is a fluid one, and one that should be analyzed separately from that of people of color (POC) (Roberts, 1999). BFT allows for full centering of the Black woman's voice. According to Collins (2000), BFT provides opportunities for, “analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustice for Black women” (p. 12). Black female student-athletes deserve the same level of centering as other Black women who have had the opportunity to explore their experiences.

Applying BFT as a theory for this research allows for reclaiming, discovering, and reinterpreting (Collins, 2000).

Equally important to BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019) and BFT is Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Else-Quest and Hyde (2016) argued Intersectionality is a merging critique that allows for advancement of empirical research. In other words, the Black female student-athlete experience consists of the Black identity, gender identity, class identity, and sexual identity. Crenshaw (1989) dove deep into the complexities of sex and race. Atewologun (2018) and Collins (2015) further explore different identities by arguing that all categories should be centered into understanding the lived experience of each individual, but also understanding there is a greater notion that power influences how these social categories are viewed by non-members of certain categories.

Due to their deep fluidity of each theory, I used them together as a foundational theoretical framework to create clear oversight of the complexities of this research.

Key Terms

For this research study, the following list of terms and descriptions were used throughout this manuscript to offer subject context:

- **Athletic Directors (AD):** Athletic directors are the leaders of the collegiate athletic departments. All athletic staff report directly to the AD. This includes but is not limited to the head coaches, assistant coaches, athletic training staff, athletic facilities staff, and academic support staff.
- **Black female student-athlete:** An individual who identifies with the female gender, is of the Black race and ethnicity, and participates in a sport.

- Black or Black American: An individual who has Black African ancestry. These terms also include individuals who are self-identify as African American. Black American has been chosen for this research because Black highlights the Black American culture that is specifically tied to individuals who live in America and are Black.
- Division I (DI): DI is the highest level of NCAA collegiate play. DI colleges and universities provide full scholarships (tuition, room and board, meal plans, books, etc.) for student-athletes participating in men's football, men's and women's basketball, women's volleyball, tennis and gymnastics.
- Division II (DII): DII is the second highest level of NCAA collegiate play. DII colleges and universities have a significantly higher percentage of student-athletes who participate in sports without a full scholarship. The competition level is often ranked as mid-high to mid-low. In addition, DII institutions tend to have lower enrollment numbers than DI institutions.
- Division III (DIII): DIII is the third level of play in the NCAA collegiate governing structure. The DIII level focuses on providing student-athletes with the opportunity to play and participate in all other co-curricular activities on campus. This division cannot issue scholarships for student-athletes. DIII intuitions significantly suffer from lack of financial resources.
- Mid-major NCAA DI programs: Mid-major NCAA DI programs are programs that are DI but do not have the same financial resources as teams in the "Power Five" conferences – Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pac-12 Conference, and Southeastern Conference (SEC). The competition level varies but often,

the mid-major NCAA DI programs are still able to provide an elite experience for student-athletes.

- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): The NCAA is a member-led organization that governs collegiate athletics at the Division I, II, and III levels.

Summary

In summary, Chapter I outlined the research approach, situated in and of relevance to higher education. Chapter I opens the door for understanding how athletic departments are situated, which is key to understanding the layers to the Black female student-athlete experience. This includes a broader conversation around modern-day slavery in the structures of the NCAA. Due to the lack of Black female student-athletes participating in the NCAA, especially at the DI level, Black female student-athletes are often isolated in their athletic programs, departments, and athletic experiences. Chapter II provides a broad overview of the existing literature on Black students in higher education and Black student-athletes and takes a deeper dive into Black female student-athletes' experiences, or lack thereof. Chapter II will advance the comprehensible theoretical framework of BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), BFT (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016). In Chapter III, I critique and shape the structure of the research methodology for this study. In chapters IV I disclose who participated in this research study and disclose findings from this research study. Finally, I conclude with summary of the study, highlight interoperations of the findings, share limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for practice, leadership, and future scholarship.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review literature on Black students in higher education, athletics in higher education, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) athletic departments, athletic department leadership, athletic governing body, Black student-athletes, and more specifically, Black female student-athletes. The literature review is essential to familiarize the reader with existing literature on a research topic. I used a variety of platforms to obtain research on the following areas: Black women, Black women in higher education, Black students, Black student-athletes, athletic departments in higher education, and the Black female student-athlete experience. I used research databases provided by Illinois State University, North Central College, and Eureka College. I read books that covered each of the aforementioned topics, and I spoke to colleagues and other Ph.D. students to seek videos, articles, or other platforms to obtain as many research references as possible. I utilized these strategies to position me to explore all angles and complexities of Black female student-athletes' experiences.

As a former NCAA DI Black queer female student-athlete, and as a current senior athletic administrator in higher education, I am well-positioned to dive deeper into this research. Therefore, I also have included my own experiences into this literature. This style of writing is called identity positioning (Walshaw, 2008). I center storytelling throughout this research and storytelling starts with me. While I engage identity positioning, I explain in Chapter III that I developed and implemented an intentional plan to check my biases to ensure the research findings are centered in the participants' narratives.

Theoretical Framework

In order to conceptualize the complexity of the Black female student-athlete experience in higher education athletic departments, Black female student-athletes' experiences must be

examined critically through a theoretical lens that provides the most holistic uncovering. For this research study, BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) were combined for the foundational theoretical framework to represent such holistic uncovering. Creswell (2014) argued that the utilization of a theoretical framework allows for a broad overview of examination. In this section, I provide an overview of BlackCrit theory, BFT, and Intersectionality.

BlackCrit Theory

BlackCrit (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Johnson, 2019) theory was selected for this research study to support my exploration of anti-blackness as a social construct, my understanding of Black Americans' lived experiences, particularly related to how Black Americans navigate spaces designed not to support them as members of this society, and my intention to communicate and review the on-going bullying that is done to Black Americans. BlackCrit theory was developed from Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ross, 2019). Race scholars embrace CRT work by being vocal that "race does matter." Smith (1993) went a step further to say, "blackness matters," while Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) "suggested Blackness matters and should stand alone when discussing issues of race" (p. 52). Ross (2019) argued, "anti-blackness is the absolute right to exclude" (p. 416). This notion is supported by the idea that anti-blackness is a social contract (Ross, 2017). For this study, anti-blackness is viewed as a social contract used to penalize Black female student-athletes because of their gender and race. Anti-blackness is a power dynamic exercised by athletic department administration.

Below I provide an example of identity positioning by utilizing the lens of the theoretical framework to analyze my lived experience as a former Black female student-athlete. I recall

pivotal moments in my tenure at Western Michigan University (WMU) that I want to explore through the lenses of BFT (Collins, 2000), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) and anti-blackness. There were only three Black players and one bi-racial player on the team when I played for WMU. I remember vividly one very specific experience that happened on our “off” day every Sunday. I would like to note here that I use quotation marks (i.e., “off”) because while we needed to be off athletes, Sunday was just as busy as any other day Monday through Saturday. Sundays were typically reserved for self-care and study time. One essential example of a self-care routine for any Black woman is getting her hair done. If a Black woman did not know a hair stylist in an area, she could trust that any other Black woman would understand she would spend time and money finding a hair stylist and/or purchasing hair products to get her hair done. Typically, Black women spend anywhere from an hour to six hours getting their hair done.

Many Black female student-athletes desired to use Sundays to get their hair done. However, student-athletes often are required to spend their Sundays getting “treatment”, which is when student-athletes attend sessions with their athletic trainers. During treatment, the student-athlete engaged in rehabilitation, ice baths, and stem treatment and stretches, breathing exercises, etc. These sessions were to ensure the student athlete was fully recovered and ready to go for the coming week. Treatment usually took anywhere from an hour to two hours, not including the time spent in preparation to attend those treatment sessions on time. Once athletes concluded treatment, they were required to attend 2-4 hours of study hall starting at 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. In between those required commitments, sometimes we had booster socials that required additional time. After completing these activities, there was no time left for doing hair, something, which already noted above, is very important for the Black woman. While this

example may seem like commonplace, I share it because it highlights some of the complexity's Black female student-athletes have to face. Such an experience could make the Black female student-athlete feel unwelcomed and minimized in White spaces. This demonstrates the lack of consideration for Black female student-athletes' weekly requirements. Also, there is the expectation that the Black female student-athlete needs to always be "on"—even on their "off" days.

According to Dumas (2016), "BlackCrit theory leverages CRT tenets but specifically focuses on blackness" (p. 429). Johnson (2019) further explained Dumas' and Ross' (2016) ideology around CRT tenets and their relationship with BlackCrit theory's principles, which are the following:

- "Anti-blackness is critical to understanding the social economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life" (p. 77).
- "BlackCrit intervenes at the point of detailing how policies and everyday practices find their logic in and reproduce Black suffering; it is also to imagine the futurity of Black people against the devaluation of Black life and skepticism about (the worth of) letting Black people go on" (p. 78).
- "Black Crit should create space for scholars to push back on white supremacy that wants to eras White people's roles in rape, mutilation, brutality, and a history of racial dominance" (p. 78).
- "Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination" (p. 430).
- "More specifically speaking, Black people are viewed as in the way of multicultural progress" (p. 430).

BlackCrit theory fits this research for two reasons. First, athletic departments are required to win games and draw money to their colleges or universities. Therefore, winning and the numbers on the jerseys overshadow the unique identities of the student-athletes. Winning is the scapegoat for administrators to defend white supremacy. What I mean by this is if administrators are winning, some of the internal behavior that fosters discrimination, hostility, and a deeper level of anti-blackness is excused. In a recent article Tommy Tuberville, former head coach for the University of Mississippi and University of Auburn football programs, was exposed for the racist behavior he exhibited during his coaching tenure (Freeman, 2022). These racist issues were not brought to the forefront during Tuberville's coaching tenure, but this is likely because of his winning record. Second, BlackCrit theory highlights the ways scholars must critique and examine power structures as they dream about how athletic departments could be. BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019) lays the foundation for centering blackness.

I also center gender in this study. As such, in the next two sections, I discuss the application of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and Intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989) to this research study.

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) is an essential framework to this research study because it centers the complexities of gender and race. Simien (2008) suggested analysis of both gender and race are needed to fully understand a Black woman's experience. There are two significant waves of Black feminist theory that have evolved over the years. The first wave was started with the Black women who were enslaved and fought for equal rights in the Black community and equal rights against the oppressors (Taylor, 1989). Black feminist theory is the foundation for BFT (Collins, 2000). BFT examines two realities for Black women: 1) Black

women who are very aware of their oppression and 2) Black women who are unaware of how to communicate their oppression in a way that reaches their oppressor or other individuals (Collins, 2000). For the purpose for this study, I focus on BFT as a critical social theory (Collins, 2000). Utilizing BFT through the lens of critical social theory supports the narrative as to why this work around former NCAA DI Black female student-athletes' experiences is critical to Black women's overall experience as critical social theory is designed to chip away at social and economic injustices (Collins, 2000).

Some Black women are unable to communicate their oppression. I recall one of my favorite moments during my collegiate experience when I watched a Black teammate get into an argument with a White teammate about shared space. The argument was so much bigger than going back and forth about boundaries in a shared space. My Black teammate was seeking advocacy and support during a difficult time. Several of my White teammates collectively challenged her in that moment and insinuated she was overreacting about the situation. I fell in line with this narrative because all I cared about at the time was winning.

After reflecting on that experience and my Black teammate's positionality in the argument, I realized I failed her as a Black woman in that space. I knew my White teammates were wrong, and I dismissed my Black teammate for the sake of winning. I did not know how to call out microaggression at that time in life. Since my awakening, I have been able to reconnect with that Black teammate to discuss further what she was feeling in that moment and to apologize for not protecting her in that space. I would like to think we not only healed but are now taking steps forward to end injustices within our post athletic communities.

Intersectionality

Coined by the critical scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Intersectionality allows for the complexity of a Black woman's story to be told. Collins and Bilge (2016) contended more specifically that an intersectional analysis allows for all angles of the human experience: race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Black female student-athletes enter their DI athletic programs with intersecting marginalized identities. They are Black and woman in a male-dominated industry. Many also have varied class backgrounds; and some may be lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Because of these layers, Black female student-athletes exist in their programs in a unique way. Utilizing Intersectionality to critique the current literature is doable because of its core tenets: (1) inequalities exist mutually in an individual's experience; (2) all social groups must be considered and acknowledged to understand how power is used to shape one's experience based on the social group; and (3) social justice movements and goals should be centered when centering intersectional analyses (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Overstreet et al., 2020). Black female student-athletes' experiences encompass each tenet.

Intersectionality scholars suggest all "-isms" are mutually centered. Because of the Title IX era (which I will unpack further in this literature review), all women's athletic issues were elevated. However, there was no intentionality to support Black female student-athletes' experiences. For example, when I was a student-athlete at WMU, only my gender was centered by the athletic department. The athletic department at WMU provided the women's volleyball team with access to greater resources than other female programs. To be more specific, I know our pregame meal was significantly healthier and luxurious than the women's softball team. Having access to better quality meal was due to how the athletic department viewed and valued the women's program. The WMU women's volleyball team was viewed as a top tier women's

program. As a Black female student-athlete at a PWI, I was often the only Black person in a majority of our spaces. My teammates always watched and listened to music that I could not identify with. Because of being outnumbered and a lack of awareness for my Black body, I was excluded until it was game time. The exclusion I experienced is an example of what Mills (1997) argued, which was to exclude the object (i.e., Black people) from participating in societal norms allows for further control by the subject (i.e., White people).

The second tenet of Intersectionality focuses on the dynamic of power that lies within each social group and identity. I want to explore my own athletic experience and how an intersectional analyses of my experience exposed the athletic department's lack of understanding for all of my identities. My socioeconomic status was slightly addressed but eventually led me to a financial literacy deficit. I was battling being a less financially stable Black girl with very few family members to call home to for additional financial support. My associate head coach helped me complete my FASFA form, and I received Pell Grant funding. During the first few years, I sent that money home to support my family. If there was some sort of road map outlined for me as to how I should use that money, I believe my financial experience would have been significantly different. When student-athletes sign their national letters of intent, neither athletic departments nor coaching staff disclose the additional expenses student-athletes incur such as meals after games when the dining services are closed, personal items, gas money to get around town for personal appointments, medication for overcoming illness, and overall external social opportunities that enhance a student experience. As Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (2000) suggested, being a female student-athlete got me a full ride scholarship, but my social economic status carried more power over and greatly impacted my athletic experience.

The lack of financial literacy support provided by the athletic department stems from the reoccurring theme identified within the literature—colleges and universities are anti-Black spaces because of the social contract established in education. Mills (1997) furthered this conversation around a social contract by including race, specifically suggesting the only human body that is noteworthy is the White body and all non-White bodies are viewed, treated, and abused under the lens of non-humans. I argue coaches did not center my socioeconomic status because they either assumed my background and identity did not warrant education. Specifically, I argue coaches likely assumed neither I nor my parents were financially adept or that, as a Black female student-athlete, I was not worthy of such an education. Either way because of the social contract my Black female body was an object to the White human or in other words “subject” (Mills, 1997).

The third tenet of Intersectionality focuses on the social justice movement. Being a DI athlete carries a significant amount of weight, especially if for athletes on a full ride. Many student-athletes feel they owe athletic departments everything they have from a competitive standpoint because they have been chosen by a very special college or university. Over the recent years, Black female student-athletes have been intentional about leveraging their influence to support the social justice movement. For example, social justice advocacy was apparent when a Black Duke University women’s volleyball spoke out about her poor experience during a volleyball match that was held at Brigham Young University (BYU) (Patel, 2022). The Black Duke University women’s volleyball spoke out to hold the athletic department at BYU accountable and raise awareness to her and many other Black female student-athletes’ lived experiences (Gaydos, 2022). Speaking out about social justice issues continue to be a taboo topic for more athletic departments and organizations. Ricciardelli (2020) reported that although

student-athletes should have the opportunity to use their voices around social justice issues some student-athletes believe speaking on social justice issues is a distraction to the overall game day experience.

Moreover, historically, Black women have been true advocates for their experiences. It was very difficult to find literature on Black female student-athletes leveraging their voices to support social justice work. In fact, Bruening et al. (2005) wrote about the common theme of silencing Black female student-athletes. Several scholars (Corbett, 1988; Leath & Lumpkin, 1992; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Rintala & Kane, 1991; Schell, 1999) argued silencing Black female student-athletes' voice stems from the lack of media coverage around the Black woman experience. Bruening et al. (2005) suggested that their framework around silencing Black female student-athlete experiences is because of their intersecting marginalized identities.

In the next section, the literature on Black students in higher education, Black student-athletes, and Black female student-athletes are explored.

Black Student Experience in Higher Education

To understand the experience of Black students, an understanding of the climate Black students navigate is warranted. While there are many places in educational history where this discussion could begin, I start with *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) set the tone for “separate, but equal facilities” based on race (Harris, 1992). *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) allowed for society to see race as not just Black and White but also biracial. *Plessy* was uniquely positioned to disrupt a racist structure put in place to further oppress Black people. After progressing through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the post-Civil War Reconstruction was in full affect. Millions of formerly enslaved Black people became a part of society, triggering several

challenges due to resistance to Black involvement and advancement, fostering the concept of interest convergence.

Interest Convergence

Another critical moment in education history was the *Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (1954) decision (Bell, 1973). The *Brown* decision overturned the system of “separate but equal”. Some citizens were in favor of ending segregation, specifically in the school system. This policy shift is important to note because post-*Brown* Black students experienced challenges in schools they had not faced before desegregation. After *Brown*, Black students experienced a variety of challenges: (a) psychological harm (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004); (b) continued disadvantage through resistance to desegregation (Fisher et al., 1996; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004); (c) placement in poorly funded schools (Fischer et al., 1996; Glickstein, 1996; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004); and (d) limited access to college prep curriculum to support post-secondary intuition transition (Fisher et al., 1996; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Black students’ educational experiences have not been the same. The *Brown* decision had several challenges; however, some argued the policy changes prompted by the decision were good for Black people. Legal scholar Derrick Bell and other scholars have suggested otherwise.

Bell (1973) credited “interest convergence” with ending segregation in schools. He argued Black people only advance if White people are able to benefit from that advancement, too. Throughout the literature, interest convergence is a reoccurring theme. Black students were allowed to study and learn in the same places as White students, but Black students faced a variety of unique challenges with institutional racism being one of the most difficult to navigate (Alridge, 2015). Crenshaw (1989) suggested intersectionality explores all identities in how they

impact one another, which systems uphold each identity, and furthermore expose the true narrative of an individual who holds multiple oppressive statuses. Intersectionality plays a significant role for Black female student-athletes. They have indulged in obtaining post-secondary degrees but continue to face challenges that are significantly different than White female student-athletes. These challenges do not come as a surprise. W.E.B. Du Bois (1936) predicted these struggles when he advocated for “self-segregation” after desegregation occurred, arguing white supremacy is deeply embedded in our society and Black people would find it nearly impossible to avoid these challenges in an education system.

Critical race theorists, Bell (1992), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), and Harris (1992) support W.E.B. Du Bois’ (1936) positionality on systematic racism by suggesting racism is a permanent factor in our society. Bumpers (2020) argued the permanence of racism by suggesting race always will be a part of the education system. Harris (1992) agreed writing the substantial harm done to Black people in the school structures require unpacking and healing from several years after the harm has occurred.

Financial Challenges

Another common theme within the Black student higher education experience has been student loan debt. The Black student loan debt disparity starts with the admissions process. In a recent article in the *Inside Higher Education*, Redden (2020) wrote about how standardized tests, the wealth gap, and the unconscious bias of admissions counselors severely impact Black student enrollment. These trends, among others, are used to weaponize the ability of Black students to even enter the higher education structure.

Best Colleges declared Black student loan debt a crisis (Writers, 2021). Currently, 86.6 % of Black college students have federal student loans in comparison to 59.9 % of White college

students (Writers, 2021). Brown (2021) found Black families are disproportionately disadvantaged because of tax structure, White privilege, and the hidden curriculum of financial literacy related to college attendance. Furthermore, Addo et al. (2016) stated Black students take out more student loans than White students because of financial limitations in their households and overall lack of access to resources. Walsemann et al. (2016) furthered the narrative by writing about how Black students who undertake a significant amount of student loan debt face serious health and wellness issues. Black students are overextending themselves just to survive enough to show up for classes, student activities, jobs, and practices. The Black student loan debt crisis is a heavy burden that colleges and universities have failed to address because it requires accountability around the equity concept. Bumpers (2022) found explicit education debt is being owned by Black women at a much higher rate than any other population. These systemic issues have reinforced the narrative that Black student-athletes seeking college degrees might be better served through securing an athletic scholarship. Armstrong and Jennings (2018) further commented that seeking an athletic scholarship starts at such a young level, and athletic scholarships have been declared as the “way out” of any and all bad situations (Coakley, 2015; Van Rheene, 2013).

History of Athletic Departments

Athletic departments are often led by former players or former coaches or by coaches who use to coach an individual at some point in their playing career(s). In some cases, hiring managers weigh previous coaching or playing experience high on list when critiquing candidates for open athletic administrator positions (Branch, 1990). Strongly considering coaching or playing experience as indicator as to how qualified someone is stems from the reality that the

candidate more often than not understands the position in a more in-depth way than individuals who may not have coached or played.

Athletic directors (ADs) have a significant level of influence and power that is often demonstrated without check and balances in place (Chelladurai, 1985). ADs have a substantial amount of power because of their director oversight, how media and other stakeholders have positioned their leadership, and the levels of influence they have. LeCrom and Pratt (2016) wrote about the landscape of ADs' roles and responsibilities. It is important to note that ADs provide oversight to institutional compliance with the NCAA, budgetary responsibilities, staffing personnel, student-athlete recruitment and retention efforts, fundraising, and other duties assigned (Smith, 2014). Robertson (2008) argued ADs must be able to lead, problem solve, make tough decisions, and provide an impactful environment that draws in several key stakeholders. Most ADs deal with decisions that could make or break a college or university public image, could impact a student-athletes experience directly depending on how budgets are decided or how head coaches are appointed (LeCrom & Pratt, 2016). Woods et al. (2019) drew further attention to the power and influence an AD has by how they evaluate and negotiate million-dollar contracts that impact several entities internally and externally. The profiles of ADs allow them to make decisions that foster a great deal of power and influence.

Athletic departments also bring some of the highest media ratings for a college or university (Branch, 1990; Krupa & Dunnivant, 1989). A significant portion of this media comes from the expectation to win. Krupa and Dunnivant (1989) argued ADs' winning mentalities create additional leadership problems that other areas of higher education may not face as directly. For example, when an environment centered on winning behaviors is fostered, integrity issues amongst ADs are more prevalent (Hoy & Miskel, 1982). Integrity issues have been the

most visible when addressing Title IX issues. ADs have mismanaged Title IX cases for decades. Examples include the Baylor University (Watkins, 2016) and Michigan State University (Tracy, 2018) women's gymnastics cases. ADs and other administrators failed to protect victims and survivors during the development of those Title IX cases.

Exploration of NCAA DI ADs' roles in hiring only those in their circles (good 'ole boys), ADs influence and power, the significant visibility of athletic departments and ADs, and the high expectations for winning and systems that reinforce a culture of win at all costs prompted a deeper examination of athletic departments' roles in the Black female student-athlete experience.

Athletic Governing Structure

There are three different divisions in the NCAA: Divisions I, II, and III (DI, DII, DIII). The NCAA has not always governed sports in higher education. Before the 1900s, athletics were designed and played strictly for leisure (Smith, 2000), but the leisurely aspects of athletics changed because sports fans love to see people and teams win and lose. In fact, the competitive nature of organized sports undergirds the fabric of society now. Scholars have contributed to the conversation around sports in higher education in a very passive way that supports the narrative of manipulating power (Toffler, 1991). This form of manipulation was first demonstrated when White people placed athletics on a pedestal and denied access to some groups who sought to participate. This ongoing demonstration of power exercised during the variety of leadership roles in collegiate athletic department. In the next section, I highlight each role within the athletic department and provide context as to who is occupying those positions of leadership.

Athletic Department Leadership

There are several key positions in a standard athletic department: the Director of Athletics, Associate and/or Assistant Athletic Directors, Senior Women's Administrator (SWA), Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR), and Sports Information Director (SID), according to the national report produced by TIDES (2021) and the NCAA (2021). Athletic departments are often cultivated by the highest leader on a college campus, usually the President or Vice President. According to the American Council on Education (2018), over 70% of Presidents or Vice Presidents presiding over collegiate institutions are White. These numbers provide evidence that leaders of athletic departments are saturated in the ideology of whiteness. White ideology leadership often normalizes hegemony and hegemonic masculinity (Sage, 1998; Whisenant et al., 2002; Williams, 1985). Being steeped in a culture and adopting a leadership that normalizes the areas mentioned directly influences Presidents', VPs', and ADs' decision-making skills and impacts all stakeholders involved in the athletic experience—especially student-athletes.

NCAA DI is the highest level of play for any student-athlete, and most student-athletes aspire to play at this level. DI, DII, and DIII programs have an AD who leads the department. ADs are often one of the highest paid athletic administrators in the athletic department. These individuals are responsible for ensuring their direct reports, head coaches, athletic administration staff, athletic training staff, and more, support the overall mission and vision of the programs and are responsible for the student-athletes' needs and wellbeing. In 2020, there were 50 athletic directors leading at the DI Board of Directors Autonomy Five Conference level (NCAA, 2020). Of those athletic directors, only 13 were people of color (POC) (NCAA, 2020). According to TIDES, White males are overly represented in the AD role, with 71.6% of the ADs at the DI

level identified as White males (Lapchick, 2021). Lapchick (2021) reported only 12.2% of the ADs are Black, and only a handful are Black women.

Lapchick (2021) exposed the lack of diversity in collegiate DI athletic departments by reporting that of the associate director positions—the second in command leaders—84.0% are White leaders in comparison to the 10% who are Black leaders. The SWA has evolved over the years to include women gaining more access to the overall operations of the athletic department. However, according to the TIDES report, White women secure SWA roles at faster rates than Black women—79.0% of SWAs are White women; only 14.8% of SWAs are Black women (Lapchick, 2021). The next significant role within the athletic leadership is the FAR. The FAR is appointed by the college or university Provost (Chief Academic Affairs Officer). Although most ADs do not have a say as to who this person is, 2022 TIDES data indicate these roles are consistently aligned with the rest of the athletic department make up. Lapchick (2021) also explained that 87.0 % of the FARs at the DI level are White. Furthermore, the SID position is responsible for the stats, athletic prereleases, social media communications, marketing, sometimes game day management logistics, etc., and depending on the number of resources and size of the institution, the SID role can vary. The SID role is essential to the athletic department because these individuals control the external narrative of the athletic department. It was reported that of the SID's working in DI athletic departments 91.4% are White leaders (Lapchick, 2021).

Aside from the athletic administration staff, the athletic department leads, fosters, and guides a variety of athletic programs that have head coaches that lead each individual program. TIDES (Lapchick, 2021) collected data to see what the diversity make up was for DI head coaches—85.3% of the head coaches at the DI level are White males, and 9.0% of head coaches are Black. These data are important because they provide a glimpse of the racial ideologies that

lead athletic departments. A greater understanding as to who leads athletic departments contribute to understanding who is participating in athletic departments.

The next section provides an overview of how Black student-athletes have historically been situated in higher education institutions. I focused solely on female student-athletes because Black female student-athletes' experiences are centered for this research.

Historic Perspective of Black Student-Athletes

This section analyzes the conversation on Black student-athletes from a historic perspective. It is important to understand Black student-athletes have had different journeys in sports. Bell's (1973) interest convergence in the athletic context explores the notion that athletes can play, but under strict restrictions. This conversation starts with Rhoden's (2006) work. He theorized about how Black people have latched onto athletics as a survival strategy to gain access to some form of privilege. From a historical context, scholars have justified that enslaved people were accustomed to not having any physical, monetary, or social capital during enslavement. Over time, White people continued to find new ways to use Black people as a source of entertainment. Ramachandran (2019) wrote acknowledging current student-athletes' understanding of the enslaved mentality allows students to conceptualize their entertainment roles in higher education. Throughout the Jim Crow era, literature espoused derogatory themes such as blackface, minstrel shows, and the fetishization and animalization of the Black body. These perpetuated stereotypes nurtured inferiority complexes in some Black people. King (2014) asserted Black bodies are discourse, and the discourse around the Black body and its value is directly connected to labor in a settler colonialism lens. Such discourse continues to reinforce interest convergence, anti-blackness, and the complexity of intersectional analyses.

Rhoden (2006) described significance of the plantation climate in regard to entertainment through sports. Sports became popular amongst the enslaved who were allowed to participate in them. Despite experiencing continued dehumanization, enslaved athletes were treated with a higher regard by other enslaved individuals and their enslavers (Rhoden, 2006). In Rhoden's *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of the Black Athlete*, the story of William Mallory deeply resonated with and frustrated me. Mallory was an enslaved person who raced for the entertainment of his enslaver on the plantation (Rhoden, 2006). I remember racing in my neighborhood at all different times of the day. My father used to make me race the boys, race my family members, and race his friends because he believed I could win at such a young age. His beliefs continuously have translated into my adult work ethic. I found some enjoyment in racing. However, racing also took a lot out of me because I was *required* to race, not choosing to do so. Similarly, the perceived need to race, perform for, and entertain White people has become exhausting for not just myself but for countless Black people. I saw my experiences reflected in Mallory's story, but I rarely see my experiences reflected in the literature on Black athletes.

Gender Matters

Black Male Student-Athletes

Enslaved Black men had an opportunity to play sports but were exempt from winning a championship or coming in first place (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). Nevertheless, they were satisfied with being able to play sports and often willing to do whatever it took to maintain the opportunity to play sports. This mindset continues to support Bell's (1973) interest convergence framework because the oppressed supported the notion they could play rather than advocating for their wins. In fact, Edwards (2018) wrote about the moment segregation was no longer a

codified requirement for various White-only sports programs. Segregated White-only football teams began recruiting Black players to be a part of their rosters. Black athletes selected for these White teams were occasionally identified as “Uncle Toms.” Some Black community members have argued that the phrase “Uncle Tom” is a derogatory term commonly used in the Black community to describe another Black person who overly conforms to and is subservient to White dominant culture. Although the name “Uncle Tom” has become a derogatory phrase among many in the Black community, its origins in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s (1852) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* depicts an enslaved man who organized White people who were against slavery to work together to advocate for slavery to be abolished. However, I grew up hearing my father and uncles frequently use this term when we would run into Black men who appeared to be disconnected from the Black community.

Some spectators have associated Black male student-athletes as an “Uncle Tom” or in other words advocates for working alongside White people to end injustices because of how quickly they are awarded athletic opportunities in comparison to Black female student-athletes. Not only did the proverbial “master” (i.e., White athletic administrators) fail to value the Black female student-athlete experience, so did the Black male student-athletes whose “Uncle Tom” mentality caused them to disregard and further marginalize their Black female student-athlete peers. This narrative has been ongoing for years. Several famous Black athletes have been labeled as such, and some have even been known to embrace this title. Jackie Robinson has been labeled one of the most well-known “Uncle Toms” to have played professional sports (Rhoden, 2006). Robinson took a liking to a different approach when it came to being a professional athlete. Some would argue that Robinson represented the Black community while also failing to represent the Black community. I recall watching the movie *42* (Helgeland, 2013) an overview of

Jackie Robinson's life and having difficulty identifying with him. It was challenging to identify with Jackie because it appeared he did everything to support the expectations of the oppressed versus leveraging his voice and baseball platform to create change. Robinson was athletic, hardworking, and a true team player. Individuals have stated that Jackie Robinson perpetuated Woodson's (1933) argument that Black people have been oppressed so severely that many will do as their "masters" require, before even being instructed to do so. Robinson was the standard for how an athlete should exist within sports. We saw this narrative reinforced with how the media often portrayed him; a rule follower, obedient, outgoing, and a true team player. The media also highlighted their fixation on Robinson's body, his ability to perform athletically, and to be compliant. Edwards (2018) wrote about how positive media coverage and support from White communities only apply to some and a small population of Black athletes like Robinson would receive positive media coverage over the decades of sports.

It may be deduced from the literature presented above that much has not been written on the Black female student-athletes. The Black female student-athletes voices have been excluded for the progression of sports. To understand Black female student-athletes' experiences, Black female students-athletes' eligibility for and entry to collegiate sports must be examined. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of Title IX Education Amendment of 1972 and the overall experience of Black female student-athletes within athletic departments.

History of Title IX in Athletics

Historically, women have had a different road to access to sports at every level. The Title IX Education Amendment of 1972 states, "No person in the United States shall, based on sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (United States

Department of Education, 1972). Since its initial implementation, researchers have documented the events that have taken place throughout the history of Title IX (Abrams, 2022; Anderson & Osborne, 2008; Brown, 2022; Evans, 1998; Lopiano, 2000; Sandler, 2007). Therefore, Title IX has evolved from the practices first established in 1972. In the following paragraphs, I provide a broad review of essential conversations to include the rights of oppressed groups, the history of Title IX, the legal considerations and institutional compliance, the pioneering women, and the shift from sports to preventing sexual violence in education.

Before 1972, women did not have the same opportunities as men in regard to physical education and sports (Bell, 2007). Women did not have opportunities to participate in physical education activities or sports because of society deeming what the role of women was supposed to be. There were minimal opportunities for women in physical education and sports (Bell, 2007; Mak, 2006; Sandler, 2007). If a school or organization allowed women to participate in an activity, the women were forced to overcome obstacles that were designed to make it nearly impossible for them to participate in those opportunities. For example, women would be forced to wear outfits that were different from men, oftentimes making it difficult for women to complete the full task.

There are theories about what ignited the women's movement, reflecting on one of the most oppressed groups in history, Black people. "The 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" between tennis star Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs marked the first time that many 1970s White feminists saw athletics as an arena for women's rights" (Belanger, 2016, p. 17). Billie Jean King used her influence over sports to begin conversations with key political parties; she developed relationships with senators who eventually became allies (Belanger, 2016). Billie Jean King and other White feminists developed relationships with key male influencers in different social areas

to start conversations about women and equal rights. The issue with this effort is simple: the Black women's experiences did not stand alone during these efforts. There was a lack of consideration of the intersectionality of a Black women's sports experiences (Ashendouek, 2020; Evans, 1998,). Billie Jean King's activism highlights the magnitude of coverage and reveals how much Black female student-athletes' experiences matter. Historically, according to key scholars, the Black female experience has been situated in lack of empathy, lack of respect, and lack of understanding of the Black experience (Evans, 1998; Mathewson, 1996).

Black Female Student-Athletes

The NCAA reported in 2019 that 19,550 of their student-athletes were females (NCAA, 2019). However, Black women only made-up 12% of those female student-athletes (NCAA, 2019). Recently TIDES (Lapchick, 2021) produced an updated report about the NCAA DI demographics and found Black female student-athletes still represented only 12% of female student-athletes participating at the DI level. This lack of representation, and resulting lack of cultural responsiveness, is a problem. These statistics strike a familiar chord, as I can personally attest to the loneliness that I experienced as a Black female student-athlete. Although women have had more access to athletic opportunities, athletic organizations have not extended the tailored support needed for Black female student-athletes.

Hawkins (2001) suggested Black female student-athletes' experiences are not identified due to the relative novelty of Black female student-athletes' inclusion at HWIs. Most HWIs lack support for underrepresented minority groups. Torres et al. (2003) argued the systems currently in place at HWIs do not accommodate marginalized groups but support, cultivate, and stimulate structures to keep marginalized groups aligned with predominantly White collegiate objectives. This passive-aggressive tactic festers the wounds of suppression of diversity of thought and

behavior. In fact, Foster (2003) explored the increased surveillance Black female student-athletes undergo while participating in their sport. The high level of surveillance leads to a natural process of assimilating to the White dominated culture. Black female student-athletes are among the least prioritized individuals in America, simply because they are Black women. Davis (2015) outlined the terror placed upon Black women during the era of slavery, during which Black women received harsher punishments, and were seen as lesser than enslaved Black men. Society's view of Black women transitioned into one of today's enslavement structures, athletics. Simien et al. (2019) argued the terror against Black female NCAA DI student-athletes is due to prioritizing the experiences of other minority groups, rather than those of Black women.

One reoccurring theme in the current literature is the lack of literature on Black female student-athletes. I do not see myself represented in this literature. In fact, some scholars (Bruening et al., 2005; Carter-Francique et al., 2011; hooks, 1981; Smith, 2000) have laid the foundation to address this gap in the literature on Black female student-athletes' experiences. As a former Division I athlete, I was one of the favorites within the athletic department, booster club, and other athletic programs. I can recall individuals saying I was fun to watch, or they could not believe how high up I could get off the ground. Fans loved the "swag" I had as a player, which they labeled as very different than that of my White teammates. They loved how "raw" I looked on the floor; and more importantly, they enjoyed how I could dominate the game to bring the program a win. In addition to the boosters, my coaches and other supporters thought about my playing career. As one of the only Black athletes on my team, I was also often used as propaganda. Edwards (2018) and Rhoden (2006) have written about these tactics, in particular how often Black athletes do not even realize they are the center of the propaganda. To understand this, we must understand that Black woman student-athlete have not been viewed as

valuable stories to share to advance the Black women student-athlete experience in higher education.

Stereotypes of Black Women

Another emerging theme throughout the literature are the different layers of Black female student-athlete experiences. Black female student-athletes are challenged to overcome the historic stereotypes of a Black woman in America. French (2013), Wallace et al. (2011) and West (2018) highlighted some of the most talked about stereotypes have been the Mammy (servant caregiver) and Jezebel and Sapphire (hypersexual and lacking in morals). Research continues to suggest that these stereotypes are frequently presented as truth, and sully self-concept before Black girls have a complete chance to define themselves and their strengths (Carter-Francique et al, 2011 & West, 2018). Because these images have been reinforced by media, Black female students-athletes are often times enter their athletic departments with deficit perspectives placed on them. French (2013) argued the hyper-sexualization of Black girls is the act of an American society that adultifies them early, stripping them of innocence and girlhood. This concerted effort does not occur for their White girls, who are often extended gentleness and kindness and excused of wrongs assigned to young girls, well into their adulthood.

Isolation

Furthermore, Black female-students' isolation has upheld the sting and disparity feelings, in intentional and unintentional silencing of the Black female student-athlete (Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Bruening et al., 2005). Black female student-athletes often do not receive high levels of support from athletic departments, community members, and sometimes their own families. Two examples are the Rutgers women's basketball team, a team of mostly Black female student-athletes led by a Black women head coach, being called "nappy-headed hos" by Don Imus in

2007 (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and historically Black Howard University's mostly Black women's lacrosse team facing racial slurs before participating in their game against Presbyterian College (Adams, 2022). The Rutgers women's basketball team received very little attention and support from majority White media platforms, and some would argue that what happened to the Rutgers women's basketball program should have received national attention outside of predominantly Black media outlets. Many individuals excused Imus's behavior due to the nature of his radio station that some have considered a more radical and overly candid show. The Howard University women's lacrosse program has received little to no coverage on this matter nor have any significant changes have been made at this time to prevent this from happening to the next all Black women's team.

Summary

This chapter was intentionally designed to highlight a broad overview of the pre-existing literature on the Black students in higher education, athletics in higher education, Black student-athletes, and more specifically, Black female student-athletes—which are all crucial themes to understanding how Black female student-athletes are currently situated. The frameworks used to critique the literature: BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), BFT (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) were pivotal lenses to analyze the research that has already been done. Chapter III provides an overview of the research the research methodology that was used for this research study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to center National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) Black female student-athletes' experiences and 2) to analyze how Black female student-athletes experience the anti-Black spaces of college athletic departments. I argue athletic departments are the modern-day enslavers, implementing a structure which consistently disenfranchises their Black female players. This study provides scholars, administrators, and athletic staff with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and implement change for Black female student-athletes.

Research Questions

The key questions that guided this research study are:

1. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experience their athletic departments?
2. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes navigate these anti-Black spaces?

Research Design

The overall paradigm for this research is qualitative. Qualitative research is designed to capture the lived experiences of the individuals participating in the study (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research originates in anthropology, which has been one of the main areas to which Black feminists have dedicated their scholarship, in order to create space for the Black woman's experience (McClaurin, 2001). With anthropology being one of the major components of qualitative research woven into the academy's DNA, qualitative research was appropriate for this study to further align this research with preexisting studies. In addition, qualitative research allows the researcher to gather participants' experiences. In fact, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019)

supported this research style and contended qualitative research should focus on multiple truths existing within lived experiences. This particular approach provides the reader with a stronger understanding of NCAA DI Black female student-athletes' experiences by telling stories and using different procedures and data types. Moreover, critical research has been chosen to fully understand Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes' ideas, actions, and interactions with athletic departments at a DI level at a college or university that has been identified as a mid-major. Critical research offers the concept of individuals are the key indicator for shaping our society and allows for the researcher to obtain empathy for why certain behaviors have foster (Chowdhury, 2014).

Narrative Inquiry

For the purpose of this research, I used narrative inquiry study as the qualitative research design. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested one of the significant components to narrative inquiry study is it allows for understanding around how participants assign meaning to their lived experiences. A second component to narrative inquiry is the research cannot be analyzed through one independent lens (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Lastly Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stressed the importance of narrative inquiry by fostering storytelling, retelling, and reliving lived experiences. Selecting narrative inquiry as the research design allowed for Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes to be the experts in their own stories. Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes are the most informed individuals in this research they lived and understand athletic culture.

Participants and Recruitment

This research was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) at Illinois State University. After receiving approval from the IRB, I recruited participants for this study.

Research participants were Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who met the following criteria: (a) Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes whose sex assigned at birth was female; (b) played a varsity sport at a four-year NCAA DI program for four consecutive years; and (c) attended and played a varsity sport at a four-year NCAA DI college or university that has been identified as a mid-major institution. Mid-major colleges and universities are defined by conference size examples mid-major colleges or universities are Morgan State, Davison, Drake, Toledo, etc. These identified criteria are important to the study because it allowed for voices to be heard from Black female student-athletes committed to their programs from start to finish. Once participants were identified, each participant completed a demographic survey that allowed me to capture additional information but also to cross-check their status for full participation in this study.

For this study, NCAA DI Black female's former student-athletes were solicited by utilizing a snowball sample, non-probability sample method (Glesne, 2016). The snowball approach was selected because Black women's voices are often muted or misinterpreted and utilizing the snowball approach allowed for me to recruit Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who could share their stories in the upmost respectful way by leveraging trusted resources. Black female former student-athletes were selected as the required criteria because they are more likely to have an opportunity to reflect on their collegiate experience. Black female former student-athletes were also selected for this research because they would not be penalized with scholarship removal or penalized for playing time for participating.

Collins (2000) supported the notion that Black women's knowledge, experiences, and voices have not always been protected by other scholars in the field. Utilizing the snowball strategy allowed Black women to assert that they believe in my research and promulgate it

further. Furthermore, Evans-Winters (2019) similarly supported the conversation around protecting Black women's stories, by asserting that Black women's unique language holds power. I was able to uphold that power and advance their power through this research. The proliferation of this new space could start a movement that permanently alters the perception of and treatment of Black female student-athletes on college campuses throughout our nation.

Ethical Considerations

I identified seven participants by utilizing the snowball method. All participants met the criteria outlined above. Participants were over the age of 18 and did not receive monetary compensation for participating in this study. I solicited participants through the following platforms: (a) social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter); (b) intentional outreach to various higher education colleagues; (c) soliciting senior leadership through the NCAA; and (d) intentional outreach to different coaching platforms. Each participant received an electronic communication and letter (Appendix A) from me that formally invited them to participate in this study. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic that the United States of America and the world was battling, I conducted interviews by utilizing the Zoom platform, a virtual meeting platform that allowed me to have secure interviews virtually. Participants received an email from me that included time, date, and a secured, password-protected Zoom link. Each participant had to wait in the Zoom waiting room before being admitted into the interview. I notified each participant that I was recording on two platforms: 1) on the Zoom platform and 2) on my personal phone recorder. I also took notes during each interview to make sure I captured more of each story.

Participants had the luxury of finding a safe space in their homes, offices, etc., to participate in the interview. Each participant was required to identify a date and time for an

interview from a list of options I provided in an electronic communication. Seven participants accepted the opportunity to participate in this study. Before starting each interview, each participant completed a consent form (Appendix B) that was sent to them by e-mail in advance.

In addition to their communication letter and consent form, each participant received another copy of the solicitation flyer and a copy of the demographic survey form (Appendix C) prior to recording. Before I proceeded with interview questions, I re-read key items from the consent form to make sure they were appropriately agreeing to participating in this research. I also reviewed each participant's demographic responses with them to be certain I had the correct information before moving forward with interview questions. At the end of each interview, the final version of the interviews was uploaded to a secure, encrypted file. After each interview I shared the recording with the transcriber who signed a non-disclosure agreement. The transcriber is a Black woman who does writing services for a living. It was critical to have a Black woman transcribing the interviews. The interview recordings were permanently deleted once the research study was concluded. All other critical research item (i.e., transcriptions, reflecting journal, consent forms, demographic survey, email treads, etc.). Finally, each participant was required to select a pseudonym to protect their identity and a pseudonym to protect their intuition's identity.

Limitations

Limitations are a part of the research process. Creswell (2013) wrote that limitations can directly influence the generalizability of a research study and must be taken into consideration. This study was not cultivated to generalize but to help bring awareness to experiences, provide deeper understanding of experiences, and center the healing experiences that perhaps have been neglected.

Limitations must be documented throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013) to explain what impacted the research study. The NCAA is a large governing body with a lot of power that can negatively impact an individual if they expose the NCAA in a non-favorable way. That power can hinder future employment opportunities and other future sport partnerships this is a limitation because of the magnitude of influence this governing body has. This power could have prevented participants from disclosing certain information. Further, due to the current state of the pandemic, interviews were conducted virtually versus in-person. Virtual interviews made establishing rapport more difficult and could have influenced data collection.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries to the study that were not included in the research study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). For example, this research study did not include bi-racial former student-athletes that may identify as Black American, Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes that transferred from a DII or DIII institution to a DI, or Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes that did not compete for four consecutive years. It was important to capture the Black female student-athletes experience over four consecutive years because it provides contexts to a structure that was in place before the evolution of transfer guidelines. Excluding these indicators from the participant requirement list eliminated several voices that may have some overlapping themes.

Assumptions

Assumptions are bound to happen throughout the research process. According to Ellis and Levy (2009), assumptions are statement stories or other evidence that may not have proof of its truthfulness, but the research still accounts for its truthfulness because it is common knowledge. In the athletic world there is an unspoken word about how the systems are cultivated

and fostered. This behavior is driven by the notion of winning. I assume that because winning carries such significant weight, some former NCAA DI Black student-athletes will not see any issue with how internal processes are established. I assume that because I had internal racial issues within my own experience that other Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes will have similar experiences. Finally, I assumed that, regardless of an institution being a historically Black college or university (HBCU), Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes would not have the same experiences as Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes that went to a predominately White institution (PWI).

Data Collection

I applied a semi-structured interview process to collect data for this study. According to Glesne (2016), semi-structured interviews allow for structure by having a set number of questions but also allows for openness as the interview may navigate on its own with the researcher pivoting as the interview naturally flows. Each participant was asked nine open ended questions (See Appendix D). Semi-structured interview process was also selected to allow for a natural flow of follow-up questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) framed semi-structured interviewing as a method to cultivate rich dialogue.

There are some significant benefits and challenges with semi-structure interviewing. Smith and Osborn (2003) claimed semi-structured interview allows for true empathy and true storytelling. In contrast, semi-structured interviewing challenges the researcher because storytelling can be open-ended and too broad for the researcher, which positions the researcher to not remain full in-control of the interview and result in data that are difficult to analyze (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Each participant was interviewed for about 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews were guided by a set of nine questions that were asked in order (See Appendix D). I recorded

video and audio of the interviews on the Zoom platform. I also took thorough notes throughout each interview. Those notes were kept in a private notebook that was secured at all times. Once I concluded each interview, I sent each interview directly over to my transcriber. The transcriber reviewed the recordings for verbatim transcriptions. At the conclusion of each interview, I allotted time for myself to reflect on each interview.

I intentionally selected BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) to develop the theoretical framework for this research study. These theories informed the interview questions and the interview process. They allowed for a rich narrative inquiry study approach centered in understanding the experiences of Black female student-athletes. As explained previously, critical research framework was selected for this research study, critical research aids an intentional interviewing method called “funneling” (Smith & Osborn, 2007). It was important for me to capture all of the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes’ experiences which triggered the “funneling” interviewing approach. I asked each NCAA DI Black female former student-athlete about their youth athletic experience and their and high school athletic experience before engaging in them in their storytelling around their collegiate athletic experience.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis procedures used for this study started with narrative analysis and included inductive coding and in vivo coding. Narrative analysis allowed for storytelling to be centered and a true understanding of each NCAA DI Black female former student-athlete’s experience to be unpacked when multiple layers existed (Glesne, 2016). Manual coding was chosen to ensure I developed a strong connection to and understanding of the data. Glesne (2016) argued that

“coding allows for the researcher to connect thoughts and actions across bits of data” (p. 195). This strategy also allowed me to better understand my own biases throughout out the analysis process. Next, I used inductive coding as another strategy to understand the data; inductive coding allows for themes to come to light on their own. This authentic coming together is critical to honoring each former NCAA DI Black female student-athlete’s voice. Finally, in vivo coding was used. Each participant’s words hold weight, and it was important to capture their voices as they shared them. Some participants voices included Black English, and it was important to honor their authentic voices.

The first step to understanding the data was to review each transcript thoroughly to remind me of the story that was told. Saldaña (2016) argued the researcher must familiarize themselves with the data to start taking ownership of the data. This allows for themes and subthemes to emerge throughout the data analysis process in a more fluid way. After reviewing each transcription, I created a dashboard after coding to track themes I identified in each transcription. This dashboard consisted of words, phrases, and or questions that were evident throughout the data. Once I was able to see where the majority of the themes landed on the dashboard, I narrowed down which themes spoke the loudest in the research. This effort traditionally is characterized as focused coding which allows for reconciliation of all the themes that emerged throughout the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research provides a different but also reliable research approach. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) provided context around the significance of qualitative research suggesting that the researcher will focus more on the importance of transferability, dependability, and credibility. Stahl and King (2020) furthered this conversation around the trustworthiness of

qualitative research by specifically speaking to experiences carrying weight. By conducting research through a qualitative lens, the researcher is able to acknowledge subjectivity through storytelling but also give power to those experience.

Transferability was expedited throughout this process because of the language the participants were using. I was a former student-athlete who also currently is an administrator in an athletic department. Because of my lens, I was able to capture their experiences in a more intentional way when reporting out findings. Transferability requires in depth storytelling to draw the reader into fully understanding the participants' lived experiences. Throughout my reflection process I was able to underline critical parts of the story I believed would require a more in-depth explanation. This allowed me to not make assumptions about an experience just because I was familiar with the language. Some drawbacks to being a former NCAA DI student-athlete and currently sitting in a Vice President position who provides oversight to athletics; I am a product of the athletic structure who has failed other marginalized groups. Moreover, more often than not the competitive drive that has been fostered through being an active member of the athletic structure(s) individuals tend to position winning over individual needs.

Moreover, credibility is critical for qualitative research. Credibility is important to capture each woman's voice in the way they wanted to share. After each interview was transcribed, each participant had a chance to review their interview transcript to be certain their voices were captured correctly. This process is called "member checking" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Another credibility strategy that was used for this research study was peer review. I identified two scholars with Ph.D.'s who were not directly connected to the athletic world to review my process and findings. This strategy was used to ensure my biases of being a NCAA

DI Black female former student-athlete were not woven throughout the process but rather I sought feedback from an objective lens.

Finally, I used a bias journal and kept an audit trail. The bias journal was used to document my biases as they arose throughout the data collection process. I followed up with writing a reflection on how those biases arose and explaining how I was able to monitor them. Keeping an audit trail was important to this research study to show evidence of my work. Those records were lock away in a secured location throughout the entire process.

Summary

Chapter III outlined how this qualitative research study was conducted. Chapter III provided a detailed overview of the research design, highlighted research questions, provided context on how the solicitation process was executed, outlined ethical considerations, unpacked limitations, delimitations, and assumptions that were present throughout the research, provided greater context as to how the data collection process was facilitated, and conceptualized credibility and trustworthiness. Chapter III also included a discussion of the theoretical frameworks with which this study was aligned and described best practices for this type of research study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to take a deep dive into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) Black female student-athlete experience. Specifically, I analyzed Black female student-athletes' experiences with athletic departments and explored how they experienced anti-Black spaces within those athletic departments. Data were collected with a demographic survey and an interview protocol. The interview questions were structured intentionally to ensure the participants felt comfortable with me throughout the interview process. A semi-structured interview process was utilized for this research study. This approach allowed for storytelling and more personal interviewing experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant had the opportunity to take me on a journey through their entire athletic career (from youth to college). Starting with questions that focused on how participants got started with their athletic careers and explored their engagement with athletic staff over time allowed for a more fluid interview experience. The key questions that guided this research study are:

1. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experience their athletic departments?
2. How did Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes navigate these anti-Black spaces?

Data analysis disclosed five overarching themes from the interview data: Title IX Dynamics, Issues of Race, Lack of Institutional Support, Perceptions of and Relationships with Athletic Administration, and Anti-blackness. In this chapter, I present the findings of the study. First, I present the Black female student-athletes' profiles, gathered from the demographic survey. Next, I provide additional context about each participant. Finally, I present the study

results in response to the research questions and in the line with each of them generated from the interview data.

Participants' Demographic Profile

I collected background information from the seven Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes interviewed for the study using a demographic survey. This information from the survey is presented for each of the participants using pseudonyms they selected that they felt represented their identity and the institutions they attended to further protect their confidentiality and privacy. Some of the participants took a political stance with their pseudonyms, others used names from movies that centered Black women athletes. Again, other used the names of current or former professional Black female athletes, or generally made-up pseudonyms that matched their own personalities.

The majority (four of the seven) of the Black female former student-athletes were between the ages of 30-45 (See Table 1). Two of the research participants were born in the State of Michigan. The remaining five were from Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Texas, and Florida. Collectively, the Black female student-athletes either attended a historically White institution (HWI) or a historically Black college or university (HBCU).

Another critical item collected from the demographic survey was the sport the former student-athletes played in college. Three participants played basketball, one ran track, and three played volleyball. Finally, the demographic survey tracked which year the former athletes played in the starting line-up for their sport. Three of the women started their lineup during their first (freshman) year of college, two started during their junior year, and two started during their senior year of college.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Age	State Born In	College Attended	NCAA DI Sport	Starting Year
Monica in <i>Love & Basketball</i>	Less than 30	Michigan	Morris Brown College	Volleyball	Senior
Sanya Richards-Ross	Less than 30	Ohio	University University	Track & Field	Freshman
Simone Shutters	Between 30-45	Florida	Brown State University	Volleyball	Senior
Ace	Between 30-45	Michigan	Universities of All University	Volleyball	Junior
Mercedes	Between 30-45	New Jersey	Golden State College	Basketball	Junior
Stephanie Curry	Between 30-45	Texas	McDonalds University	Basketball	Junior
Allen Iverson	Between 30-45	Indiana	Title IX College/Brittany Griner University	Basketball	Freshman

Participants' Profile Narratives

Monica from Love & Basketball. Monica from *Love & Basketball* played at Morris Brown College. Monica is originally from the Midwest but played collegiate sports on the East Coast. She played volleyball and did not see the starting line-up until her senior year. There were significant challenges she faced that impacted her overall collegiate experience.

Sanya Richards-Ross. Sanya Richards-Ross played at University University. Sanya was from the Midwest and continued her collegiate experience at an institution in the Midwest. She ran track for University University, where she began her collegiate career in the starting line-up as a freshman. Although she stayed in the Midwest, she left her home state and experienced several challenges as she and her family adapted. Some of those challenges impacted her collegiate experience but did not prevent her from being in the starting line-up as a freshman.

Simone Shutters. Simone played at Brown State University where she competed in volleyball. Simone was from the South and remained there for her collegiate career. She did not join the starting line-up until her senior year of college. Simone was a self-taught volleyball player. Being self-taught impacted her collegiate career significantly because most of her college teammates had benefited from advanced AAU programs. Simone spent a substantial amount of time trying to get caught up to her college teammates' athletic experience.

Ace. Ace played volleyball for Universities of All Universities, which was located in the Midwest. She joined the starting line-up during her junior year of college. Ace described her start to her athletic career as a humble one. She and her family did not know a lot about the ins and outs of playing sports at a high level. Lack of knowledge around how to transition into collegiate sports played a critical part in her athletic experience.

Mercedes. Mercedes played basketball at Golden State College, which is located on the East Coast. Mercedes joined the starting line-up during her junior year of college. She was saturated in sports since she was a young girl, and this saturation resulted in her having strong connections with several individuals in her youth and high school athletic systems due to her military up bringing. Ultimately this gave her knowledge about how to navigate her collegiate experience.

Stephanie Curry. Stephanie played basketball at McDonalds University which was located in the South. Stephanie started her athletic experience in martial arts. After being scared of the intensity of the sport as she got older, she transitioned into playing several other sports. Although she experienced winning at the high school level, she was only sought after by one DI program. Stephanie knew how to win once she was allotted an opportunity; she joined the

starting line-up during her freshman year, which is a rare accomplishment for most DI programs.

Allen Iverson (AI). AI played basketball at two different institutions; Title IX University and Brittany Griner University. AI grew up being a starter on a basketball team in her hometown. Her athletic foundation was fostered by playing with boys and men most of her life. AI was also raised in an environment where transitioning to collegiate sports was seamless due to the access her family had. She had family members who had gone to college and had the opportunity to play in college. AI started in the starting line up as a freshman.

Thematic Findings

In the next section, I provide the thematic findings generated from the interview data that were collected from the former Black female student-athletes. The data disclosed five overarching themes: Title IX Dynamics, Issues of Race, Lack of Institutional Support, Perceptions of and Relationships with Athletic Administration, Anti-blackness.

Title IX Dynamics

Each participant highlighted different experiences, explicitly focusing on the issue of athletics departments not closing the gap around Title IX mandates. The Title IX Education Amendment of 1972 states, “No person in the United States shall, based on sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (United States Department of Education [U.S. DOE], 1972). Title IX Dynamics as a theme was interestingly brought up by the former Black student-athletes as they discussed how they felt excluded, discriminated against, or mistreated regarding the distribution of resources. Some resources involved access to additional money to enhance their experiences, having a woman as a coach, or even having

access to resources but having the resources stripped from them later, especially when they needed them most. On this issue, Stephanie Curry said:

I noticed...It would be like, the team. Like we wouldn't get the same amount of stuff that the men's basketball team would get. So, I feel like it was more of a, not just recognizing my, my personal gender identity, but definitely the women's teams don't get as much publicity, or recognition or gear, or...just not understanding why that was, and then obviously realizing it's because it's us. Like, we're ladies.

Although Monica from *Love & Basketball* noted:

I would say, I think I was kind of privileged because of my gender, and because of the sport that I played. And I say that because the year that I went to my...that I started playing, there were some budget cuts, and my sport didn't get cut. Like the male track team, I think they just completely got rid of it.

Scholars such as Pickett et al. (2012) contended leaders in athletic departments have spent most of their efforts coming into compliance with Title IX by disadvantaging Black female student-athletes. Also, speaking specifically about the allocation of space during their experience in their individual sports programs, the Black student-athletes noted how they were treated differently. For instance, Simone Shuttles recalled how she and her teammates felt excluded when she shared an incident concerning space allocation for Black female student-athletes. She said:

At the time, I don't know if they brought in a lot of money, but they were definitely above us as far as importance, in my opinion. So, they would...They basically kicked us out of our locker room one year. I can't remember what year it was. Definitely wasn't freshman, probably sophomore. Kicked us out of our locker room because they wanted

that side, and it was bigger. And they pushed us into a very small locker room, very small. So, I felt like that played a difference. Okay, number one, you don't care about our sport. And number two, we're female, so you think you can push us around.

In general, Black female student-athletes felt left out and not prioritized in the conversation surrounding their sports. Mercedes shared, "And out...Historically, like women's basketball was better (laughing) than the men's, but it still felt like people were more...They paid more attention to the men's team and athletes". Brown (2022) wrote that the advancement of Title IX excluded Black female student-athletes. Nerkar (2022) furthered this notion during an interview with legend Dawn Staley, the head coach of the NCAA DI National Champion Women's Basketball Team, the South Carolina Gamecocks. Coach Staley stated, "When we want all women to be successful, I do believe it falls under Title IX. But I don't think there's enough support for Black women. I just don't" (Nerkar, 2022, para 2).

Part of the Title IX issue stems from institutions not receiving adequate funds to level the playing field. The U.S. DOE mandated that colleges and universities "effectively accommodate the interests and abilities of members of both sexes" (Goplerud, 2003, p. 127). However, it is important to note that while this is the case, the U.S. DOE failed to address systems that intentionally disadvantage Black people and specifically Black women. W.E.B. Du Bois argued human rights are reserved for some but not all. Some people are intentionally excluded because they are members of a marginalized group (Elias, 2009). Some of the former women athletes described the benefits of having such Title IX dynamic being met. For example, AI noted, "Playing for a woman coach. Like, she...Women and men talk to girls differently. So, like, a man wouldn't say some things that a woman was saying."

Issues of Race

Race was centered throughout the participants' storytelling. The former Black female student-athletes spoke on how race issues were a part of every facet of their experience. The women felt that their race was one of their identities that was first noticed anytime they entered any space. Sanya Richards-Ross said:

Or I really didn't see people that looked like me other than like, my teammates. Or like being around, you know, the basketball team—predominately Black. Or the football team—predominately Black. Track and field team—predominately Black. Basketball was predominately Black, but then all the other sports were predominately White.

Similarly, Simone Shuttles said, “We saw color, you know, we...But I didn't really see the difference, and just really pay attention to my blackness, until after I graduated and started living outside the walls of my school.”

The Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes also described their experiences by pointing out the difference in race, especially amongst individuals who held different leadership roles in their athletic departments. Some participants explained that not having leaders they could identify with in the athletic department shifted how they would utilize those individuals as resources. Sanya Richards-Ross explained:

Our athletic unit was predominantly White. Like, even when I think about our coaching staff, when I was...Like, my...The head coach, the track coach, he was a White male. The cross-country coach was a White female. The throwers coach was a White male. So, it was not like, a Black coach that like, I could be like “Okay.” And then, even like our NCAA compliance person, he was a White male. Athletic director, White female. And then, we did have our athletic advisor. We did have a Black male. And he was cool. And

so, I felt like he was somebody to connect with and definitely someone that you could connect with for just different things.

The Black female student-athletes who attended HBCUs were thankful that their racial identity was part of their college experience. According to Brown (2013), The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines HBCUs as educational institutions founded before 1964, with the purpose of educating African Americans. Due to slavery and restricted access to educational opportunities before the Civil War, specifically being denied access to higher learning opportunities. HBCUs were essential for the development and growth of Black Americans before the ruling of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). In other words, HBCUs were a safe haven for Black Americans to support each other's educational needs; however, there is a clear standard and expectation that students uphold the Black excellence standard that has been set by the alumni. Stephanie Curry said:

When I realized my blackness was a part of my collegiate identity, being that I went to an HBCU, I felt like they already stressed that to us in our classes. Especially, we had to take a course, like a... It was called First Year seminar.

When discussing whether race was part of her collegiate experience, Mercedes commented:

Oh, immediately especially because I went to an HBCU. And a part of that could be because I attended a historically Black college. So, you know, even before I signed on, it was like there was this distinction between, you know, even before I signed on, it was like there was this distinction between, you know, the HBCU versus other institutions.

However, even though the Black female student-athletes who attended HBCUs said they often appreciated that they were not too different from the people around them, they still noted how they quickly learned that even when it came to their blackness, there were times when there were

differences. There were different types of Black people and different types of standards for Black female student-athletes. Monica from *Love & Basketball* said:

I don't know if everyone else has this talk; I know some people have. But just the idea that, like, you, you have to be better. Like, you have to be on your p's and q's. The things that you can do—I'm sorry, the things that some of your teammates may be able to do and get away with, you may not be able to do the same thing.

The preexisting literature suggested that when hegemony is centered in a system, a culture that advances one race over others is nurtured (Wright et al., 2011). Whisenant et al. (2002) explained hegemony is centered throughout systems to ensure power remains accessible to only those who fit the dominant ideology—or the White Eurocentric ideology (Davis, 1994; Regan et al., 2014). As mentioned in Chapter I, NCAA DI athletic departments are majority lead by White administrators. A majority White leadership sends several clear messages: 1) Black leaders are not welcomed and or invited into the athletic administration place; 2) There is no intentionality to ensure that Black athletes have the opportunities to leverage relationship-building in the same way as White athletes; and 3) The narrative that Black people lack human capital because White people believe their voices add no value to such a prestigious department is reinforced. Cunningham and Sagas (2004) argued human capital in the context of athletic departments is viewed under the lens of, *does this individual have playing experiences?* This argument particularly reflects playing DI athletics, the highest collegiate level of play. Black female student-athletes are dismissed from human capital athletic departments because they do not have access to athletic DI experiences at the same rate as their peers.

Lack of Institutional Support

The data demonstrated athletic departments were missing key resources to enhance the NCAA DI Black female student-athletes' experiences and to ensure they felt fully supported. Participants shared experiences around not having someone to identify with, mentors, adequate medical treatment, and resources to ensure they were prepared even for life after college. There were two major sub-themes that were present throughout the data on institutional support. These were Representation and Mentorship and Athletic Training Care and Lack of Medical Support.

Representation and Mentorship. As participants told their stories about their experiences playing for NCAA DI sports teams, it became clear that representation is critical for retaining Black people within higher education systems. For instance, Ace said:

But, you know, it seemed like it was hard to get some Black athletes that were playing volleyball featured as like this person, you know, athletes that were playing volleyball featured as like this person, you know, athlete of the week. Or, you know, All-American or whatever.

Comeaux (2013) and Gayles (2015) affirmed the notion that racial diversity is critical for retaining Black students, but racial diversity is often ignored when athletics departments commit to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion. Racial diversity in the athletic department could create opportunities for Black female student-athletes to connect with mentors. Speaking on this issue, AI said, "I think the school, Title IX University, was like just not diverse at all. I wish we had more like, like, places like. Like, I wish we just had more representation, if that makes any sense." Sanya Richards-Ross also noted this:

I think that would have been nice. Or to like, you know, connect us with some Black

resources. Like, hey, these are some mentors that can like, be a resource for you as a Black woman here on campus, while you're in this city, you know, those type of things, I think could be important. But then again, it's about keeping you in your athletic bubble because they don't want you to stray too away, and you get distracted, or you know, I don't know.

Sanya Richards-Ross, further expressed her strategy for seeking access to representation by saying:

So, like, had I not worked on my college campus, in various student employee positions. I feel like my identity was strongly, of course, a student-athlete. And so being able to work on campus, I was able to like, connect with different people, and especially once I started working for like, the Office of Multicultural Affairs. I was able to connect more with, like, Black women that high leadership, that had their PhDs. And so, giving me a different perspective.

Carter and Hart (2009) suggested mentorship for Black female students-athletes is healthy for the overall Black female student athlete-experience. Bowman, et al., (1999), Jennings et al., (1998), and Simons et al., (2004) reported mentorship is important for marginalized individuals to establish connecting with professionals from similar back grounds. Having mentors supports career development, enhances emotional support, and contributes to athletic department leadership accountability (Carter & Hart, 2009; Kram & Isabella, 1985). If the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who participated in this study had access to mentorship, they might have had a more fulfilled collegiate experience. On that note, Simone Shutters pointed this out:

I do...Not even going to like, I do feel like, they could have prepared us more, for “Y’all about to be in this real life, y’all ready?” I just feel like it was like, “Alright, see y’all later!” No, bro, we don’t know what to do out here!

Athletic Training Care and Lack of Medical Support

Hawkins (1995/96) noted the idea that the Black body continues to be terrorized in athletic spaces. White people have fantasized about the Black body for years. Coakley (1978) noted fetishization of the Black body has centered examinations of Black people’s bodily functions and double-jointedness and understanding how the Black body has the ability to stay loose under different physical pressures.

Also, in the macro conversation around lack of resources, the former Black female student-athletes spoke to the lack of medical support. Medical support is provided by athletic training staff. These are medical professionals who understand how to prevent and respond to athletic injuries and serve as the middleman between medical doctors, student-athletes, and coaches. They have an obligation to always do what is in the best interest of their student-athletes. However, the former Black female student-athletes, like Mercedes, conveyed their experiences with athletic training staff were not supportive, thus creating a less than positive collegiate athletic experience. Former Black female student-athletes like Mercedes spoke on this issue. She shared the following:

But at that point, like, it was really hard to deal with my injury and knowing that I wasn’t going to be able to play my senior year. But I also didn’t get the support, I felt like, from my coaches, or from the athletic staff and athletic administration, or from the trainers, quite honestly.

Participants expressed they encountered critical moments throughout their playing time where the athletic training staff was not helpful or supportive and did not provide adequate support when the student-athletes were injured. The lack of care impacted many of the Black female student-athletes' playing careers post-college. This narrative of lack of medical support is not uncommon for Black women. The literature outlined the lack of trust Black women have for medical treatment has a history dating back to the period of enslavement when Black women were used to explore the best course of action for treatment plans for White folks (Gamble, 1997; Washington, 2006). Additionally, in a recent study, researchers disclosed how marginalized groups are less likely to obtain the services they need because of a lack of trust (Abel & Efirid, 2013; Smedley et al., 2003; 2002; UT, 2003). In fact, scholars have argued that Black women receive inadequate care even when they do stomach the courage to seek health care services (Amutah-Onukagha, 2020; Chinn et al., 2021).

Moreover, the data show that this of lack of trust and quality care transpires especially in athletic systems. Scholars have augured that racial bias is woven into athletic training practices when treating Black athletes because treatment professionals believe Black people have higher pain tolerances (Druckman et al., 2018; Van Ryn & Burke, 2000). The former Black female student-athletes explained that even when they knew something was wrong with their bodies, their voices were still not always heard. There was a lack of appropriate treatment plans, and the Black female student-athletes felt the athletic department's response time to their injuries significantly impacted their experiences. In addition to documenting racial bias among treatment professionals from a historic perspective, it is worth mentioning there is still very little to no research on Black female student-athletes' experiences directly around injuries. This comes as no

surprise as Black women have been the anchor of our society but intentionally left out of conversations on wellness.

Black women being left out of the conversation is not surprising. Black women scholars such as Davis (1981, 1983), Collins (2000), Evans-Winters (2019), Tatum (2017), hooks (2015), and Crenshaw (1994) have been working tirelessly to give Black women a space in the literature. The Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes echoed this problem in their interviews. They registered their concerns about how issues concerning their wellness went unheard. They felt their voices did not carry weight because of some of preconceived stereotypes. Preexisting literature highlights the obsession our society has with Black women being strong superwomen. Hooks (2015) and Collins (2000) are two of many scholars who wrote about the strong Black woman ideology that continues to reinforce Black women have to take on more than their peers. Black women have served as care takers, providers, community builder, advocates, lovers, matriarchs, strong Black women, and so much more (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005, 2007, 2009; Gillespie, 1984; Nelson et al., 2016; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Because Black women have been ascribed the strong Black woman identity, individuals think Black women are unbreakable (Collins, 2000; Nelson et al., 2016).

In short, the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes argued that not having the right people in the right spaces, not having adequate medical care, and not having their voices heard was part of their experience in their DI athletic programs. Specifically, lack of representation and also the athletic programs' lack of resources in the form of medical supplies actively shaped their experiences.

Relationships with Athletic Administration

The former Black female student-athletes described their perceptions and relationships with athletic administration staff as part of their experience. When participants were asked about their engagement with the athletic department administration, the former Black female student parsed their relationship with three separate groups of individuals in the athletics department: their coaches, academic support staff, and athletic directors (ADs) and other athletic administrators. The majority of athletes spoke of their coaches first, then their academic support staff, and finally the ADs and other administrators, in that order.

Relationship with the Coach. Some of the Black female student-athletes in this research study spoke to the lack of connection they had with their coaches. They attributed some of this lack of connection to the coaches' leadership styles. The influence coaches have on their players is a conversation that has received significant attention in research literature (Bell, 2009; Simons et al., 1999). Coaches are the drivers for student-athletes' experiences. Student-athletes either typically love, tolerate, or strongly dislike their coach. There are a number of factors that influence how student-athletes identify their level of loyalty to their coaches. According to the NCAA (2011), most student-athletes select their institution by whomever the coach is. Brubaker (2007) and Lattman (2008) wrote coaches serve as critical guides for student-athletes providing mentorship and intrusive support throughout the student-athlete's tenure. Scholars have argued that positive relationships between coaches and student-athletes contribute positively to student-athlete experience and retention, their self-esteem, and the level of advocacy and support they believe they are receiving (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gershgoren et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2009; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Shipherd et al., 2019). In this study, Ace shared her experience along the lines of the literature. She said the following:

I kind of developed relationships with some of the other coaches. Not like where I would just go and like, sit in their office but like, if you saw each other on the track or something, we would shoot the shit.

The interview data gathered from the former Black female student-athletes in this study suggests some of them felt a strong connection with their coaches to the point where they often felt the need to return to their alma mater to offer their services in varied capacities to support their alumna or former program directly.

On the other hand, coaches may use different strategies to motivate their athletes that may be inappropriate, resulting in a decreased or minimized student-athlete performance (Weathington et al., 2010; Weinberg & Gould, 2003). Some stories matched the former Black female student-athletes shared narratives of how they had developed a terrible reaction to their coach. For instance, AI described her negative experience with her coach and connected it to the performance of the team and to her, in particular. She said:

And we go and we played a team, and we lose really bad. We lose really bad, and... We lost really bad, and like, go in the locker-room and our coach is mad, he's yelling, like blah blah blah. And he kind of like, blames the loss on me. And he says like, things like, you supposed to be the best thing since blah blah blah. You're not even playing!" And I'm like, "I can't play".

Poor relationships between student-athletes and coaches often result in challenging student-athlete experiences. Additionally, poor student-athlete-coach relationships can trigger poor student-athlete behaviors in the classroom, on the playing field, and other social settings (Duda et al., 2014; Shipherd et al., 2019).

Some coaches may yell to trigger a positive reaction from a student-athlete, while others may use a more nurturing approach to hold a student-athlete accountable. Whatever the strategy, it is essential that coaches understand their players' identities in order to develop the best motivational cues. Coaches need to understand they carry a lot of weight as the leader of the program, and their coaching practices leave a lasting impression. Sanya Richards-Ross described her relationship with her coach like this: "He was a White male; cussed me out every day. And I feel like some of that stuff that he did, like, it would not like, be good in today's like...how we move today". As noted throughout this section and in connection with this sub-theme, whatever the coach does would impact the reactions they get from the athletes, especially the athletes of color. Ace said, "Yeah, so when the assistant coach left, another guy came and like, I really wasn't trying to give him the time of day".

It is important to note that some of the relationships the coaches build with their athletes could last beyond their tenure. For instance, in speaking on her relationship with a coach, Simone Shuttles had this to say:

I thought it was fine. I really...And I still converse with my coach to this day. She's amazing. I think that I'm very, I am very grateful for her seeing the potential in me, and offering me that scholarship, and I really appreciate it.

Similarly, Ace said:

So, for college, like, there was an assistant coach that just like, who I really talked to until this day. Like she comes to my city because she has a daughter that plays volleyball, like I'm going to see her. Everybody had an open-door policy, even the head coach, but you know, sometimes it's hard to talk to the head coach.

Finally, others like Mercedes shared how the racial and gender identity of the coach can be essential to the Black female student-athlete. She said:

The volleyball coach at the time was somebody that I sought out, as just like...Again, she was a Black woman, like she was a coach, she seemed like, about her business, you know? Like, I just kind of started going to her for some mentoring. And then, she...My school ended up getting like, a sport management degree my juniors' year, and she taught some of those classes. And I used to just like, go to her classes, just because, you know?

Relationship with the Academic Support Staff. The support staff is different on each college campus. Some colleges have several professional staff members to support each athletic program; some have several for fall, winter, and spring sports; and some programs are extremely understaffed. Some programs have success coaches, nutritionists, athletic trainers, etc. The type of resources an athletic program has depends on the kind of college or university, program, and the overall intuitional support available. The former Black female student-athletes described their engagement with support staff typically around two areas: academic support and athletic training staff.

Academic Support. Scholars have analyzed athletic departments' efforts related to academic support for decades (Ego, 2013; Will, 2022). Scholars have argued there is a lack of intentionality and conversations about supporting student-athletes and prioritizing student-athletes' academic well-being (Gerdy, 1997; Hurley & Cunningham, 1984). Traditional academic support staff have understood the foundation of developing students through development advising framework (Hagen & Jordan, 2008) and other best practices to ensure students have the support they need to persist to graduation. Leadership has critiqued athletic department academic support staff because of the level of empowerment these staff members

have had. For example, athletic academic support staff have the right to place student-athletes in courses they believe are best for them (Stokowski et al., 2016; Watkins et al., 2022). Allowing such a structure to exist naturally welcomes a conflict of interest. Academic support staff are typically under pressure(s) from athletic administration and coaches to ensure their roster of student-athletes is eligible to compete.

Watkins et al. (2022) argued academic support staff should report to student services or academic affairs offices instead of ADs (COIA, 2007). Some intuitions have flirted with the idea of dual or dotted reporting structures for academic support staff in athletic departments to help ensure student-athletes have the support they need (Watkins et al., 2022). Academic support services have continued to be under a microscope due to student-athletes receiving special treatment because of their playing status, coaches and administrators centering gamesmanship over academic integrity, and the framework of academic clustering. Academic clustering, a term coined in the 1980s, occurs when a group of student-athletes are collectively major in the same content area (Case et al., 1987; Fountain & Finley, 2009; Otto, 2012; Paule-Koba, 2020). This clustering is done intentionally to support coaches' and administrators' bonds with the designated faculty member, to support student-athletes working on their assignments as a group, and to make it easier for coaches to monitor class expectations. Unfortunately, research has shown that marginalized student-athletes often are placed into majors to foster academic clustering (Case et al., 1987; Fountain & Finley, 2009; Houston & Baber, 2017; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010; Watkins et al., 2022). In describing their relationship with support staff, one of the former Black female student-athletes, AI, noted how the academic support staff or advisor helped get her through her education. She said:

The only person that I felt like had my back, was our academic advisor and her assistant. Like, I literally would go sit in her office all the time. And just sometimes, I would cry. Like, I would just...Like, I feel like she was the only person who had me for real or understood me.

Stephanie Curry also said:

So, with athletic administration, I remember our compliance, like, our compliance person, I do remember her. We didn't have too many conversations, but I know exactly who she was. I remember her name and everything to this day. And she was just the one that, you know, if something wasn't right, that's who we were supposed to go to.

Relationship with ADs and other Administrators. The former Black female student-athletes shared the unique perception they had of their ADs and other administrators. Some spoke about ADs as if they were not a part of the athletic department because of their leadership status and mentioned the lack of relationships they had with their ADs. Ace said:

I'm pretty sure if I wanted to go to talk to the AD that I could, but she was older and I just really, she just really didn't resonate with me as somebody that I would like to just like go and shoot the shit with. She was just really professional.

Sanya Richards-Ross also said:

But I don't know, I just feel like as far as the Athletic Director...So we had a woman athletic director, which is not uncommon, right? Well, which is not common. Like I feel like the [inaudible]...I forgot the data about that, but it's like, small percentages of women Ads, especially at Division I level. So, I think everything was political for her, in the sense of like...First, her priorities were like, football and basketball, and like, men's sports.

The idea that the Ads are so far removed from student-athletes' experiences is not surprising. ADs are often the highest paid administrator in the athletic department. Some colleges and universities have the AD reporting to the President or a Vice President.

ADs are responsible for managing and leading coaches, support staff, and student-athletes; developing policies and procedures that mitigate risk for all community partners involved; providing an enhanced athletic experience for student-athletes; and fostering partnerships with key stakeholders within the institution (Hardin et al., 2013). Scholars have taken a special interest in the identities, roles, and responsibilities of ADs in higher education. Some researchers have reviewed how ADs manage their teams (Seidler et al., 1998); how ADs progress up the ranks of securing an AD position (Fitzgerald et al., 1994); and analyzing how many ADs were former head coaches (e.g., 70.7%) (Fitzgerald, et al., 1994; Hardin et al., 2013; Hatfield et al., 1987; Quarterman, 1992).

The preexisting literature suggests ADs at the DI level hold some of the most sought-after positions in the DI athletic administration landscape (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Burton et al., 2009; Hardin et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2011) with a charge of maximization in targeted sports (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). Consequently, those "targeted" sports have been predominantly male sports (e.g., football, basketball, hockey). In addition to maximization efforts of targeted sports, ADs are responsible for significant financial budgetary responsibilities that stem from the competitive need for state-of-the-art facilities, student-athlete cosmetic enhancements, scholarships, academic resources, coaches' compensations, etc. (Fitzgerald et al., 1994; Hatfield et al., 1987; Hardin et al., 2013; Lawrence et al., 2012). All of these factors contribute to how an AD may navigate their athletic department.

Anti-blackness

When asked about their overall collegiate experiences and or when they became consciously aware of their blackness, the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes provided ample descriptions of those experiences. While most of them experienced anti-blackness, some of them were able to articulate what anti-blackness looked like within their athletic departments clearly, while other were not able to put their experience into words.

There has been an uptick of institutions and organizations that have focused on advancing diversity but embracing blackness has been left out of those conversations. Some of the former Black female student-athletes spoke about how they noticed the exclusion of Black culture in the athletic department. Some explained that if they were navigating an injury or did not perform at a level of excellence, their experiences during those low performance times were not seen as relevant to the athletic department

For some of them, their experience was a cultural shock. For instance, AI said, “When I went to Title IX (the university) I was surrounded by... I was like, in culture shock. I was like, ‘Whoa.’ Like, everybody was White. Like, I was like, ‘I’ve never dealt with this before, like, at all’”. Simone Shuttles also said of her experience, “Did we sometimes walk in a gym with people that did not look like us, and it was full of it? Absolutely. Was it intimidating? Yes.”

For others, it came in the form of rudeness and an uncalled-for rejection of their cultural representation. Sanya Richards-Ross shared:

So, you know, it was only a couple of us that were Black, and was like, training with the cross-country team. And I just remember some of my teammates, they would... I don’t know, they would like, make comments like, ‘Oh, yeah, like, I don’t feel like listening to rap today’”.

Similarly, Monica from *Love & Basketball* noted some of the conversations she overheard. She shared, [Her teammates would say,], “Like, ‘Oh my gosh, this song is so ghetto,’ or, you know, little things of that nature that could kind of get to you.”

Others recalled anti-blackness in the form of the lack of resources or support for Black female athletes. Mercedes said, “So, I knew immediately. But then once I got on campus and could feel and see the resources that we didn’t have versus other schools where either my friends were attending, and my friends were, you know, athletes at other schools.” AI also shared this: “Then I come to this, and she won’t even like...She’s not helping me do anything, and I’m telling you I’m hurt”.

Yet again, for others, it was a total disregard or lack of acknowledgment of their presence. Sanya Richards-Ross described her experience like this: “Well, one of my White teammates, I remember we were in the mall, and she only introduced her parents to a White teammate that was with us”. She also added this about another experience:

I remember I had one friend that was on the gymnastics team—she’s a Black girl—and her team was predominately White, and her coaching staff was predominately White.

And I just remember her like. Her coach, like, told her not to like, hang out with us! So, was it like we were going to be a bad influence on her? And he’s like, ‘Well, you would think she’d want to connect with us because were Black women student-athletes as well’.

And for Monica from *Love & Basketball*, it was in the simple yet important details concerning her being. She said:

But simple things like hair. I’m natural, so like, hair wash day was an event, and they did not understand it. And every time like, that day came, they had so many questions and like ‘What do you put in your hair? Why is it taking so long?’ Like, ‘You’ve been in the

bathroom for hours.’ Just didn’t comprehend it. Super shocked with like, the hairstyles that I could do, and like of course, they want to touch your hair. They want to play in it.

Anti-blackness was partially developed out of the reinforcement that the Black body is property subjected to surveillance, physical harm, and control (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilderson, 2010). Scholars have expanded on this conversation around the Black body being solely viewed as property. Dancy et al. (2018) and other scholars argued, “property status does not change simply because one’s ‘owner’ relinquishes property rights. Black people remain property whether or not an individual owns them” (p. 180). This narrative is parallel to Black former student-athletes entering athletic departments assuming their experience would be equal to their peers. This process simply starts with student-athletes signing a national letter of intent that binds them to the institution.

Moreover, anti-blackness has fostered Black fungibility (Dancy et al., 2018; Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010). “Black fungibility refers to the expansive, inexhaustible use value of Blackness beyond labor. That is as a source of enjoyment, violent domination, and imaginary projection” (Day, 2021, p. 1). In collegiate athletics, Black bodies are viewed as unique, powerful, and beautiful bodies that can do amazing things on the playing surface. Athletic administrations recruit Black bodies for wins, diversity needs, and sometimes self-gratification. However, the moment the Black body does not secure a win, does not comply with marketing request by a college or university, or does not execute performative behavior to ensure the AD looks good in a press conference, the Black body is thrown away and replaced. The Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes described this Black fungibility as part of their DI athletic experiences. AI recalled the following:

You're fine; you're alright. They would never give me an MRI, never did anything. So, after the season ended, you go through post season workouts, which is like working out, conditioning. I'm like, 'I can't walk.' Like, I'm like. Running...I'm like, still doing everything, but I can't walk, I can't really jump; it hurts. And I'm still going through everything.

Ace also shared, "I mean, there was never a push to differentiate the path of a Black female student-athlete as opposed to a White one. We were...I'm not going to say we were all treated equally, per se."

Additionally, Black fungibility is repeated behavior demonstrated across sports and more frequently within marginalized communities. For example, Black female student-athletes are more likely to be called for a foul in the sport of basketball than their peers. Pullin (2018) recently compared the number of foul calls by officials referring games at HBCU and HWI sports programs and found athletes in HBCU programs received more foul calls than athletes at HWIs. Ironically, HBCUs account for only 7% of the active programs at the DI level (Pullin, 2018). The effects of this goes a long way. For instance, the biased policing of Black female student-athlete bodies in basketball disproportionately impacts their opportunities to be game changers for their programs.

Summary

This chapters foregrounds the findings from each participant through a thematic data analysis that centered Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who played collegiate sports at the NCAA DI level at a mid-major, four-year college or university. The research study specifically focused on the athletic departments as anti-Black spaces for Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes. Utilizing interview data and a demographic survey, thematic data

analysis resulted in five themes. This chapter provided structure to each theme that emerged throughout the interview questioning process. Data analysis revealed mid-major NCAA DI institutions are anti-Black spaces for Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes, and athletic departments foster a climate that uphold the exclusion of the Black female experience. This analysis illustrates the role and impact of mid-major NCAA DI institutions' athletic departments not closing the gap on Title IX, fostering inclusive and equitable relationships, not providing adequate resources, not valuing diversity of race or understanding the implications of race, and sponsoring anti-Black climates.

The next and final chapter will I describe how these findings connect with the theoretical framework I applied in the study. Also, I expound the implications of the study and share recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Chapter V is designed to emphasize each fluid theme that emerged from this research study by answering the research questions and reviewing the implications of the study. In Chapter V, I summarize the study, discuss and interpret the findings of this research study using preexisting literature and through the lens of the theoretical framework selected for this study. I also address the limitations and implications of the study and conclude with recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This study provided Black women in the athletic industry an opportunity to share their stories as they reflected back on their time with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) athletic departments. This research study reinforced that there is a small population of Black female student-athletes who have gone through the collegiate pipeline because of how difficult it was to secure participants. However, this study justified there are some experiences from that small population worth greater exploration. Black female student-athletes were allotted the opportunity to open up about experiences that they had suppressed or never considered reflecting on. This reflection allowed for healing. Finally, this study gives clear direction for researchers, leaders, and practitioners on which next steps they could consider expand further on to ensure the Black female student-athletes experience is fully captured.

Interpretation of Findings

The seven participants were Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes that competed at a mid-major college or university for four consecutive years. Research findings were discovered by sitting with each transcription and coding the data. The data disclosed five overarching themes: Title IX Dynamics, Issues of Race, Lack of Intentional Support, Perceptions

of and Relationships with Athletic Administration, and Anti-blackness. BlackCrit theory (Dumas & Ross, 2019; Johnson, 2019), Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) lenses were applied to analyze and critique these findings.

This study resulted in a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes. This study also clarified what I and other scholars should explore next to ensure there is a breath of research on Black female student-athletes. Some participants had not thought about their experiences until they were in the interview process. I equate this level of detachment from their experience as a result of Black women consistently moving onto the next essential task in their life.

Finally, this study did exactly what I hoped it would do: provide healing for Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes. This study allowed each participant to share their experiences without being judged for their reality, allowed for clear direction as to how athletic departments can improve, and triggered further reflection and growth for those who participated. In the next sections I reflect on each of the emerging themes generated from the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes' interviews.

Title IX Dynamics

This study findings highlighted the reoccurring narrative that some Black women are fully aware of the oppression they are facing but do not always have the language to describe their experiences. For example, it was impactful to hear these women define inequities that were occurring during their collegiate athletics tenure, but some did not see those incidences as Title IX violations. Ross spoke to this experience when she stated:

I think that was like, right away; given. And even like, recently, like I'm on the Like, Spam listserv. And I was like—to them—y'all sharing football, basketball, hockey and, and all these other sports, but I don't see women's track in here.

Collins (2000) argued there is an overlapping of inequities within the Black woman's lived experience. One way these social inequities are fostered is due to colorblindness, and reinforcement of harmful invisible behavior. Mercedes further expanded on this notion when she stated:

Yeah, the ambulance came, and I immediately went to the hospital, but it was like, really traumatic. Because I didn't have, you know, the physical therapy that I should have had. I was...I mean, my parents definitely wanted me to leave campus and come back home, but I'm like, "I", in the middle of, you know, "it's the fall of my senior year."

As a former student-athlete, I recall this harmful invisible behavior with how one of my teammates was treated. She was labeled as someone who was lazy, non-complaint, and overall, sometimes described as a distraction. Members of the program would reinforce these narratives by gossiping about her behavior and excluding her from growth opportunities, which ultimately resulted in this young lady not feeling a sense of belonging within the program. She eventually transferred from the program.

Another critical Title IX dynamic the research study disclosed was the uniqueness between Intersectionality, BlackCrit, and BFT. Participants clearly understood when they believed their sports programs were being discriminated against or not being prioritized. Monica said:

And so, there was pretty much an investigation that was going on within our sport (volleyball). And we had like, our President involved, our AD involved. And in that, I

know, I know earlier, kind of, when you gave the briefing about, like the risk, and every about the, the interview, one of the concerns is that sometimes our voices, or Black voices, are misrepresented. Or sometimes we go into different spaces, like healthcare and things like that, and our voices are not only misrepresented, but they're not taken seriously. I was the only Black girl on the team. So, I think they viewed me as having—for whatever reason—like, a very unbiased view or perspective, in comparison to some of my other teammates.

I recall moments where my undergrad program enhanced football facilities and equipment. I do not recall receiving those same levels of enhancements during my own playing tenure.

Gender was essential to Black female former student-athlete experiences. For the majority of my life, I have centered my identity of being a student-athlete over being identified with my gender (woman). When I reflect back to my experiences aside from my hair challenges, there are no pivotal moments where I center my gender externally first when speaking of my student-athlete experience. The Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes in this study also struggled to understand their gender played a part in their experiences. What I mean by this is participants did not often talk about what it was like to be a woman in sport. They spoke more about the overall difficulties of being a student-athlete. Crenshaw (1989) and Collins and Bilge (2016) argued we must take into account each factor of an individual. It was interesting to observe each participant only leveraged one or two of their identities when sharing their story. The Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes demonstrated clearly that there are multiple layers to this emerging theme, and that this theme needs further exploration.

Perceptions of Athletic Administration, Race, and Anti-blackness

Perceptions of athletic administration encompassed race issues and anti-blackness. For instance, the Black female student-athletes who attended HBCUs and were surrounded by Black athletic administration, also described some of the same experiences as those who were enrolled in HWIs. That is, for the Black female student-athletes, administrators' behaviors were the same irrespective of the type of college or university they attended and the racial or gender identity of the administrator. The administrators had fully adopted the white ideology of how to be a great AD. Often times, when us Black folks are trying to navigate places of higher learning, we conform to the white culture to secure advancement. In other words, unfortunately some Black leaders in collegiate spaces support anti-blackness by adopting practices steeped in whiteness. BlackCrit scholar Johnson (2019) stated that anti-blackness equates to "reinforcing reproducing Black suffering" (p. 78). What I mean by this is when Black leaders conform to the white ideology there is a level of suffering that occurs on the Black body. In other words, many Black leaders in collegiate spaces lose themselves as a Black person. This level of suffering can spill out into how these leaders support student-athletes. Participants were able to clearly identify this behavior but did not have scholarly language to attach to what they had observed. AI added to this narrative when she shared:

And he ended up getting the job...So, it was good, like...I'm like, 'Okay, I can see the changes they're making. Yeah, they're still losing, like, it's gonna be a little hard, but we gonna push through'. So, the first red flag was, the people who were supposed to be there with me, transferred. And I wasn't thinking too much into it. I'm like, 'Okay, they transferred. Whatever. Like, it's fine, we still gonna be fine'. Red flag. Another red flag was like, I came on my official there super late. And I came with, like, other recruits that

had committed. And so, I get there, and I'm fine. Like everything is fine. I end up starting that year as a freshman, which is crazy. And I had an injury, but we didn't really know it was an injury. Because I like, I have a high pain tolerance. So, my mom was like, 'We're taking you to the doctor, let's go to the doctor.' The MRI showed that I had torn my plantar. So, then I finally came back, injury is over. I didn't end up coming back like, fully recovered, until like, the first game, or scrimmage or something. This is my sophomore year now. And I like, couldn't get up. Like, I couldn't get up, and my roommate—this girl is like my best friend, like, we've known each other since we were in sixth grade—she's like, 'Get up. Get up. Get up.' I'm like 'I can't get up.' Like, I can't move. I couldn't move. And my ankle was like, basically flat, like on the ground. I was like, 'I can't move.' So, the trainers like, 'She can't go back in again.'

What AI described is her former coach navigating the systems in place to secure coaching position at a DI school but once he stepped into that role his positionality shifted and demonstrated. That shift resulted in significantly impacting AI's overall experience which resulted in negligence of her overall health and safety.

It was equally interesting that some the Black female student-athletes I interviewed said they were still highly connected to athletics. Some of them are used as prompts to reinforce either: a) other Black female athletes should attend their college or university because of their great experience or b) the "Uncle Tom" narrative—or in other words serve as the point person to bridge the gap between White allies and the Black community. In my case, since graduating from my volleyball program, I have had to tussle with what my involvement would look like, how I could create change, and how I should protect the values I hold dear. After unpacking the findings from this study, I found that this narrative was presented equally through the

conversations with each of the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes I interviewed but on wide spectrum. For instance, they spoke from a place of excitement to be engaged with their athletics programs. Their peer alumni passion was highly palpable. Some of them even spoke from a place of “it was a good experience”; yet they also were quick to mention that they had wished “they had done this better.”

Finally, the study findings demonstrate a lack of diversity within the athletic department. As a Black female former student-athlete and now a senior administrator in collegiate athletics, I can say that my athletic department is not shaped any differently from what was described by the Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes in this study. To hear their stories and acknowledge their stories align with the NCAA data that shows a lack of diversity within college athletic departments is disheartening. The findings from this study and the preexisting data support athletic departments the fact that college athletic departments are anti-Black spaces. Dumas and Ross (2016) and Johnson (2019) argued BlackCrit allows us to view anti-blackness as a social contract. The concept of a social contract reinforcing exclusion of Black culture is further reviled within this study. The Black female former student-athletes spoke strongly about not seeing people that looked like them or even knowing where to go to seek community with other individuals who look like them. Furthermore, it was clear that either the student-athletes found a connection with the athletic administration, or they had a significantly distasteful or unpleasant experience.

Lack of Institutional Resources

As a current leader of an athletic department, I understand the intuitional complexities of how some areas receive funding over others. I believe it is important to understand what student-athletes want at each institution. For example, some student-athletes want better on-the-road

experiences, apparel, mentorship programs, or post-graduation support, to name a few. It was clear amongst the participants that additional intuitional support would have enhanced their playing experience. Historically we have seen colleges and universities invest in mentorship programs, academic support, and additional support staff (i.e., academic support, athletic training staff, etc.) but this study disclosed some gaps that are still within these areas.

One gap in the literature that should be further explored is how former NCAA DI Black female student-athletes contextualized their medical experiences with the athletic training staff. Although not every participant had negative experiences with their athletic training staff, it was evident that the situations that had occurred were deferential and should be further explored. Black feminist scholars Collins (2000), Rollins (1985), and Scott (1985) suggested the oppressed group (Black women) is less likely to speak up about what happens to them as a result of their interaction with the oppressor because of lack of ability. This study highlighted that these Black women did speak up about their medical experiences; in any case, the descriptions shared by these Black women suggest they were not treated fairly in their athletic departments. Processing their stories has alarmed me that as a Black female athletic administrator, there is an area under my purview that I have not audited thoroughly through a critical lens to ensure these types of situations are not reinforced. Again, this study has exposed parts of athletic departments, provided greater understanding, and clarified further the need to expand this research.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this study. This study is qualitative and cannot be generalized. The research study does, however, offer guidance and a deeper understanding of Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes' experiences. Another limitation is reflected in that the COVID-19 pandemic still looms. As a result, interviews were conducted on the Zoom

platform. Although WI-FI has become more accessible, it was not always reliable throughout the interview process. Another limitation was due to the pandemic was the location of interviews. Some of the best and uncensored conversations for a student-athlete typically happens in their locker-rooms. Interviews were supposed to be conducted on the participants' former college campuses in the locker-rooms to allow participants to feel more comfortable reliving their athletic memories.

Limiting the pool of participants made it extremely difficult to secure a high volume of participants. Another limitation was the number of Black female student-athletes that participated in various sports at the DI level. There are limited Black female student-athletes in sports such as lacrosse, bowling, field hockey, soccer, gymnastics, etc. Due to lack of Black female student-athletes in a variety of sports, I had several participants who played the same sport as other participants. Finally, an unexpected limitation of this study was the number of participants who attended HBCUs. When I started this journey, I did not think HBCU Black former student-athletes would have similar experiences to Black female former student-athletes who attended HWIs. Another limitation is the majority of HBCU athletics administrators were Black. These limitations were worth noting.

Recommendations for Practice, Leadership, and Future Research

This study provides information that helps administrators, researchers, and former and current Black female student-athletes to understand better how Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experienced and navigated DI athletic departments at mid-major colleges and universities. Specifically, the research study focused on understanding the experiences of NCAA DI Black female student-athletes during their playing careers and how they navigated those experiences. The recommendations for practice and future research provided below are culled

from a combination of sources: the comments and suggestions offered by the Black female former student-athletes who were interviewed for this study, the research findings, and from my expertise as a senior athletic administrator.

Recommendations for Practice

These recommendations are designed to help practitioners close the gap on how to support Black female student-athletes and are intentionally designed to establish collaborative partnerships within colleges and universities and externally. I recommend focus on each of the areas discussed in the following paragraphs.

Establish Trust and Seek Feedback. First athletic administration leadership, support staff, and coaches should actively work to establish trust with Black female student-athletes. One strategy to do this is to actively inquire about who Black female student-athletes are as individuals and to understand what their lived experiences are on campus, within the department, and within the community. As trust is established athletic administration, leadership, support staff, and coaches should seek advice from Black female former and current NCAA DI student-athletes on how they may want to consider navigating athletic departments. Athletic leadership, support staff, and coaches should consider utilizing multiple platforms (i.e., one-on-one conversations, surveys, focus groups, etc.) to engage current and former Black female student-athletes.

Provide Mentorship. Next athletic administration should actively work to provide opportunities for mentorship outside of the athletic departments. Often times student-athletes do not understand the importance of mentorship. Athlete administration should create a pipeline that ensures that every student-athlete has a mentor internal and external to the athletic department to support the student-athletes' persistence and retention them. In addition to creating a mentorship

pipeline for Black female student-athletes, athletic administration should also create a second layer to the mentorship program that allows for intrusive coaching to ensure current Black female student-athletes have the opportunity to advance into athletic leadership roles post-graduation.

Create Safe Spaces. Another recommendation is the creation of a safe space. Safe spaces allow for targeted populations to occupy and speak freely about and process their experiences. Black women and other marginalized groups within athletic departments need access to a safe space. This space can be an office space within the department, meeting room, etc. This space should be created, designed, and developed in collaboration with Black female student-athletes. Athletic administration should consider a beauty station, meditation space, relaxation space, etc. This space should be utilized for intentional programming to support Black women and other marginalized groups. This space should be exclusive to Black and other marginalized groups within the department. Self-segregation as needed is critical to an individual's sense of belonging.

Establish Culturally Responsive Support Services. Moreover, athletic administration and student services/multicultural or other diverse support services should intentionally partner to ensure Black female student-athletes have access and exposure to an advocate. These individuals should be identified as a strategic partner for Black women issues and more specifically when Black women are working directly with athletic medical staff. These advocates should be knowledgeable in Black women issues, knowledgeable in athletics, and a student development framework.

Establish Pathways for Recognition. Lastly, my recommendation for practice is to establish a pathway for award recognition within the conference and nationally for Black female

student-athletes. This requires additional advocacy work, intentional partnerships with head coaches within the conference, and national partnerships. That pathway should be transparent with all members of the athletic department including Black female student-athletes. Current Black female student-athletes should be aware of the criteria to obtain awards in the conference and at the national level.

Recommendations for Leadership

Leaders leading the athletic department must be held accountable for serving all students. These recommendations serve four different frameworks: 1) representation matters and will provide a return on investment on multiple layers; 2) challenging the current systems in place for advancement for Black women; 3) creating a structure that fosters accountability for the leadership; and 4) upholding a true student center focus as the priority for serving Black female student-athletes. These recommendations were developed out of conversations with the former Black female student-athletes and further through the analysis of the data and the emerging themes throughout the data.

Appoint Black Women Leaders. Athletic directors must prioritize appointing Black women into athletic leadership roles. This requires intentional partnership with human resources, Minority Opportunity Athletic Association (MOAA), and other diverse employment platforms. ADs also need to create position descriptions that allow for further advancement opportunities for those Black women when they are hired. For example, resources for further education or professional development. Another layer to this recommendation is to consider transferable skills from professionals that have gone through the student-services and/or higher education educational programs. This allows for a unique set of skills to be leveraged when supporting Black female student-athletes.

Implement Professional Development. Next, athletic leaderships establish professional development courses that provide ADs with on-going education around student development theory that specifically focuses on marginalized communities. These courses should be in-person instruction that allow for further connections with other athletic leadership across the country. There should be a learning outcome component that allows for accountability on active progress being made by athletic leadership. Those results should be annually reviewed with colleges and universities Chief Diversity Officers, Vice Presidents, and Presidents. Finally, this on-going course work should be built into the human resource annual review process for athletic leadership.

Restructure Reporting Lines. Finally, a recommendation for athletic leadership and senior leadership is to restructure reporting lines to ensure athletics reports to chief executive officers for student affairs. Adjusting the reporting line allows for the intentional collaboration with student services and athletics, allows access to both departments which strengthens the overall relationship, allows for opportunities to decrease negative narratives that each may carry, and allows for shared resources on how to support marginalized students; specifically Black female student-athletes.

Recommendations for Research

This study created room for further research. These recommendations for further research were developed in collaboration with the former Black female student-athletes who were interviewed for this study and the gaps that emerged through the study findings. Overall, there is a lack of research on Black female student-athletes' experiences. The recommendations below offer different angles on how we can further expand the preexisting literature on this essential demographic.

It is important to further explore Black female student-athletes' athletic experiences. I believe this research study and other preexisting studies slightly open the door for further exploration. By further researching will allow for athletic administration and other stakeholders within higher education better support Black female student-athletes. Additional themes that should be explored should include the following: 1) a focus on conversations around Black female athletes seeing their value to a program through playing time only; 2) understanding why Black female student-athletes value relationships with coaches over their own needs; 3) exploring the experiences of Black female student-athletes who are on DI programs roster but never become the star of the program; 4) examining the effects of poor athletic trainer treatment with Black female athletes who are the star of their programs and those who are not; 5) exploring Black female student-athletes' post-collegiate experiences and describing how their playing career impacts their professional careers; 6) inquiring about Black female student-athletes' relationships with their families during their playing careers and determining the impact those relationships have on their collegiate experience; and 7) considering various data collection methods to include surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Summary

This research study adds to the larger conversation of Black female students in higher education and Black female student-athletes participating in NCAA DI programs. This research focuses on Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes, who participate at the highest level of collegiate athletics. Five overarching themes were generated from the interview data: Title IX Dynamics, Issues of Race, Lack of Intuitional Support, Perceptions of and Relationships with Athletic Administration, and Anti-blackness. These themes have provided awareness into what Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes experienced at DI athletic programs and

understanding of how they navigated the complexities of the DI athletic departments, administrations, and other political land minds.

Black women have not always been allotted the space to share their stories, show the importance of their stories, and challenge those in positions of power to take accountability for how they have positioned Black women in our society. In large part, this research puts Black women in the forefront by sharing their experiences so readers may begin to understand how they experience athletic spaces. This study brought awareness and opportunity to address social justices' issues for Black women in sport. Black women had the opportunity to move towards healing. Finally, this research also provides guidance regarding which conversations should be explored further, in particularly around current practices, leadership styles, and the preexisting literature on higher education.

REFERENCES

- Abel, W. M., & Efirid, J. T. (2013). The association between trust in health care providers and medication adherence among Black women with hypertension. *Frontiers in Public Health, 1*(66), 1-6. doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2013.00066
- Abrams, Z. (2022). *Title IX: 50 years later*. American Psychological Association.
- Acosta, R.V., & Carpenter, L.K. (2010). *Women in intercollegiate sport: A longitudinal study-twenty-five-year update, 1977-2002*. Brooklyn College, Department of Physical Education.
- Adams, C. (2022). Howard women's lacrosse team faces racist slurs before game at Presbyterian College. *NBC News*.
- Addo, F. R., Houle, J. N., Simons, D. (2016). Young, Black, and (still) in the red: Parental wealth, race, and student loan debt. *Race & Social Problems, 8*(1), 64-76.
- Agar, M. H. (1986). *Speaking of ethnography*. SAGE.
- Aldridge. (2015). *Participatory research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- American Council on Education. (2018). *ACE*.
- Anderson, P., & Osborne, B. (2008). A historical review of Title IX litigation. *Journal of Legal Aspects in Sport, 18*, 127-168.
- Armstrong, K. L., & Jennings, M. A. (2018). Race, sport, and socio cognitive “place” in higher education: Black male student-athletes as critical theorists. *Journal of Black Studies, 49*(4), 349-369. doi:10.1177/0021934718760721
- Ashendouek, J. (2020, July). Title IX: A milestone for women in sports, but unfulfilled promise for Black women. *Ms. Magazine*. <https://msmagazine.com/2020/07/14/title-ix-a->

Atewologun, D. (2018). Intersectionality theory and practice. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*.

milestone-for-women-in-sports-but-unfulfilled-promise-for-black-women/

Axson, S. (2020, August). College football means big money. Black athletes stand at the intersection of risk and profit. *NBC News*.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/college-sports-mean-big-money-black-athletes-stand-intersection-risk-n1238450>.

Bauer-Wolf, J. (2019, May). 'Why hasn't the hammer come down?' *Insider Higher Ed*.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/05/23/athletics-officials-question-role-top-college-leaders-disciplining-coaches>.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2009). *Behind the mask of the strong Black women: Voice and the embodiment of the costly performance*. Temple University Press.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2007). You have to show strength: An exploration of gender, race, and depression. *Gender & Society*, 21, 28-51.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2005). Keeping up appearances, getting fed up: The embodiment of strength among African American women. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 5, 104-123.

Belanger, K. (2016). *Invisible Season: Title IX and the fight for equity in college sports*. Syracuse University Press.

Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. Basic Books.

Bell, D. (1973). *Race, racism, and American law*. Aspen Publishers.

- Bell, E. L. (1992). Myths, stereotypes, and realities of Black women: A personal reflection. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 28(3), 363-376.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886392283003>.
- Bell, L. F. (2009). Examining academic role-set influence on the student-athlete experience. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 19-41.
- Bell, R. C. (2007). A history of women in sport prior to Title IX. *The Sport Journal*, 10(2).
<https://thesportjournal.org/article/a-history-of-women-in-sport-prior-to-title-ix/>
- Bloomberg, L. D. & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end (4th ed.)*. SAGE.
- Bowman, S. R., Kite, M. W., Branscombe, N. R., & Williams, S. (1999). Developmental relationships of Black Americans in the academy. In A. J. Murrell, F. J. Crosby, & R. J. Ely (Eds.), *Mentoring dilemmas: Developmental relationships within multicultural organizations* (pp. 21-46). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Branch, D. Jr. (1990). Athletic director leader behavior of intercollegiate athletic organizational effectiveness. *Journal of Sport Management*.
- Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Brown, J. J. (2022, July). Fifty years later, Title IX does not fulfill promise to Black women. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*.
<https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15293960/fifty-years-later-title-ix-does-not-fulfill-promise-to-black-women>
- Brubaker, K. (2007). Coaching and teaching our athletes. *Coach Athletic Director*, 77(3), 30-32

- Bruening, J. E., Armstrong, K. L., & Pastore, D. L. (2005). Listening to the voices. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 76(1), 82–100.
doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264.
- Bumper, T.S. (2022). *The impact of implicit education debt on the lives of African American mothers in PhD programs: A phenomenological research study* (Publication no. 28970009). [Doctoral dissertation, Illinois State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Burton, L. J., Barr, C. A., Fink, J. S., & Bruening, J. E. (2009). “Think athletic director, think masculine?”: Examination of the gender typing of managerial subroles within athletic administration positions. *Sex Roles*, 61(5-6), 416-426.
- Cameron, C. (1990). The ethnographic approach: Characteristics and uses in gerontological nursing. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 16(9), 5-7.
- Carter-Francique, A. R., & Hawkins, B. J. (2011). Coping strategies among African American female collegiate athletes in the predominantly White institution. In K. Hylton, A. Pilkington, P. Warmington, & S. Housse (Eds.), *Atlantic crossings: International dialogues on critical race theory* (pp. 61-92). University of Birmingham Higher Education Academic Network
- Carter, A. R. & Hart, A. (2010). Perspectives of mentoring: The Black female student-athlete. *Sport Management Review*, 13(4), 382-394.
- Case, B., Greer, S., & Brown, J. (1987). Academic clustering in athletics: Myth or reality? *Arena Review*, 11(2), 48-56.
- Chelladurai, P. (1985). *Sport management*. Sports Dynamics.

- Chinn, J. J., Martin, I. K., & Redmond, N. (2021). Health equity among Black women in the United States. *Journal of Women's Health, 30*(2), 212–219.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2020.8868>.
- Chowdhury, M. F. (2014). Interpretivism in aiding our understanding of the contemporary social world. *Open Journal of Philosophy, 4*, 432-438.
- Coakley, J. (2015). *Sports in society: Issues and controversies (11th ed.)*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Coakley, J. J. (1978). *Sport in society: Issues and controversies*. Mosby.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology, 41*, 1-20.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press.
- Comeaux, E. (2013). Faculty perceptions of high-achieving male collegians: A critical race theory analysis. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(5), 453-465.
- Corbett, D. (1988). The magazine media portrayal of sport women of color. In F. Carre (Ed.), *ICPER/CAHPER world conference: Towards the 21st century* (pp. 190–195). University of British Columbia, School of Physical Education and Recreation.
- Corbett, D.R. (1998). The magazine media portrayal of sport women of colour. In F. A. Carre. (Ed.), *I.C.P.E.R./C.A.H.P.E.R. world conference: Towards the 21st century* (pp. 190–
- Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 4*(3), 307-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892>.

- Crenshaw, K. W. (1994). *Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color*. Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–167. Reprinted in *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, 195–217 (2nd ed., edited by David Kairys, Pantheon, 1990).
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, & mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. SAGE.
- Cunningham, G. B. & Sagas, M. (2004). People make the difference: The influence of the coaching staff's human capital and diversity on team performance. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 4(1), 3-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/oipp.2014.43047>.
- Dancy, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176–195. doi.org/10.1177/0042085918754328.
- Davis, T. (1995). The myth of the superspade: The persistence of racism in college athletics, 22 *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 22(3), 615-698.
- Davis, A. (1994). Afro images: Politics, fashion, and nostalgia. *Critical Inquiry*, 21(1), 37-45.
- Davis, J. D. (1994). *Coloring the halls of ivy: Leadership & diversity in the academy*. Anker.
- Day, I. (2021). *On immanence and indeterminacy: Black feminism and settler colonialism*. SAGE.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.

- Donnor, J. K. (2005). Towards an interest-convergence in the education of African-American football student athletes in major college sports. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 45-60.
- Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1856).
- Druckman, J. N., Trawalter, S., Montes, I., Fredenall, A., Kanter, N., & Rubenstein, A. P. (2018). Racial bias in sport medical staffs' perceptions of other's pain, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 158(6), 721-729.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1936). Race segregation with special reference to education. *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers*. Special Collection and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- Duda, J. L., Papaioannou, A. G., & Appleton, P. R., (2014). *Creating adaptive motivational climates in sport and physical education. Routledge companion to sport and exercise psychology: global perspectives and fundamental concepts*. Routledge.
- Dumas, M. J. & Ross, K. M. (2019). Revisiting BlackCrit in education: Anti-Black reality and liberatory fantasy. Center for Critical Race Studies in Education at UCLA.
https://issuu.com/almaiflores/docs/kmr_blackcrit_final
- Dumas, M. J. & Ross, K.M. (2016). *"Be real Black for me": Imagining blackcrit in education*. SAGE.
- Edwards, K. T. (2018). Stories of migration: Passing through, crossing over, and decolonial transgressing in Academyland. In O. N. Perlow, D. I. Wheeler, S. L. Bethea, & B. M. Scott (Eds.), *Black women's liberatory pedagogies: Resistance, transformation, and healing within and beyond the academy* (pp. 85-100). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Elias, (2009). W.E.B. Du Bois, race, human rights. *Societies Without Borders*, 4(3), 273-294.

- Ellis, T. J., & Levy, Y. (2009). Towards a guide for novice researchers on research methodology: Review and proposed methods. *Issues in Informing Science & Information Technology*, 6, 323-337.
- Else-Quest, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2016). Intersectionality in quantitative psychological research: II. methods and techniques. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(3), 319-336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684316647953>
- Evans, T. M. (1998). In the Title IX Race toward gender equity, the Black female athlete is left to finish last: The lack of access for the invisible woman. *Howard Law Journal*, 42(1), 105-128.
- Evans-Winters, V. (2019). *Black feminism in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing out daughter's bodies*. Routledge.
- Fisher, C. S., Hout, M., Sanchez Jankowski, M., Lucas, S. R., Swidler, A., & Voss, K. (1996). *Inequality by design: Cracking the ball curve myth*. Princeton University Press.
- Fitzgerald, M. P., Sagaria, B. N., & Nelson, B. (1994). Career patterns of athletic directors: Challenging conventional wisdom. *Journal of Sport Management*, 8, 14-26.
- Foster, K. M. (2003). Panopticonics: The control and surveillance of Black female athletes in a collegiate athletic program. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 34(3), 300-323.
- Fountain, J., & Finley, P. (2009). Academic majors of upperclassmen football players in the Atlantic Coast Conference: An analysis of academic clustering comparing White and minority players. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: *The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.*

- French, B. H. (2013). More than Jezebels and freaks: Exploring how Black girls navigate sexual coercion and sexual scripts. *Journal of African-American Studies*, 17, 35-50.
- Gamble, V. N. (1997). Under the shadow of Tuskegee: African Americans and health care. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87(11): 1773–1778.
- Gaston-Gayles, J. L. (2015). Advising student-athletes: An examination of academic support programs with high graduation rates. *NCADA Journal*, 23(1&2), 50-57.
- Gaydos, R. (2022, August). Duke women’s volleyball players racial-slur claim come under scrutiny. *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/sports/duke-womens-volleyball-players-racial-slur-claim-comes-scrutiny>
- Gerdy, J. R. (1997). *The successful college athletic program: The new standard*. American Council on Education/Oryx Press.
- Gershgoren, L., Filho, E.M., Tenenbaum, G. (2013). Coaching shared mental models in soccer: a longitudinal case study. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 7(4), 293–312.
- Gillespie, M. A. (1984). The myth of the strong Black woman. In A. M. Jagger & P. S. Rothenberg (Eds.) *Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men* (pp. 32-35). McGraw-Hill.
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (5th ed.)*. Pearson, Allyn & Bacon.
- Glickstein, H.A. (1996). Inequities in educational funding. In E. C. Lagemann & L. P. Miller (Eds.), *Brown v. Board of Education: The challenge for today’s school* (pp. 122-128). Teachers College Press.
- Goplerud, III, C. P. (2003). Title IX: Part three could be the key. *Marquette Sports Law Review*, 14(1), 123-140.

- Groenewald, T. (2004). *A phenomenological research design illustrated*. SAGE.
- Guinier, L. & Torres, G. (2002). *The miner's canary: Enlisting race, resisting power, and transforming democracy*. Harvard University Press.
- Guess, T. J. (2006). The social construction of whiteness: Racism by intent, racism by consequence. *Critical Sociology*, 32(4), 649-673. doi.org/10.1163/156916306779155199
- Hagen, P. L., & Jordan, P. (2008). *Theoretical foundations of academic advising*. Wiley.
- Hardin, R., Cooper, C. G. & Huffman, L. T. (2013). Moving on up: Division I athletic directors' career progression and involvement. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 5(3), 55-78.
- Harris, C. I. (1992). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1710-1791.
- Hartman, S. (1997). *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. Oxford University Press.
- Hatfield, B. D., Wrenn, J. P., & Bretting, M. M. (1987). Comparison of job responsibilities of intercollegiate athletic directors and professional sport general managers. *Journal of Sport Management*, 1, 129-145.
- Hawkins, B. (2001). *New plantation: the internal colonization of Black student athletes*. Sadiki.
- Hawkins, B. (1995/96). *The black student athlete: The colonized Black body*. Springer.
- Hernandez, A. (2021). Step one: Solving the NCAA sexual assault problems. *Marquette Sports Law Review*, 32(1), 158-183.
- hooks, b. (2015). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. South End Press.

- Houston, D., & Baber, L. (2017). Academic clustering among football student-athletes and exploring its relationship to institutional characteristics. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 11(1), 66-90.
- Hoy, W.K., & Miskel, C.G. (1982). *Educational administration: theory, research, and practice*. (2nd ed.). Random House.
- Hurley, R. B., & Cunningham, R. L. (1984). Providing academic and psychological services for the college athlete. *New Directions for Student Services*, 28, 51-58.
- Jackson, B., Knapp, P., & Beauchamp, M. R. (2009). The coach-athlete relationship: a tripartite efficacy perspective. *The Sport Psychologist*, 23, 203-232
- Jennings, J., Martin, R. R., & Vroom, P. I. (1998). African American women in academic leadership. In A. Daly (Ed.), *Workplace diversity: Issues and perspectives* (pp.166-175). National Association of Social Work Press.
- Jolly, S., & Chepyator-Thomson, J. R. (2022). “Do you really see Us?”: Black college athlete perceptions of inclusion at DI Historically white institutions. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experiences*, 4(2), 139-159.
- Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The coach-athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q): Development and initial validation. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 14(4), 245–257. doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0838.2003.00338.x
- Kalman-Lamb, N., Silva, D., & Mellis, J. (2021, March). ‘I signed my life to a rich white guys: athletes on the racial dynamic of college sports. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/mar/17/college-sports-racial-dynamics>
- Kram, K. E., & Isabella, L. A. (1985). Mentoring alternatives: The role of peer relationships in career development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(1), 110-132.

- King, T. (2014, June 10). Labor's aphasia: Towards antiblackness as constitutive to settler colonialism. *Decolonization Indigeneity, Education & Society*.
<https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/06/10/labors-aphasia-toward-antiblackness-as-constitutive-to-settler-colonialism/>
- Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. (2010). *Restoring the balance: Dollars, values, and the future of college sports*. <https://www.knightcommission.org/2010/07/restoring-the-balance80/>
- Krupa, G., & Dunnivant, K. (1989). The struggle with the downside. *SPORT.inc*, 2(1), 33-34, 37-38.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Lapchick, R. (2021). The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES).
- Lattman, M. (2008). The role of junior college coaches: More than the sport. *Coach and Athletic Director*, 77, 110-112.
- Lawrence, H. J., Li, M., Regas, J. S., & Kander, J. (2012). National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics directors cup standings: Predictors of success. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 5, 207-224.
- LeCrom, C. W., & Pratt, A. N. (2016). Exploring interaction between NCAA division I athletic directors and university presidents: A qualitative study from athletic directors' perspectives. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 9(2), 200-225.

- Leath, V., & Lumpkin, A. (1992). An analysis of sportswomen on the covers and in the feature articles of *Women's Sports and Fitness* magazine, 1975–1989. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 16, 121–126.
- Lewis, G. (1970). *The beginning organized collegiate sport*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lopiano, D.A. (2000). Modern history of women in sports: Twenty-five years of Title IX. *Clinics in Sports Medicine*, 19(2), 163-173.
- Lumpkin, A., & Williams, L. (1991). An analysis of *Sports Illustrated* feature articles, 1954–1987. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8, 16–32.
- Mak, J. Y. (2006). The impact of Title IX on athletics development in the United States. *Journal of Physical Education & Recreation*, 12(1), 34-38.
- Mathewson, A.D. (1996). Black women, gender equity and the function at the junction. *Marquette Law Review*, 6(2), 239-266.
- McClaurin, I. (2001). Black feminist anthropology: Theory, politics, praxis, and poetics. *Rutgers University Press*.
- McDonagh, E., & Pappano, L. (2008). *Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in sports*. Oxford University Press.
- Memmi, A. (1965). *The colonizer and the colonized*. Beacon Press.
- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. L. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mills, C. (1997). *The racial contract*. Cornell University Press.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2020). *National Collegiate Athletic Association: diversity research*. NCAA.org.

- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019). *National Collegiate Athletic Association: diversity research*. NCAA.org.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2011). *Examining the student-athlete experience through the NCAA GOALS and SCORE studies*.
<https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2013/11/20/ncaa-goals-study.aspx>
- Nerkar, S. (2022M June). Title IX didn't guarantee Black women an equal playing field. *FiveThirtyEight*. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/title-ix-didnt-guarantee-black-women-an-equal-playing-field/>
- Nelson, T., Cardemil, E. V., & Adeoye, C. T. (2016). Rethinking strength: Black women's perceptions of the "strong Black woman" role. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1-13*.
doi: 10.1177/0361684316646716
- Orfield, G., & Eaton, S.E. (1996). *Dismantling desegregation. The quiet reversal of Brown vs Board of Education*. The New Press.
- Otto, K. (2012). Demonstrating the importance of accuracy in reporting results of academic clustering. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education, 6*(1), 293-310.
- Overstreet, N. M., Rosenthal, L. & Case, K. A. (2020). Intersectionality as a radical framework for transforming our disciplines, social issues, and the world. *Journal of Social Issues, 76*(4), 779-795.
- Patel, V. (2022, August). Racial slur during college volleyball game leads to fan suspension. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/27/sports/duke-volleyball-racial-slur.html>
- Paule-Koba, A. (2020). Not just a Power 5 problem: An examination of academic clustering in FCS football programs. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics, 14*(2), 1-11.

- Pickett, M. W., Dawkins, M. P., & Braddock, J. H. (2012). Race and gender equity in sports: Have white and African American females benefited equally from Title IX? *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(11), 1581-1603.
- Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- Pullin, D. (2018). Female basketball players face disproportionate racial bias: New study. *American Association for the Advancement of Science*. <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/875635>
- Quarterman, J. (1992). Characteristics of athletic directors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *Journal of Sport Management*, 6, 52-63.
- Ramachandran, P. (2019, November). 'It looks a lot like slavery': Black athletes share thoughts on playing for white entertainment. Duke University's *The Chronicle*.
https://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2019/11/duke-university-black-athletes-white-entertainment-slavery?fbclid=IwAR0nzoVB5UvPg5WHLzZzKvjxiLt8JhMpUM8JGsFCGxn8vt_vNN_csMn9fQ
- Redden, E. (2020, October). Confronting racism in admissions. *Inside Higher Ed*.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/10/26/will-conversation-turn-action-when-it-comes-issues-racial-equity>.
- Reid, J. D., Jr. (1975). Sharecropping in history and theory. *Agricultural History*, 49(2), 426-440.
- Rhoden, W. C. (2006). *Forty million dollar slaves: The rise, fall, and redemption of the Black athlete*. Crown.

- Ricciardelli, M. (2020, November 23). *61% agree with athletes' right to speak out for social justice; but more than a third say it hinders desire to watch games, ruins sports as 'escape.'* Seaton Hall University: School of Business News and Events.
<http://blogs.shu.edu/sportspoll/2020/11/23/61-agree-with-athletes-right-to-speak-out-for-social-justice-but-more-than-a-third-say-it-hinders-desire-to-watch-games-ruins-sports-as-escape/>
- Rintala, J., & Kane, M. J. (1991, November). Culturally constructed factors that mediate the media's portrayal of female athleticism: The case of age, race and disability. In *Meeting of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Milwaukee, WI*.
- Roberts, D. E. (1999). Blackcrit theory and the problem of essentialism. *University of Miami Law Review*, 53(4), 855-862.
- Ross, K. M. (2019). *Revisiting BlackCrit in education: Anti-Black reality and liberatory fantasy*. Center for Critical Race Studies in Education at UCLA.
- Ross, K. M (2019). On black education: Anti-blackness, refusal, and resistance. In C. A. Grant, A. Woodson, & M. Dumas (Eds.), *The future is black: Afropessimism, fugitivity, and radical hope in education*. Routledge.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative research (3rd ed.)*. SAGE.
- Samad, M. Y. (2021). The recruitment of Black student-athletes by white head coaches at predominately white institutions [Unpublished dissertation, The Ohio State University].
- Sanders, J. P., & Hildenbrand, K. (2010). Major concerns? A longitudinal analysis of student athletes' academic majors in comparative perspective. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 3(2), 213-233.

- Sandler, B. R. (2007). Title IX: How we got it and what a difference it made. *Cleveland State Law Review*, 55(4), 473-489.
- Schell, L. (1999). *Socially constructing the female athlete: A monolithic media representation of active women*. University of Oregon Microform Publications.
- Seidler, T. L., Gerdy, J. R., & Cardinal, B. J. (1998). Athletic director authority in Division I intercollegiate athletics: Perceptions of athletic directors and university presidents. *International Sport Journal*, 2(2), 36-46.
- Shipherd, A. M., Wakefield, J. C., Stokowski, A., & Filho, E. (2019). The influence of coach turnover on student-athletes' affective states and team dynamics: An exploratory study in collegiate sports. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 14(1), 97-106.
- Simien, E. M. (2008). *Clinton and Obama: The impact of race and sex on 2008 democratic presidential primaries*. Routledge.
- Simien, E. M., Arinze, N. A., & McGarry, J. B. (2019). A portrait of marginality in sport and education: Toward a theory of intersectionality and raced-gendered experiences for Black female college athletes. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 40, 409 - 427.
- Simon, C., Bowles, D., King, S., & Roff, L. (2004). Mentoring in the careers of African American women in social work education. *Affilia*, 19(2), 134-145.
- Smedley, B. D., Stith, A. Y., & Nelson, A. R. (Eds.) (2003). *Unequal treatment: Confronting racial and ethnic disparities in health care*. National Academies Press (US).
- Smith, D. L. (1993). Let our people go. *The Black Scholar*, 23(3/4), 74-76.
- Smith, R. K. (2000). A brief history of the national collegiate athletic association's role in regulating intercollegiate athletics. *Marquette Sports Law Review*, 11(1), 9-22.

- Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp.51-80). SAGE.
- Stahl, N. A. & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 26-28.
- Steinfeldt, J. A., Cater, H., Benton, E., & Steinfeldt, M. C. (2011). Muscularity beliefs of female college student-athletes. *Sex Roles*, 64, 543-554.
- Stokowski, A., Rode, C. R., & Hardin, R. (2016). Academic advisors' perceptions of student athletes at NCAA Division-I institutions. *The Journal of SPORT*, 5(1), 64-92.
- Taylor, U. (1989). The historical evolution of Black feminist theory and praxis. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(2), 234-253.
- Tracy, M. (2018, January). Nassar case topples U.S.A. gymnastics board and M.S.U. athletic director. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/sports/michigan-state-mark-hollis.html>
- Toffler, A. (1991). *Powershift: Knowledge, wealth, and violence at the edge of the 21st Century*. Bantam Books.
- Torres, V., Howard-Hamilton, M., & Cooper, D. (2003). *Identity development of diverse populations: Implications for teaching and administration in higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
- United States Department of Education (2015). *Title IX*. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html
- Van Rheene, D. (2013). Exploitation in college sports: Race, revenue, and educational reward. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(5). 550-571.

- Van Ryn, M., & Burke, J. (2000). The effect of patient race and socio-economic status on physicians' perceptions of patients. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(6), 813-828.
- Vermillion, M. (2014). *Division I student athletes' perceptions: How well does the athletic department promote student athlete development in an Urban-serving university?* Metropolitan Universities.
<https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/muj/article/view/20563/20163>
- Vertinsky, P., & Captain, G. (1998). American culture and representations of the Black female's athletic ability. *Journal of Sport History*, 23(3), 532-561.
- Wallace, M. (1990). *Black macho and the myth of the superwoman*. Verso.
- Wallace, S. A., Townsend, T. G., Glasgrow, Y. M., & Ojie, M. J. (2011). Gold diggers, video vixens, and jezebels: Stereotype images and substance use among urban African American girls. *Journal of Women's Health*, 20(9), 1319-1324.
- Walsemann, K. M., Ailshire, J. A., & Gee, G. C. (2016). Student loans and racial disparities in self-reported sleep duration: evidence from a nationally representative sample of US young adults. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 70(1), 42-48.
- Walshaw, M. (2008). The concept of identity positioning the self within research. *ICME Proceedings*, 322-337.
https://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/ICMI/files/About_ICMI/Publications_about_ICMI/ICME_11/Walshaw.pdf
- Watkins, J., Slater, K., & Chang, L. (2022). The relationship between academic clustering and athletic academic support departments reporting lines in NCAA FBS programs. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sports*, 15(1), 125-142. doi.org/10.17161/jis.v15i1.15226

- Watkins, M. (2016, October). Feds investigating Baylor University for handling of sexual assault. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2016/10/19/federal-agency-investigating-baylor-university-han/>
- Weathington, B. L., Alexander, A. C., & Rodebaugh, L. L. (2010). Coaching influences on student-athlete motivation, stress, and skill. *Athletic Insight Journal: Online Journal of Sport Psychology*, 12(2).
- Weinberg, R. & Gould, D. (2003). *Foundations of sport and exercise psychology*. Human Kinetics.
- West, C. M. (2018). Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and the bad girls of reality television: media representations of Black women. *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, 139-158.
- Whisenant, W. A., Pedersen, P. M., & Obenour, B. L. (2002). Success and gender: Determining the rate of advancement for intercollegiate athletic directors. *Sex Roles*, 47, 485-491.
- Wilderson, F. B. (2010). *Red, white & black: Cinema and the structure of U.S. antagonisms*. Duke University Press.
- Will, L. (2021, March). Academic support programs for student-athletes & Their participation. <https://open.library.okstate.edu/ashley/chapter/academic-support-programs-for-student-athletes-their-participation/>
- Wood, E. A., Dittmore, S. W., Stokowski, S., & Li, B. (2019). Division I athletic directors' trends and perceptions of requisite professional skills. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation*, 1(5), 102-122.
- Woods-Giscombe, C. L. (2010). Superwoman schema: African American women's views on stress, strength, and health. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20, 668-683.
- Woodson, C.G. (1933). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Associated Publishers.

- Wright, C., Eagleman, A. N., & Pedersen, P. M. (2011). Leadership in intercollegiate athletics: Analysis of NCAA Division I athletic directors. *Sport Management International Journal* 7(2), 35-52.
- Writers, S. (2021). *Black students face significant student loan debt*. Best Colleges.com.
- Zirkel, A. & Cantor, N. (2004). 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education: The promise and challenge of multicultural education. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-4537.2004.00096.x>

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INITIAL COMMUNICATION

Greetings,

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in this groundbreaking study exploring the lived experiences of Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes who participated in athletic departments at institutions that have been identified as mid-major colleges or universities. I am very excited to meet with you and understand your experiences.

Attached please find the informed consent document, which provides all the details regarding the study, a demographic questionnaire to be certain you are the correct participant for this study, and a flyer that highlights participation requirements. Please sign and date this consent form and send it back to me at your earliest convenience. In addition, please complete the questionnaire survey (sign and date) and send it back to me. Signatures must be physical signatures. You will receive a final copy of the consent back with my signature.

Please convey which pseudonym you will be using for this research. Please select a day and time slot for your interview.

Interview Details

Pseudonym:

Dates to chooses from:

Location: Zoom

Once I have received your signed consent form, a calendar invite with Zoom link will be sent to you. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to reach out.

I truly appreciate your time and interest, and I look forward to connecting with you.

JB

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Illinois State University

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica J. Brown (JB), a doctoral student, under the direction of Dr. Mohamend Nur-Awaleh in the Department of Administration and Foundation (EAF) at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to determine if athletic departments are anti-Black spaces for Black female student-athletes.

Why are you being asked?

You have been asked to participate because you are a Black former student-athlete who played a varsity sport at a NCAA Division I (DI) program at a mid-major college or university. You are ineligible to participate if you are currently located in the European Economic Area. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

What would you do?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a 60–90-minute interview on the Zoom platform. Prior to participating in the study participants will be asked the following questions for a demographic survey: Are you a Black former female student-athlete, Did you Play a varsity sport at a NCAA Division (DI) institution?, Did you play a varsity sport at a NCAA Division (DI) institution that has been labeled as a mid-major college or university?, Did you play a varsity sport at a NCAA Division (DI) institution for four consecutive years?, Do you have access to a computer or phone with Zoom capability?, and Are you willing to be video and audio recorded during the interview process?

Are any risks expected?

As a participant you may feel some discomfort by telling your story about your collegiate experience. There is some risk associated with participating in this study because historically Black female voices have not always been captured accurately. Risk damage to reputation may apply due to the sensitivity of this study. To reduce these risks, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym for you and your respected institution.

Will your information be protected?

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Your interview will be video and audio recorded. You will be given a password-protected link to join a private meeting. The recording will be saved on a password encrypted digital server. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team. The final research study may be disseminated at public symposiums or conferences, published in journals, and used for training for athletic departments.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

We need to make you aware that in certain research studies, it is our legal and ethical responsibility to report any life-threatening situation and/or illegal activity on the ISU campus,

campus-controlled locations, or involving ISU students to appropriate authorities. However, we are not seeking this type of information in our study nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

Could your responses be used for other research?

We will not use any identifiable information from you in future research, but your deidentified information could be used for future research without additional consent from you.

Who will benefit from this study?

Current and former NCAA DI Black student-athletes, and athletic departments will benefit from this study. Depending on findings key stakeholders will be able to leverage this study as a way to retain, support, and advance the needs of current and former NCAA DI Black female student-athletes. Participating in this study may also serve as a form of healing for Black female former NCAA DI student-athletes.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Jessica J. Brown (JB) at brownjess144@gmail.com or 269.355.0004. Or you can contact Dr. Mohamed Nur-Awaleh at manuraw@ilstu.edu or 309.438.5155.

-

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent

Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study. If you are not comfortable signing this form then you will not be allowed to participate in this research study.

Signature _____ Date _____

You will be recorded (video and audio) for this research study. Your signature below indicates that you agree to be recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.
You can print this form for your records.

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What gender do you identify as?
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Not listed
 4. Prefer not to answer.

2. How old are you?
 1. 0-15 years old
 2. 15-30 years old
 3. 30-45 years old
 4. 45+
 5. Prefer not to answer

3. What is your ethnicity?
 1. Caucasian
 2. Black American
 3. Latino or Hispanic
 4. Asian
 5. Native American
 6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 7. Two or More
 8. Prefer not to say

4. What state were you born in?

5. What college did you play your varsity sport at?

6. What sport did you play?

7. What year did you join the starting line-up?
 1. Freshman year
 2. Sophomore year
 3. Junior year
 4. Senior year

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Semi-Structured Interview: Virtual Protocol Guide & Checklist

Start Recording ____ Date _____ Time _____

Introduction

Confirmation of Pseudonym ____.

Confirmation of Pseudonym of college / university ____.

Confirmation of data capture on demographic survey is accurate ____.

Review previously provided informed consent with participants ____.

Overview of the interview structure and expectations ____.

Provide time for questions ____.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your youth athletic experience (s)?
2. During your youth athletic experience what was your engagement like with athletic administration, coaches, and other athletic support staff?
3. What was your high school athletic experience (s)?
4. During your high school athletic experience what was your engagement like with athletic administration, coaches, and other athletic support staff?
5. Tell me about how you transitioned into collegiate sports and what that experience was like.
6. During your collegiate athletic experience what was your engagement like with athletic administration, coaches, and other athletic support staff?
7. When did you first realize your blackness was a part of your collegiate identity?
8. When did you first realize your gender was a part of your collegiate identity?

9. Could you share a time where you felt the athletic department went out of their way to support you as a Black female student athlete? Or a time where you wish they had?

Concluding Question

1. Is there anything else you would like to add? Or a question you wish I had asked?

Concluding Statements

Thank the participant for their time.

Reminded participant that they will be hearing from me when the transcriptions are complete for them to cross-check accuracy.