BLACK GIRL MAGIC: EXPLORING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALE STUDENT ATHLETES AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE DIVISION I UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explored the unique experiences of Black female student athletes. Specifically, Black female student athletes at Division I (D-I), Predominantly White Institutions, academic and athletic experiences were explored as factors that may contribute to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) graduation success rate (GSR). Participants for this study included Black female student athletes from different Division I schools on the east coast. Accounts of the findings include the collection, data analysis, and interpretations drawing from the lens of Black Feminist theory, Intersectionality, and Sensemaking.

The findings indicate specifically that Black female student athletes do not have unique experiences in regards to academics and athletics. The themes that emerged from academics and athletes include: transitional experiences, life and career goals, relationships with teammates and coaches, and pressure to perform. These themes are all related to the first research question. In terms of race and gender, the findings reveal that Black female student athletes struggle with racial reality, support system, self-segregation, and gender bias. During the interview process, the participants added more in-depth responses to the research question regarding race and gender differences. Many gave examples of when they faced racial or gender discrimination. It is important to note that one of the participants is an international student. I included her international race perspective in the findings section too as her viewpoint can be seen as an outlier.

This study’s findings and implications have the potential to support and inspire Black female student athletes, inform higher education institutions and athletic programs, and the ways in which the graduation rate gap may be reduced and/or eliminated.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who instilled in me the value of hard work and education. Throughout this dissertation process, there were moments where I wanted to give up. With your words of encouragement and faith in God, I was able to finish. I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Pearl Smith, who passed away way too soon. Grandmom, I did it!!! I know you’re in Heaven smiling down on me, as I become THE FIRST in the family to become a Doctor. Miss you!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Black female student athletes encounter an array of challenges related to their race, gender, and status as student athletes (Howard- Hamilton, 1993). For example, Black female student athletes have a 67 percent graduation rate, while White female student athletes have a 78 percent graduation rate (NCAA, 2017). The gap widened between 2008 - present (NCAA, 2017). The gap disparity has raised the importance of understanding the athletic and academic services designed to support Black Female student athletes. This disparity has led the NCAA and many athletic programs to rethink and revise their approach to supporting Black female student athletes. This study examines the role of race and gender in the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes who attend predominately White Division I Institutions. Through qualitative measures, the results of the study indicate that Black female student athletes experience unique struggles with racism, gender, transitions, pressure to perform academically and athletically, and complex relationships. In this study, I explored the academic and athletic struggles of Black female student athletes and found, the following nine themes:

- Transitional experiences.
- Pressure to perform both athletically and academically.
- Career goals and life missions.
- Relationships, with teammates, coaching staff.
- Racial reality.
- Support systems.
- Self-segregation.
- Domestic versus international viewpoints.
- Gender differences.
Historical Context- Black Females in Higher Education

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs,) were established with the purpose to educate and graduate Black Americans. The first three HBCUs include: Cheyney State University (PA) (1830), Lincoln University (PA) (1854), and Wilberforce University (Ohio) (1856). Shaw University was the first HBCU created in the South in 1865 (Willie, 2003). It is important to note that during this time period, the American Civil War was concluding and many Blacks were now free from slavery and migrating up North. Whites slowly began to admit small numbers of Blacks into colleges and universities. It was not until 1890, Congress passed the Morrill Land Grant Act, which required states to accept Black Students or create a separate land grant institution for people of color. This is the reason other institutions like Prairie View A & M University, Florida A & M University, and North Carolina A & T State University were established. They were designed to teach skills in the fields like agriculture and mechanic arts (Myers, 1987).

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in the Plessey v. Ferguson decision regarding segregation laws. This doctrine was applicable to all public facilities “separate but equal.” This applied to all public universities, buildings, public restrooms, etc. As segregation continued, Supreme Court cases like Brown v. Board of Education 1954 overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine. The United States Supreme Court case exposed the inequalities within education and forced legislation to provide equal educational achievement and opportunities for all minorities.
Later in 1964, the Civil Rights Act was implemented to “prohibit discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance.” Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 created a landmark for women in the United States, providing equal opportunity (Abney, 1999). Title IX states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Lopiano, 2014; Sawyer, 2010). In sports, Title IX benefited women athletes especially because they could now be given the same opportunities as men, receive the same amount of funding as the male sports programs, and this was the first time women were able to earn scholarships to play at the collegiate level. Title IX changed the expectation of women by giving them the opportunity to choose, compete, athletically, scholastically, professionally, politically, economically, and socially.

Title IX applies to all educational institutions, both public and private, that receive federal funds. Athletic programs are considered educational programs and activities. If any educational institution is found to violate or not be in compliance with Title IX, then federal funds will be taken away. There are three parts of Title IX that directly applies to athletic programs:

1. Effective accommodation of student interests and abilities (participation).
2. Athletic financial assistance (scholarships).
3. Other program components (Ex: equipment and supplies, scheduling of games and practice times, travel, access to tutoring, coaching, locker rooms, practice facilities, medical and training facilities, recruitment, publicity, and student support services (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2016).
The discussion of the historical context and the laws that directly influenced Blacks and women within higher education is extremely important as it highlights the struggles that this population group once faced. Foundational laws like, Morrill Land Grant Act, Civil Rights Act, and Title IX, all grant equality in both academics and sports. There has been tremendous progress and movement over the years.

**Black Female Student Athletes**

There is a growing body of literature regarding the college experiences of Black female student athletes (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pickney, 2002; Harmon, 2009 & Bernhard, 2014). A few studies have attempted to uncover possible reasons for the graduation gap, including lack of mentorship and isolation (Bruening et al., 2005; Suggs, 2001). They also experience cultural inhibitions in which they are unable to express parts of their identity related specifically to being Black (Bruening et al., 2005; Suggs, 2001).

Underrepresentation percentages in collegiate sports include: lacrosse-2.2%, swimming-2.0%, soccer-5.3%, softball-8.2%, and volleyball-11.6%. Because Black females are underrepresented in sports like, lacrosse, swimming, golfs, etc., they are less likely to participate because they don't see people who look like them playing (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Cook, 2001).

This study examines the role of race and gender in the Black Female student athletes’ academic and athletic experiences at Predominately White institutions. I highlight the perspectives of Black female student athletes, as they are not frequently heard, but offer insight into the academic and athletic experiences and attainment of these students.
According to a 2007 report by the United States Department of Education, among high school sophomores, White girls had a 51 percent participation rate in sports, compared with 40% for Black girls. Research from Lapchick (1998) explains that the contributing factors to the lack of participation from Black girls in sports include a lack of resources, such as outdoor field space, equipment, and exposure to particular sports.

According to the NCAA (2003), Black female student athletes are underrepresented. Black females make up 10.4% of all Division-I female student athletes. The Black female student athletes that make up the 10.4% predominantly play women’s basketball or run women’s track and field (NCAA, 2003). It is important to keep in mind the underrepresentation of Black female student athletes at the Division I level and the impact it may have on the above figures.

ChildTrends (2014), conducted research data monitoring the progress of high school student athletes into college. Specifically looking at gender, in 2016, the data revealed that 61% of females participated in high school athletics. Looking at race, 62% of Black students and 68% of White students participated in high school athletics. Thus, we would expect the percentage of Black athletes who participated at the collegiate level to be slightly less than the percentage of White students. In addition, since 19% of female college students are Black, we would expect the participation of Black females to make up a similar proportion of student athletes. However, only 10.4% of all Division I female student athletes are Black.

Over the past years, the NCAA has been using quantitative measurements such as graduation rates and the Academic Success Rate (ASR) to measure the progress of student athletes. The six year graduation rate measure that is commonly used by
universities does not account for transfer students, so the NCAA created the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The Academic Success rate is only used for Division II athletes and therefore does not apply to this study, which only focuses on Division I athletics. The NCAA has been looking at various approaches to best measure and track student-athlete graduation rates and modern-day patterns of student completion. In 2016, Black female student athletes had an 81% graduation rate, compared to White female student athletes, whose rate was 93%. Bruening et al. (2005), found that racism manifested in discrimination by peers, coaches, and staff. Other research has shown that the retention rates of Black female student athletes may be linked to the disconnect between their personal values and values of the campus community as a whole (Constantine & Watt, 2002; Gloria, Robinson, Jurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Another factor is the notion that Black female student athletes have limited social supports on campus and experience negative stereotyping from peers and faculty (Engstrom et al., 1995; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Suggs, 2001).

With the expansion of research in the past few years of awareness of intercollegiate athletics, especially at D-I institutions, understanding the role of race and gender at the D-I level may help to unravel the Black female student athlete narrative and contribute to the broader literature on collegiate student athletes. The National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASAP) and the NCAA administrators’ common goals are to increase graduation rates amongst undergraduate students and provide resources to help students succeed in college. This research, especially the narratives of the Black female student athletes, can give some insight of the experiences of Black female students.
Throughout this study, I use a race and gender lens to examine the Black female student athlete academic and athletic experiences at predominately White institutions, where White students account for 50% or greater of the total enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010). In this chapter, I introduce my research questions and provide a rationale for my choice to employ qualitative research methodology as the best approach to answering them. A discussion of Black feminist theory supports a fuller conversation on key concerns in the literature on Black female student athletes. Exploring through this lens Black feminist theory allowed me to demonstrate how my study may create much-needed space for the voices of Black female student athletes. Also, this study allows me to explore their experiences and the ways their lives have been impacted. It is my goal to create awareness for student affairs professionals and NCAA administrators of the challenges faced by Black female student athletes. Hopefully, this can lead to the implementation of policies and procedures to lessen the graduation gaps amongst Black female student athletes and their White peers.

**Statement of the Problem**

Quantitative measures of student success, such as GSR, do not fully illuminate the experiences of Black female student athletes. While the NCAA graduation success rate statistics have been meaningful and used as measurement sources for the NCAA and universities’ athletic departments, they do not paint a full picture. Literature lacks looking at the Black female student athlete experience to provide additional meaning behind the figures listed above. For example, Black female student athletes have reported experiencing a “chilly campus climate,” including racism, discrimination, and lack of social support (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). Black female student athletes struggle
with the transition period between high school and college (Harmon, 2009). Moreover, Harmon (2009) discovered that during this transitional period some Black female student athletes are affected by not having a supportive coaching staff who “looks like them” for support. As enrollment of Black female student athletes continues to increase (NCAA, 2019), student affair professionals still continue to struggle with providing Black female student athletes with the assistance and opportunities they need to help them be successful (Harmon, 2009). Challenges such as lack of Black role models on campus, racial divides amongst team members, and silencing are ostensibly a few root cases that contribute to the graduation success rate gap of Black female student athletes. Silencing, in this context, is defined by Bruening, Armstrong, and Pastore (2005) as the process creating patterns and trends related to Black female student athletes that make them invisible and have no say or opinion.

Lee & Rotella (1991), suggest a link between having a Black female role model who cares for the athlete, is someone she trusts, and provides the athlete the ability to successfully navigate through her athletic experience at a predominantly White institution (PWI). In researching the racial divide on a team, studies found that Black female student athletes tend to form strong relationships with other Black female athletes, connecting to previous research that in the absence of Black adult role models, Black students rely heavily on other sources of social support, including the Black community that exists on campus (Brown, 2008; Webster & Fretz, 1977). Lastly, researchers suggest that because of the disconnect that these women face on PWI campuses; they use the silencing mechanism to isolate themselves from the team and in some cases, even the coaching staff (Bruening et al., 2005). Silencing and isolation are behaviors in line with suboptimal
resistance, which is characterized by powerlessness and dysfunctional short-term adaptations to an oppressive environment (Robinson & Kennington, 2002).

**Theoretical Framework**

**Black Feminist Theory**

Sociologist author Patricia Collins (1990) introduced Black feminist theory, and defines Black feminism as a school of thought that helps to understand the Black female standpoint. Sexism, class oppression, gender identity, and racism are all of the forces that intersect to fully understand the Black feminism concept. The study of Black feminism is a specific application of intersectionality that places Black women at the center of the analysis to study their experiences. The objective of this study is to center the experiences of Black women who are collegiate athletes, who may face racial or gender differences at predominantly White Division I schools.

**Black Women**

Patricia Collins writes that Black women are similar to other women as they share the same gender identity; however, Black women still have uniqueness about them (Collins, 2000). To understand this uniqueness, an opportunity should be provided to Black women so that they can share their experiences because theirs differ from those who are more privileged (hooks, 1984, p.15). Historically, Black women have been positioned marginally. Black feminist theory and intersectionality help to illuminate Black women’s perspectives and experiences at the center.

**Intersectionality**

The term intersectionality was first used by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand the lived experiences of marginalized people who exist on multiple axes of
identity (Crenshaw, 1989). Drawing on the historical and contemporary context in which Black women are marginalized, intersectionality describes the way in which multiple oppressions are experienced. Specifically, Crenshaw (1989) looks at various forms of oppression impacting Black women.

This study explores the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes at predominately White institutions through intersectionality and Black feminist theory (Collins, 1991). Black feminist theory specifically supports the experiences of Black female student athletes as it uses the analysis of intersectionality.

The study of Black female student athletes at predominately White institutions has been approached from a Black feminist theoretical framework in past research (Bruening, Pastore, & Armstrong, 2005). For this study, adding the intersectionality perspective provides a more thorough theoretical understanding. Therefore, this study will focus on race and gender within a academic and athletic experiences.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to use the voices of a group of Black female student athletes who attend predominately White Division I Institutions, to inform our understanding of the role race and gender play in their academic and athletic experiences. Using student perceptions offers insight into the factors that contribute to the graduation rate gap amongst the two groups (Black female student athletes and White female student athletes). By providing a qualitative context to the overwhelmingly quantitative narrative on student athletes, my research will provide the NCAA and universities’ athletic departments a critical lens into practices and policies that may better impact the success of current Black female student athletes and future student athletes.
Research Questions

Previous athletic and educational research has looked at the causes that contribute to the graduation success rate (quantitative methods), this research project aims to explore the role that race and gender collectively play in the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes at predominately White schools (DI). In trying to seek more understanding of the factors that contribute to the graduation gap, this study asks the following questions:

1. How do Black female student athletes who attend predominately White Division I institutions make meaning of their athletic and academic experiences?
2. What roles do race and gender specifically play in the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at predominantly White Division I institutions?

My research questions are designed to incorporate and draw upon two viewpoints, Black feminist theory and intersectionality that center the experience and reality of Black women.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is the potential to inform the policies, procedures, and practices of institutions of higher education and the NCAA. Much of the research conducted by the NCAA does not address issues faced by Black female student athletes. NCAA researchers utilize standardized assessments and measurement tools for Division I student athletes rather than exploring their unique experiences and perspectives. The purpose of this research is to examine the academic and athletic experiences that Black female student athletes encounter during their college years at
predominately White institutions; specifically, looking at the roles race and gender plays in Black female student athletes experiences.

For years, the NCAA has been producing figures that measure academic achievement and performance, such as student athletes’ GPAs, Academic Success Rates, Graduation Success Rates, and Eligibility Requirements Standardization. As student affairs professionals and the NCAA administrators heavily rely on quantitative data and self-report data of the student athletes to shape policy and practice, it is my goal to capture the narratives of the Black female student athlete population. Special attention to the needs and achievements of this population may potentially serve as an investment in resources and policies to ensure success of all student athletes, regardless of race, gender, or sport.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature on college athletics contains very limited research on the experiences of Black female student athletes (Bower & Martin, 1999; Bernhard, 2014). Research that is available explores race and gender separately. It does not examine the intersection between race and gender. Collectively, I present the Black feminist theory and intersectionality frameworks to understand the role that race and gender impact the lives of Black female student athletes. This research will be helpful for educational and athletic programs. Writers and scholars such as Patricia Collins, Kim Crenshaw, Soujourner Truth, Alice Walker, and many others have all paved the way for Black women through their movements and work. They wrote and fought passionately about the experiences of Black women in America. I strongly believe that to keep their legacy and that of other Black feminist scholars alive, the voices of the Black female student
athletes at predominately White institutions must be heard. Understanding this historical aspect helps us to understand why we live the way we are living. This allows us to learn from our ancestors and keep the vision and foundation going.
CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

This research project extracted from the lens of the Black feminist theory coupled with an intersectionality theoretical framework to provide insight into the experiences of Black female student athletes. As a means of examining the research context for this study, the review of the literature provides an overview of the following: Black feminist theory, intersectionality, sensemaking, and research about Black women athletes. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, is also discussed in this chapter, as this legislation protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Specifically, Title IX is applied to athletics throughout this chapter.

As mentioned in Chapter I, the NCAA has used quantitative data such as Academic Success Rates and graduation rates to measure the success of student athletes. Through the NCAA data, there is a disparity in regards to graduation rates between Black female athletes and their White peers. Despite the implementation of legislation such as the Civil Rights Act 1964 and Title IX, discrimination still exists in America and college and university campuses (Harmon, 2009). Emphasizing the opportunity gap for the underrepresented student athlete group (Black Female Student Athletes), Black feminist theory, intersectionality, and Title IX are applicable to the population for this study to help better illuminate their struggles. Because of both the lack of research and the varied methodologies and results of the past studies that have been conducted, Harmon (2009), calls for more research focused specifically on Black female student athletes could extend or elaborate previous research and add to the understanding of their college experiences.
Black Feminist Theory

Research has shown that women of color have been treated unequally from men for many years. Over centuries, White men have dominated the sports field leaving the playing territory unbalanced. Title IX was implemented to add diversity. Before Title IX (1972), little opportunities existed for female collegiate athletes. Though the NCAA was created to govern and enforce the rules for men’s football, nothing was implemented for women’s teams. For example, scholarship funding, facilities, and sporting supplies were all not offered to the women teams (History.com, 2009, para 2). Title IX was created to enforce equal access and quality.

Smith (1992) explained that, in particular, women of color have been silenced in society and sports. To address the inequality and oppression during this time period, Patricia Collins integrated the Black feminist theory to bring voice to the voiceless (Black women). As described in Chapter 1, Black feminist theory is the foundation for this study. Black feminist theory can inform qualitative analysis of Black female student athletes’ constructed attitudes towards racial and gender equality within higher education.

In Collin’s book, titled, Black Feminist Thought, the concept of the matrix of domination is described. The matrix of domination is a paradigm that consists of multiple complex variables that interlock and produce inequality. The Matrix of domination is a model that has been used in fields such as political science and education to provide a range of perspectives of oppression. Hooks (1999) describes how the interlocking forces of race, gender, and class operate oppression. Race, class, and gender may not be the most fundamental or important systems of oppression, but they have most profoundly
affected Black women (Collins, 1990). It is important to understand Black feminist theory, because it provides insight into the matrix of domination.

**Background Information on Discrimination Issues**

Evelyn Simien (2004) defined Black feminism as the recognition that Black women are status deprived because they face discrimination on the basis of race and gender. Simien (2004) also discussed the burdens of prejudice that challenged people of color during enslavement and the Civil Rights Movement, in addition to the various forms of subjugation that hindered women; Black women are disadvantaged doubly in the social, economic, and political structure of the United States. Black women occupy the lower status of the social hierarchy. Research has shown that Black women were predominately found in clerical and service jobs and are most likely to be single heads of households (Browne, 1999; Malveaux, 1990; Rothenberg, 1995; Rowe & Jeffries, 1996; Smith & Horton, 1997). Black women also lag behind other race and sex groups on practically every measure of socioeconomic well-being; income, employment, and education. As a result, they were subject to multiple burdens including joblessness and domestic violence, teen pregnancy and illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition, which define their cumulative experience with race and gender oppression in the United States (Simien, 2004).

Research has shown that, traditionally, women of color have had few opportunities to be noticed or have their voices be heard in American society and sports (Smith, 1992). One particular study by Bruening, Armstrong, and Pastore (2005), used Black feminist theory as the main framework to emphasize the importance of “visibility” of Black female student athletes. The researchers interviewed 12 Black female student
athletes at a Midwestern University Division I. Using qualitative methods, the study’s results include: lack of media coverage for women’s sports (ESPN Sports Center media coverage by gender results: Men: 95.5%; Women: 2.0%). Black female student athletes were silenced in certain situations and settings such as the weight room or the overall culture and ideologies of the athletic department. The study mainly focused on the concept of “silencing.” Silencing according to Bruening et al. (2005) was defined as the lack of voice and absence of spoken or written opinions of Black female student athletes. Furthermore, silencing was a marker of the lack of interest in, and awareness of Black female student athletes shown by individuals and organizations (athletic departments and media outlets), or those whose occupied positions enabling them to offer opportunities to Black female student athletes. Ultimately, Black female student athletes used silencing mechanisms to isolate themselves (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005).

Harmon (2009) also incorporated Black feminist theory in her study of the experiences of Black female college student athletes at a predominately White institution. Through Harmon’s study, four major themes emerged: unfulfilled expectations, being treated differently than White female student athletes, complex relationships, and resistance. Despite facing challenging and difficult college experiences and environments, these participants were still optimistic of change and voiced their experiences through the study.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), was originally introduced by feminist and critical race theorists (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; King, 1988), intersectionality is defined as a tool that helps to identify how multiple categories
of discrimination or oppression interplay on one individual/group and overlap. In its early applications, intersectionality was a smaller scale content-based singular approach (Hancock, 2007, p. 248). Over time, its reach expanded from Black feminist thought to critical race to educational and political science examinations of difference, taking on the attributes of a theoretical approach (Cho et al, 2013). Intersectionality has been applied to an array of topics in fields as diverse as criminology (Burgess-Proctor, 2006), public health (Chong, Um, Hahn, Pheng, Yee, & Auerswald, 2009), education (Gosse, Parr, & Allison, 2008), social work (Hulko, 2009), and psychology (Cole, 2009). Collins introduced intersectionality as a perspective that was meant to understand the experience of Black women who are both raced and gendered. The diagram below uses the “matrix of domination”. The diagram is a visual of several factors converging to create accumulative impact on the Black female student athlete experience. For the purpose of this study, only race and gender will be explored.

Figure 1.0 Intersecting Identity Diagram
Within the field of collegiate athletics and higher education, intersectionality has been used as the theoretical framework to empirically examine Black and Gay male athletes (Anderson & McCormack, 2010), and Black male student athletes’ experiences (Lipchick, 2016). Anderson and McCormack (2010) used intersectionality and critical race theory as theoretical frameworks in their study to examine the relationship between, race, gender, sexuality, and sports. They found that Black and Gay athletes maintain complex identities. Intersectionality specifically was used to unravel the interlocking forces of sexuality, race, and gender of Black Gay athletes in understanding their identities (multiple intersections).

Moreover, Lipchick (2016) used intersectionality framework to examine race on the Black male student athlete experience. Specifically, Lipchick (2016) examined the decline of graduation rates of Black male student athletes compared to White male student athletes. The researcher introduced the Career Transition Scorecard model that bridges the gap between athletics and academics. In general, using an intersectional approach to help better understand the Black female student athlete experience, is important because it focuses research on traditionally understudied populations like women, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities.

Withycombe (2011) examined how eight Black female athletes experience stereotypes at a Division I University. This study critically analyzed Black female student athletes’ experiences to understand the “Complex, interrelated, and fluid, character of power relations” as they are constructed along axes of differences (Cooky et al., 2010, p. 144). Withycombe (2011) identified two major themes: gender stereotypes and racial stereotypes.
Withycombe (2011) additionally notes that interpreting these findings through the lens of intersectionality begins a process of discovery, which exposes the fact that the world is very complex and complicated. The participants mentioned in the study that colorblindness is present in sport and society and heavily impacts one’s opportunities. Collins (2008) pointed out in her research that colorblindness does not ensure equality. With that being said, Withycombe (2011) inserts that the more people are blind to White privilege and the more the oppressed are silenced, this severely impacts their opportunities and experiences. The application of the intersectionality theory enabled the unmasking of discrimination.

This literature review will now take a look at the impact of Title IX in collegiate athletics. Although most people today associate Title IX with athletics, its coverage is intended to be far broader. It opened doors for admissions, academic majors, classes, and vocational education. It also mandated equal access and equal treatment once admitted. In collegiate athletics, Title IX requires for equal opportunity in athletic scholarships, benefits, amongst female and male student athletes. The full details of Title IX can be found below.

**Title IX in Collegiate Athletics**

Discussion of Title IX and other US legislation such as the Civil Rights Act (1964), are influential in the study of Black female student athletes academic and athletic experiences. The Civil Rights Act was implemented to “Prohibit discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance” (education and Title VI, 2019, para. 1). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 created a landmark for women in the United States; providing
equal opportunity (Abney, 1999). An educational program shall not provide any course or
carry out any of its programs/activities separately on the basis of sex (Portman &
Carpenter, 1999). Title IX states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of
sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to
discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial
assistance” (Lopiano, 2014, p.7). In sports, Title IX benefited women athletes because
they could now be given the same opportunities as men in sports, receive the same
amount of funding as the male sports programs, and this was the first time women were
able to earn scholarships to play sports at the collegiate level. Title IX changed the
expectation of women by giving them the opportunity to compete, athletically,
scholastically, professionally, politically, economically, and socially.

Title IX applies to all educational institutions, both public and private, that receive
federal funds. Athletic programs are considered educational programs and activities. If
any educational institution is found to violate or not be in compliance with Title IX, then
federal funds will be taken away. There are three parts that if Title IX that apply directly
to athletic programs:

1. Effective accommodation of student interests and abilities (participation).
2. Athletic financial assistance (scholarships).
3. Other program components (Ex: equipment and supplies, scheduling of games
and practice times, travel, access to tutoring, coaching, locker rooms, practice
facilities, medical and training facilities, recruitment, publicity, and student
support services (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2016).

The inclusion of laws such as Title IX and the Civil Rights Act in the literature
review that directly influenced Blacks and women within higher education is extremely
important as it highlights the struggles that this population group faced. These are considered foundational laws that granted equality in both academics and sports. There has been tremendous progress and movement over the years, yet inequality still exists. According to Bower & Martin (2010), universal compliance with Title IX and gender equity has yet to be achieved. There is still much work to be done.

As mentioned above, the goal of Title IX was to provide equal opportunity amongst women in collegiate athletics. As past research has demonstrated, there still seems to be a gap amongst men and women student athletes NCAA compliance. This research project is designed to hear the experiences of Black female student athletes. Therefore, using the Black feminist theory and intersectionality frameworks in conjunction with understanding the goals of Title IX, will help to understand their lived experiences.

Collins (2000) argued that the fact that so many Black women have grown to womanhood able to resist the damaging effects of stereotyping demonstrates the significance of Black feminist theory and the strength and survival capabilities of Black women (p. 9). The next section will review literature on the experiences of Black female student athletes.

The Black Female Student Athlete Experience

There is a substantial body of research available on White female and African American male athletes (Withycombe, 2011). The Black female student athlete experience is a unique one, yet there is little empirical research. Researchers have cited institutional barriers affecting Black female student athletes such as racism and
discrimination by teammates, coaches, and staff (Bruening, Pastore, & Armstrong, 2005). In US society, race and gender can be used in a way that both consciously and unconsciously trivializes the athletic efforts of African American female athletes (Douglas, 2002) and the mainstream media further constructs racialized and stereotypical images of these athletes (Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005). Withycombe (2011), addresses this issue:

Everyday Black female student athletes face sexist and racist stereotyping, but they also have empowering experiences in sports. Despite the oppressive forces they face, Black female athletes work hard to prove themselves both on and off the court. Their determination to be successful in every meaning of the world is a heroic feat (p. 420).

Much of the research conducted by the NCAA is limited on the Black female student athlete experience (Bower & Martin, 1999). NCAA researchers utilize standardized assessments and measurement tools on Division I student athletes rather than exploring their unique experiences and perspectives. At the high school athletic level, White females have a higher participation rate at 51%, versus Black female athletes at 40%. As a result, Black females are underrepresented at the collegiate level (10.4% of all Division I student athletes). Several authors have argued that this disproportionate representation is the result of racial stereotyping; including the presumption that Black athletes are naturally talented in some sports but are unsuited to participate in others (Acosta, 1986; Barclay, 1979; Richey, 1992).

Stereotyping has a long-term effect on student athletes. The effect of this stereotyping is said to limit opportunities for Black female athletes both for college
scholarships and for future coaching and athletic leadership opportunities that Title IX has created for women (Bower and Martin, 1999).

**Gender and Racial Stereotypes**

Withycombe (2011) states that culturally gender and racial stereotypes influence athletes’ experiences. With the growth of the media coverage and technology use, Black female student athletes are placed in a spotlight. The 2007 example of Rutgers Women’s Basketball team and Imus’s remarks “Nappy Headed Hos” are a prime example. Imus’s comment severely disrupted the lives of the Rutgers women’s basketball team. They had to seek social support. As athletes they had to contend with historically rooted stereotypes of Black female athletes as masculine and sexually promiscuous (Liberti, 1999).

Black female student athletes, like their male counterparts, are often seen as “natural athletes” (Cahn, 1994; Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005). Their biological and physical structure/built are much more featured than White female athletes. White women’s athletic success stems from their work ethic and “hard work” (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Douglas, 2002;). Black female student athletes are seen as to have more muscle definition, are stronger, can jump higher, and are faster than White athletes. They are also seen as “mannish” and represented in a highly sexualized manner. In addition to their physical stereotypes, Black female athletes are also portrayed as loud, aggressive, and obnoxious (Douglas, 2002). According to Douglas (2002) Black female athletes’ confidence and assertiveness is inextricably linked to wider narratives about black incivility. A brief historical context is further discussed to better understand the construction of the gender and racial stereotypes.
Dating back to the time of American slavery, Black women, were placed at the bottom of society. Their jobs and responsibilities included low-level tasks such as house chores, cleaning, cooking, plantation field work, maintaining the upkeep of the household, and child care; they were also seen as wearing dingy clothing. White women on the other hand were superior to these Black women. They were usually the wife of the master and gave orders to the slaves. White women’s appearance and status in society was much higher than Black woman, as White women had power and freedom. The White man or master considered Black women property; therefore many were victims of sexual and physical abuse (Yarborough and Bennett, 2000, p. 634). White women were depicted as “goddesses and pure” (Yarborough & Bennett, 2000). The historical and social experiences of African women during slavery resulted in numerous images that defined African American women as deviant (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 633). A parallel can be established where as similar to the time of slavery, the contemporary sports world for Black female student athletes bodies are still labeled dissimilar.

**Academic Struggles of Black Female Student Athletes**

For this study, the Black feminist theory and intersectionality framework help make sense of the Black female student athlete experience as this group maintains an underrepresentation and disproportionate presence within predominately White institutions. Black female student athletes face many challenges that are different than White athletes. For example, a study conducted by the NCAA showed that a large percentage of Black athletes are in the lower quartile of the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) admissions exams (NCAA, 2003).
Research suggests that the reasoning behind this is because many Black students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds than their White counterparts (Bower & Martin, 1999). In addition, research has indicated that low standardized test scores, low socioeconomic status, and being first-generation college students are all factors that put students at risk for not succeeding academically in college (Roueche, 1993). Given this research, frameworks such as the career transition scorecard (CTS) by Eddie Comeaux, is beneficial to higher educational practitioners as it gathers the perspectives of the student athletes as to what works best for their success (Comeaux, 2015). One may recommend, additional academic coaching, or mentoring sessions. There seems to be more reasoning behind the low standardized test scores, low socioeconomic status, and the status of being a first-generation college student that the NCAA has lacked to include. Qualitative research as such can contribute to factors listed above.

Bower and Martin (1999) found through their research study that the academic and social stresses take a toll in the psychological and physical well-being of Black female student athletes. As a result, they examined the alcohol and drug use of Black female student athletes through the distribution of a questionnaire. They found that Black female athletes were at an increased risk for drug and alcohol use, as they must find ways to cope with all of the stressors.

One of the limitations of the above study was the use of the questionnaire. Questionnaires are structured with close-ended questions. It does not provide the respondent the opportunity to elaborate further on their responses; it is usually a generalized form. The athletes in this study probably had limited options of responses. Quantitative research methods have their limitations and weaknesses as does qualitative
methods. For the purpose of this study, the goal is to avoid quantifying the data. Rather a more in depth qualitative research method (semi-structured interviews) will allow the respondents to give more details regarding their experiences on campus and issues with being Black and female student athletes at predominately White institutions.

**Sensemaking**

Sensemaking involves placing stimuli into some sort of framework, making sense of what we see and hear (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). This process occurs in relationship with, and influences, the thing that is being made sense of. While interpretation is typically employed to cope with entities that already exist, sensemaking better explains how entities get there in the first place; how the final product emerges. Applying the concept of sensemaking to the Black female student athlete experience helps to better understand their experiences. As is the case with many aspects of development, sensemaking is influenced by the social, physical, and cultural contexts of the sense-maker (Spillane, 2000).

As Karl Weick (1995) explains in his book, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, there are seven properties that inform individuals’ engagement in sensemaking: grounded in identity construction, enactive of sensible environments, retrospective, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. On the individual level, this involves accessing prior knowledge and experience “To notice, make sense of, interpret, and react to incoming stimuli—all the while actively constructing meaning from interactions with the environment, of which policy is part” (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).
Chapter Summary

The literature review focused on the knowledge essential for understanding the Black female student athlete experience. Intersectionality and Black feminist theory were reviewed as the foundations of this study. Interpreting the themes of race and gender through the lens of intersectionality and Black feminist theory allows us to uncover the empowering experiences of Black female student athletes. A review of Title IX legislation, also gave a basic understanding of the educational goals to provide equality to women in athletics and educational settings.

The literature revealed specific conditions that affect the academic and athletic experiences and retention of this group. The literature also displayed instances and studies that support the notion of underrepresentation of Black female student athletes at Division I universities. The literature also supported the claim that there is a gap in Black female student athletes’ eligibility and retention rates compared to White student athletes and there is much work that still needs to be done in academic performance (such as standardize testing scores, GPAs, and the college bound achievement gap), mostly evident in the revenue generating sports (football and men’s basketball). Researchers have examined many variables and theoretical models associated with the Academic Progress Rate and Graduation Success Rate and retention (Comeaux, 2015). However, a review of literature indicates a lack of thorough research and provisions of practical approaches that athletic departments and universities can use as a foundation for their commitment to academic and athletic success for all student athletes.

Black female student athletes are “agents of knowledge”; therefore, my study will examine their experiences from their own words and personal experiences to learn about
them individually and as a group within society (Collins, 1998). The intersectionality framework did not inherently privilege one aspect of identity over the others; however, it recognized that their “salience varies among and within groups” (p. 208) and that the analyses of power in various contexts served to “reveal which differences carry significance” (p. 798). The Black feminist theory and intersectionality are the ideal frameworks to inform the research questions for the study and influence the development of the interview protocol. Black feminist theory and intersectionality provide the foundation on race and gender struggle that Black female student athletes experience at predominately White institutions face. Chapter 3 describes the methodology I used to explore the Black female student athlete experience further.
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes at Division I predominantly White institutions. The rationale for collecting material on the lived experiences of these student athletes is to understand what their experiences mean to them and to provide a thick and rich description of these experiences. This study will investigate how eight Black female student athletes make meaning of their undergraduate athletic and academic experiences. This study will attend to the voices of these students, from their perspective. This chapter will focus on qualitative approach to the study and its connection to my research questions:

1. How do Black female student athletes who attend predominantly White Division I institutions make meaning of their athletic and academic experiences?
2. What role does race and gender specifically play in the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at the Division I level at predominantly White institutions?

Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design has been selected to study Black female student athletes at the Division I level. There are quantitative representation and matrixes that the NCAA produces that show graduation rates; however, the student athletes’ true stories are not told. It is the goal of this research to explore what has previously been unexplored and to portray an accurate account of the black female student athlete experience as it relates to selected participants (Black female student athletes). Litchman (2016) defines qualitative research as a method of inquiry that uses various traditions of gathering data in order to understand human behavior in their natural setting.
Marshall & Rossman (1995) also have a similar definition stating “Qualitative methods facilitate exploratory research in that a thorough, well-conceived plan that is based on current knowledge acts as a starting point that may require modification when unforeseen considerations need to be taken into account” (p. 15). They continue to say that, “The research has to build in openness to the unexpected, to new findings, and it has to retain a flexible design that fosters the exploration of nuances of meaning in a complex, tacit process” (p. 30). One of the main goals of qualitative research methods is to accurately portray the authentic descriptions that foster understanding and representation of an experience or phenomenon (Munhall, 1994). Qualitative research also aims to chronicle and interpret the complete context of that which is being studied from the participants’ vantage point or frame of reference (Leininger, 1985).

**Method of Inquiry**

Qualitative research attempts to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach is the best approach as I can use each participant’s responses as case studies to reveal meaning. The in-depth interviews will allow the participants to be open and share their lived experiences. I am interested in understanding more about the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at predominantly White institutions.

To examine Black female student athletes athletic and academic experiences at predominantly White institutions, it will be useful for this research to apply a Black feminist theory lens, coupled with the intersectionality framework. The lens of Black
feminist theory and intersectionality allowed this research to explore how, and if racism and gender plays out in the student athletes academic and athletic experiences.

**Pilot Study**

Prior to the commencement of the study, a pilot interview was conducted. Pilot interviewing is considered the pre-testing or “trying-out” of a particular research instrument (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or where proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). More importantly, pilot interviewing is particularly important in qualitative studies, as it helps to provide a framework and develop research questions (Mertens, 2009). A formal pilot interview was conducted with a Black female student athlete at a PWI in December 2017 to assess the interview protocol.

The study lasted approximately 60 minutes and the interaction with the participant aided the researcher in confirming the validity and applicability of the interview questions for a broader audience. Results gleaned from this pilot interview show that there is an expressed concern about the transitional period from high school to college and adjusting to the demanding expectations of collegiate academics coursework and athletics. There is also a belief that racism and gender bias had played a part in their academic and athletic experience. Based on the pilot test, the study is affirmed to gain the interest of the desired population and generate significant participation and rich data.
Study Participants

A purposive selection strategy was used to select eight Black female student athletes who are enrolled in a four year Division I predominantly White institution. I chose seven basketball players and one lacrosse player; due to convenience. This was purposeful because, I wanted to keep the participant population small enough to collect as much data as possible. A small sample enables in-depth interviews. The purpose of choosing multiple universities was because I wanted to add diversity and compare and contrast the experiences from each university. The student athlete must be a varsity player on a full athletic scholarship.

Purposive sampling will allow me to generate data to explore processes, large enough to make meaningful comparisons, to test and suggest theory and explanation that can account for similarities and differences (Mason, 1996). The names of enrolled Black female student athletes were obtained through participant referrals, email recruitment correspondence, and word of mouth. The age ranges of the participants are between 18 and 22 years old. Each participant completed a demographic/ background survey and complete the informed consent document before the interview process begins. All Black female student athletes who identify on the survey as Black and female will be considered for this research study. Once participant selection is completed, consent forms were issued to participants prior to the interviews.

Positionality/ Relationship to the study

As a former Division III collegiate basketball player, I have had an experience that enables me to connect to the Black female student athletes. I once was an athlete and
experienced the demands of being a student athlete. If it were not for the support of my coaches, advisors, and faculty, I would not be in the position that I am today. Through the game of basketball, I have learned many skills such as communication, leadership, accountability, patience, hard work, teamwork, and perseverance. Playing at a Division III, NCAA, small liberal arts school in Boston, MA was a different experience; different from a high school perspective. I was away from home, I had to adapt to a new city, and school environment.

In addition to athletics, I had a supportive and other student leaders in my circle of friends to rely on. The faculty and staff members were all very supportive and encouraging in my academic studies. Being a Black female student athlete empowered me and helped me through the obstacles and to graduate in 4 years. This is one of the main reasons I am also pursuing an advanced degree. As a former assistant girls basketball coach at Neumann Goretti High School (Philadelphia, PA), I coached the varsity girls basketball team from 2012-2014 season. Now many of the girls have graduated and are currently playing at the Division I collegiate level. Some of the colleges and institutions that these young women play at include Towson, Rutgers, James Madison, St. John’s University, Temple University, University of Maine, and Longwood University.

Secondly, many women sports are not revenue generating sports. Unlike most advertised sports, men’s basketball and football, the purpose of this study is to shed some light on the female athletes; specifically Black female student athletes. Women teams do not get as much exposure and media attention as the male sports. The goal is to engage in
dialogue and explore what all goes into their experiences. Hopefully the NCAA can utilize this for future research and programming.

**IRB Process/ Ethics**

Before any research was conducted, I received approval of the research protocol from Temple University’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Appendix K). When I received the IRB approval, I then proceeded to contact the interested participants. I gave them a description of the study and outline. I then asked to schedule a preliminary meeting with them to discuss the purpose of the research project and the nature of the 3-interview process (Appendix A). During this preliminary meeting, I communicated with the participant that their name or any other information shared in the research study will be kept confidential.

**Interviewing Processing**

Student athletes willing to participate were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B). All participants were asked to read and sign a permission to audiotape form (Appendix E). To safeguard confidentiality, participants were also assigned a unique pseudonym and participant number to be used in place of their given name in written material throughout the research process. Efforts to ensure anonymity also included pseudonyms for the schools and athletic departments, locations, and other individuals named in the context of the study. If partial or full quotes are appropriate to illustrate the data analysis and/or findings, a pseudonym was used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity with any personal information deleted. The participants’ names would not appear in any future presentation or publication.
One of the key objectives of this research project is to illuminate the experiences of the Black female student athletes. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the research participants in the Fall 2017/ Spring 2018 semesters. The primary source of data for this research project was semi-structured interviews because they allowed for deeper exploration of the ways in which people express their experiences and realities. The use of naturalistic data-gathering techniques (in-depth interviews) was used. According to the text, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, naturalistic researchers explore complex situations and problems using a variety of techniques, including participant observation, documentary and conversational analysis, and interviews (Rubin, H. & Rubin, I., 2012).

The first interview took place December 2017/ January 2018; the second interview was conducted in February 2018; and the final interview was conducted in March 2018. These interviews took place over Skype. The interview guide was aligned with the scope of the study’s conceptual framework; it contained 23 open-ended questions with related probing questions.

The interviews questions emerged from a variety of sources, including literature that examined the Black feminist theory, intersectionality, the student athlete experience (Bruening, Armstrong & Pastore, 2005; Collins, 1990a, 1990b, 1998, 2000; Freidan, 1963; Hooks, 1981, 1984, 1989), sensemaking, as well as the researcher’s own thoughts regarding gaps in the previous literature. The interviews gathered data that allowed analysis to go beyond ordinary reporting to provide deeper exploration into each participant’s day to day experiences at predominantly White schools. Each interview was tape recorded through the use of the voice recorder software application. The interviews
were audio recorded for the purpose of making a transcript that was initially manually transcribed, then subsequently uploaded to NVIVO for classification and categorical aggregation to establish emerging themes and patterns.

The first interview was designed to learn more about the participant. The goal was to gather background information like, family structure, career interest, factors that influenced school choice, etc. (Appendix G).

During the second interview, I dug a little deeper, asking the participant to make meaning of their collegiate experience and the role of race and gender. Questions were geared towards support relationships amongst the coach, academic advisors, the role of race and gender in their academics and athletic experiences. The theoretically-based interview questions also aimed to demonstrate whether and how the participants’ responses supported or challenged the theories used in this study (Yin, 2016). The interview questions also included a time for the participant to add anything additional outside of the questions (Appendix H).

The final interview, also known as the member check, was used as a summarization of the previous two meetings. This was an opportunity to gather any new data. The participants were given the transcripts/summary of the interviews. The participant was also given the opportunity to ask or add anything additional that might not had been covered and addressed in the previous interviews. As the researcher, I asked the participant to elaborate further on a specific incident or example she used in her interview #2.

The reasoning for including these semi-structured interviews was to create an open conversation and dialogue between the researcher and participant. The atmosphere
was open and conversational based rather than a question and answer type of session. I liked how the participants shared stories and gave detailed examples and responses.

As part of each interview session, I briefed and debriefed the participants. The purpose of briefing, before conducting the actual interview, is to remind the participant of the context of the study, the purpose of the interview, and the use of the tape recorder during the session to collect data. This gives the participant an opportunity to ask any questions before we began the questions (Kvale, 1996). Debriefing or “member checking” occurs at the end of the interview session three. This is when the researcher summarizes the main points discussed in all three interviews; find common themes. Debriefing or “member checking” is important as it ensures that both the researcher and participant are on the same page and in understanding of the notes gathered in the interviews. At this time, the participant can add comments, or further explanation if needed.

Permission and consent forms for audio recording were distributed at the initial meeting. After the interviews (1 and 2) were completed, they were transcribed to give to the participant during the 3rd interview for review and member checking. Field notes were reviewed, summarized, and organized to give to the participant in the final interview. If the participant requested that a change or anything additional needed to be added to the field notes, then a revised copy was sent to the participant via email. Revisions (if applicable) were for points of fact; if for example, they were transcribed incorrectly. I did add additional notes for clarification; otherwise, the data collected in the first two interviews were exactly that, data from those interviews.
Field Notes

As a means of strengthening the validity of this research study, I took field notes during and after participant interviews. The purpose of field notes was to better understand and take detailed notes of the interview. The recording may not have caught things like eye movements or certain gestures of the participants. The field notes were used to capture certain things that the audio recording may have missed. The field notes template is attached. Handwritten notes were collected on the field notes template included in Appendix H. The field notes allowed me to note descriptive and reflective actions of the participants. The purpose of capturing these things was to add validity (evidence) to the research and meaning.

Data Analysis

The analysis process was a continuous process. It first began when I manually started to transcribe the interviews. I transcribed the interviews immediately after I conducted the interview so that I could give the participant a copy. Also, the information was fresh in my brain and I wanted to be sure to include the information. When conducting the data analysis for this research project, I first considered the ways in which my data related to this study’s two research questions. The data analysis strategy useful for this study included two data sources: open coding and categorizing.

Data for this project were coded to allow systematic analyses of participants’ responses to semi-structured interview questions. Taylor & Anthony (2000) confirm the efficacy of analysis utilizing the narrative approach to interpret interview text. Data managing takes place through the creating and organizing of files for data (Creswell,
I created a folder for each participant that included their demographic information, actual interview questions, consent signed forms, interview answers, and field notes. Since the information was organized, I was able to readily locate and make notes and advance to the next phase of establishing the chronology, coding, and writing of the data according to emerging themes. The next two phases of the data analysis consisted of reading the interviews, making margin notes, developing initial codes, and the classification of categories. The final step consisted of utilizing the qualitative software, NVIVO. Wiltshier (2011) asserts that the NVIVO software is useful to gather all of the data together in one place such as web-based sources, PDFs, video and data sources. All transcripts were imported directly into NVIVO.

I used the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique described by Willig (2008) to re-analyze my data. The data was analyzed in five stages:

**Stage 1:** Entailed reading and rereading the text of each interview to record initial thoughts and observations, including associations, language use and summary statements. Other approaches to coding and analyzing interview data (e.g., Butterfield, Trevino & Ball, 1996) similarly label the process in this stage as breaking the transcript down into thought units. Thought units could include a phrase, a complete sentence or a number of sentences.

**Stage 2:** This analysis involved identifying recurrent themes and patterns in the text with a particular focus on the main concepts of interest to this study: (a) How do Black female student athletes make meaning of their academic and athletic experiences? (b) What role does race and gender play in the academic and athletic experiences of Black Female Student Athletes?

**Stage 3:** Uncovered themes that were related to one another to develop natural clusters of concepts that share meanings or references.
**Stage 4:** Entailed production of a summary table of the structured themes (in NVIVO) for each interviewee, together with quotations to illustrate the theme or meaning.

**Stage 5:** The final stage involved integrating the summaries from each interview to produce an overall perspective on the Black female student athlete experience.

Figure 2.0 exhibits the codes and themes that emerged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and Career Goals</td>
<td>⇒ Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with teammates and coaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to Perform (academics and athletics)</td>
<td>⇒ Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Reality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support system</td>
<td>⇒ Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self segregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic vs. International viewpoints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Bias</td>
<td>⇒ Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.0 Data Coding Table*

After analyzing the data in NVIVO categories, four broad codes were created:

(1) Academics (2) Athletics, (3) Race, and (4) Gender. Eight total themes emerged which included transitional experiences, life and career goals, relationships with teammates and coaches, racial reality, support system, self-segregation, domestic vs. international viewpoint, and gender bias.
Chapter Summary

This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes. After receiving approval to conduct the study from Temple University’s IRB, the researcher selected eight participants. The primary method of collecting data was through semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place over a span of three months, between January 2018 and March 2018. The researcher applied Black feminist theory and intersectionality as the theoretical frameworks to organize and analyze the data.

The researcher also utilized the NVIVO software package to assist with the coding process. The researcher, using the methods and procedures of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), analyzed the data collected from the interviews. Using, in part, such information as the number of female student athletes who addressed similar issues and experiences during the interviews (the frequency of responses on a given topic, theme, or question), patterns and themes regarding their experiences emerged from the data.

I would like to point out that the main reasoning for selecting the 5 multiple institutions was due to convenience. I specifically chose basketball players as I personally coached these players. Also, the players used word of mouth to recruit their teammates or other Black female student athletes on their campuses to participate in this research study. The reasoning I chose to do Skype interviews was because of distance. Some participants were in school in the South, while other participants schools were located at different parts of the country. My decision to use Skype was solely for convenience. As we live in the 21st century, I took full advantage of the use of technology. I was able to culturally
connect with the participants. The use of technology is a language and a medium that these students know and are most comfortable with. Adding on to this, I deliberately chose a small sample size as I treated each interview as a case study. This was an exploratory in-depth study. I did multiple interviews with the participants.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study in response to the two-study research questions that pertain to the Black female student athletes’ academic and athletic experiences. A discussion of the Black female student athletes’ academic and athletic experiences is also presented using Black feminist theory and intersectionality and the components of race and gender.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Revisiting Research Purpose and Applicable Theories

The purpose of this research study was to gather data on the academic and athletic experiences of eight Black female student athletes. This study examined the unique experiences of Black female student athletes at predominately White Division I institutions. Specifically, the research examined their academic and athletic experiences at the universities. Lastly, the research addressed the issues associated with race and gender within the student athletes’ experiences.

Three in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the eight participants. A better understanding of the experiences of the Black female student athlete may help higher education practitioners with information to make decisions about athletics and student affairs programs, policies, services and practices. It also allows this underrepresented group of students to share their stories and voice their experiences. The literature review revealed that there are specific conditions that affect the academic and athletic experiences and retention of Black female student athletes. An application of the Black feminist theory and intersectionality was helpful to the researcher in understanding the Black female student athlete experience on campus and provided a framework to help understand the meaning of those experiences.

This chapter presents the results of this research study. The first part of this chapter presents findings: participant profiles and demographics of the eight participants. The second part of this chapter provides this study’s findings for each of the two research
questions through the overarching themes within: (1) academics, (2) athletics, (3) race, and (4) gender. The final part of this chapter presents the discussion of the findings.

**Demographics of the Participants**

Each student athlete was given a pseudonym and participant number prior to participating in the interviews. Participants were encouraged to speak candidly, while also being assured that their identities would be kept confidential. A demographic profile below of the study participants provides their pseudonym and background information on their school, major, graduation year, and sport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Graduation Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aubree</td>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deena</td>
<td>Omega</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Traci</td>
<td>Omega</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Kappa</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Damita</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Arlene</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Organizational Sciences</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.0 Participant Profiles*
Participant Profiles

The eight participants in this study are Black female student athletes at Division I schools who are currently active scholarship athletes. One of the participants is an immigrant whose experiences may differ from the non-immigrant participants in this research project. Most of the participants’ class year is 2nd year (sophomores) or higher. They have all declared their majors and are working towards a bachelor’s degree. The participants all self-report the information provided below.

Six out of eight of the participants reported that they have a strong support network at their schools (academic staff or athletic staff), while the other two have limited support. They each come from different high schools, Amateur Athletic Union AAU and club travel teams, so their transitional experiences from high school to college were all unique. Collectively, all participants enjoy playing their sport and learning. They appeared to be very passionate about their majors that they have chosen. All seek to pursue a career in either professional basketball or other professional fields or continue their education (graduate school) once their four years of eligibility has termed and have successfully graduated with their bachelor’s degree. Below is a snapshot of each participant’s basic background and accomplishments thus far:

Participant #1: Aubree

Aubree is from the Northeast. She is a sophomore at Zeta University. Studying criminal justice major with a minor in business management. She reports that she hopes to one day land a career in law enforcement (policing or federal agency). She chose Zeta University because of the “family-oriented” environment. Also, one of her teammates is
from the same hometown and they are really close friends. Athletically, Aubree is a starter for the Zeta University women’s basketball team. Her freshman year, she earned Conference All-Freshman team and also played in 32 games. She also averaged double figures (the accumulation of a double-digit number total in one of five statistical categories—points, rebounds, assists, steals, and blocked shots—in a game). Aubree reports she loves the school environment, the coaching staff, and the team. Though the team did not make it to the NCAA tournament post play, they did however advance in the Women’s National Initiation Tournament (WNIT).

Aubree reports that she comes from a very supportive family. Her mother is a single parent. Aubree has two older sisters and a younger brother. Her mother works as a full-time nurse and travels frequently to Aubree’s home games when her schedule permits. Aubree is not the first to attend college in her family. Aubree is an average B student. She reports that her happiness is on the basketball court. She really enjoys competing on the court and training. In high school, she said she was always the last one to leave the gym. After practices, she would hang around to practice her jump shot and get additional reps in. That same discipline has carried over to her collegiate discipline and work out habits. She wants to be the best athlete on the floor. Basketball has taught Aubree much about patience, time management, discipline, teamwork, and communication. She cherishes her relationship with her teammates especially her teammate from the same hometown; Aubree reports that she looks up to her like a big sister.
Participant #2: Deena

Deena is currently a junior at Omega University. She too is from the Northeast. In high school, Deena earned the City’s “All-City” Award and made the “All-City” public school All-Star team. Attending a public high school in the inner city and being from the inner city, she wanted to choose a college that is located in the inner city. That is why she chose Omega University. Majoring in Criminal Justice, Deena reports her goal is to improve the United States justice system. She truly believes that our judicial system is unfair especially when it comes to Black men. She wants to be in a position to make a difference.

Transiting from high school to college, Deena was a C average student. She did the minimum that was required of her in high school. Deena did not have strong enough SAT/ ACT scores to get into Omega University. Her determination, preparation, and hard work, allowed Deena to retake the testing and earn a better score to meet the admissions qualifications. Once she got to Omega University, she took her academics much more serious. She reports that her parents are very proud of her and her academic achievements.

Athletically, Deena reports that she is not happy. She came to Omega University with hopes of playing and competing at the Division I level. Unfortunately, Deena and the relationship with the coaching staff are not good. Deena expressed her frustration with the coaching staff and her playing time. She has expressed interest in transferring and has actually begun the process. She loves the academic experience of Omega University however; her basketball experience has been very disappointing. At one point, she wanted to quit playing basketball; nevertheless, her parents encouraged her to “ride it
out.” She has found much support from the executive senior associate athletic director/senior woman administrator (SWA) at Omega University and also the student counseling services at Omega University. She said that this would only help her become a better person athlete in the end.

Participant #3: Kimberly

Kimberly attends Alpha University. She is a sophomore and has just declared her major as Kinesiology. She loves Alpha University! Below are a few of her athletic accomplishments:

2016-17 as a freshman:

- 2017 Conference Rookie of the Year
- Conference All-Rookie Team
- 6x Conference Rookie of the Week
- Led Alpha University and all conference freshmen in rebounding at 5.5 rpg (rebounds per game)
- Second-highest field goal percentage in conference overall

Before College:

- Rated a three-star recruit by ESPN.com
- Sports Writers High School girls basketball All-State team (2016)
- All-Southeastern State first team in 2016
- Lead high school team to back-to-back Catholic League Championships
- High school team was ranked No. 1 in the nation during her junior season and won state title
- Repeated as state champions in 2016
- Earned high school Sixth Man of the Year award

Kimberly reports that she comes from a single parent household. Her mother raised Kimberly and her older sister alone. She shared that her father is incarcerated for life. Kimberly states that, her mother, and sister all have a pretty close relationship. They are a “close-knit” family. The mother and sister travel to a lot of Kimberly’s games. They were
also very impactful in the college recruitment process. The main reason Kimberly chose Alpha University was because of the instant connection between the coach and the whole environment. “On game days, the Arena gets packed with fans!” states, Kimberly. She praises the head coach and gives much credit to him. He has helped her game improve to another level. One of Kimberly’s greatest struggles right now is keeping up with balancing the traveling schedule, basketball workouts, and practices. As she has entered into the core coursework for her Kinesiology major, the homework assignments and lab work have become much more challenging.

**Participant #4: Traci**

Like Deena, Traci too is from Omega University. She plays on the women’s lacrosse team. Traci is redshirting this season due to an injury she experienced last season. She tore her Achilles last season. Traci is from the Northeast and comes from a very small town. Growing up on her club teams traveling teams and her high school teams, she was the only Black player. Unlike basketball and track and field, where there is more than one Black girl on the team, Traci reports that the sport of lacrosse is different. Rarely do you see lacrosse fields or teams in the inner city. You mainly see basketball courts, tracks, and football fields; therefore, basketball, track, and football are the sports that attract the Black community members. These are the sports that the youth constantly see played in their communities and on television. Traci reported that being the only Black girl on the team never bothered her. This was the norm for her. She hoped for more diversity on the lacrosse team when she got to college however that did not happen. Like the Black girls on the basketball team, Traci experienced racial differences and gender differences too at Omega University.
She is studying Kinesiology and would like to continue her education after Omega University and attend graduate school (Occupational Therapy) back in her hometown because she is home sick. In 2016 and 2017, Traci was named to Omega University’s athletic director’s honor roll for a second year in a row for having a GPA of 3.0 or above. Her greatest supporters are her parents. They come to every home game. They have pushed her to be where she is today both academically and athletically. Traci also has a strong relationship with her coaching staff. She looks up to her head coach as a “mother figure.” They help her through any issue and to also stay on track with the demands of being a student athlete. Deena has a close relationship with her teammates and loves living in a big city and traveling and exploring the city.

**Participant #5: Fiona**

Fiona is an international student from Nigeria, Africa. She attended high school in the Northeast part of the United States. She plays women’s basketball at Kappa University. In high school, she was learning the game of basketball for the very first time. Through her travel teams (club teams) and high school coach, she was able to pick up the skills and understanding of the game of basketball. She also lived with a host family while attending high school. Fiona reports that her biggest struggle is time management. Moving to the United States without her family here was an overwhelming transition. She constantly reminds herself that there is a bigger purpose. She wants to get a good education and land a great career when this is all said and done.

Fiona chose Kappa University because it embodied everything that she needed in a school, especially because she was an international student. She needed a family away from home. She loved the coaching staff and the resources Kappa University had to offer.
She is majoring in Sociology. The reason she chose that major was because she hopes to one day go back to Nigeria to help the youth like herself. She wants to start an organization to provide them with educational resources and get them involved in sports. She would also like to start her own clothing line. Because of her height, she is unable to find clothes that properly fit her. She often wears men’s clothing or clothing that does not fit her properly. She reports that she struggles to find fashionable clothing.

As mentioned, Fiona reports that she struggles with time management (reference quotes below). This weakness also carries over into her schoolwork and basketball. She constantly feels overwhelmed with the pressure to perform well on the basketball court and also perform well in the classroom. In addition, she is an international student. She feels like she has to juggle many balls however, she always puts her best foot forward.

She gives much credit to her support system at Kappa University that are constantly there for her in time of need.

**Participant #6: Sam**

Sam is a junior at Delta University. She is a transfer student athlete and is redshirting this season. Delta University is located in the Southern part of the United States. Sam is originally from the Northeast. This was a difficult transition for Sam as she moved further away from her family. She reports that the reasoning to transfer to a new university was solely because of the relationship with her old coach. Sam reports that her former coach did not give her an opportunity to play and she did not agree with many of her coaching decisions. Sam has grown a lot and reports that she had more to offer as a player. Outside of basketball, she has learned to become independent and handle situations on her own. She can’t wait for the redshirt season to end so she can get back on
the court and compete again. She has been working hard all season, becoming stronger, a better athlete and student. She made the dean’s list in the Fall 2017 semester. Sam has always excelled in the classroom (A/B) student.

She is majoring in Communications. Hopefully once she gets done playing basketball, she wants to be a sports anchor/broadcaster for ESPN or any sports talk show. She would love the opportunity to play overseas or in the WNBA. This has been one of her goals since she was six years old. Sam has a close relationship with her mother and younger brother. Her parents separated while Sam was in middle school. Sam wants to be an example and be a positive role model for her younger brother who too plays basketball. She has maintained a close relationship with her AAU coach (travel club former coach). She calls him when she has issues or needs athletic advice. He was very influential in her decision to transfer. She work outs with him during the off season or summer break. He has helped her basketball game grow and become a better skilled athlete.

Sam mentioned that her high school prepared her well both academically and athletically for the demands of college. Especially on the basketball court, the same practice drills used in practice in high school, are the same drills that are practiced in college. Her high school coaches helped Sam to develop a good work ethic and leadership that carried over into her college years.

**Participant #7: Damita**

Damita was a multi-sport student athlete in high school. She played volleyball and women’s basketball. She had a better winning record in volleyball. In volleyball, her high
school team won the state championship her senior year. However, she reports that she loved the game of basketball more. That’s why she chose Alpha University to attend college. Damita is currently majoring in Journalism. She was previously a pre-medical major, but she just switched her major to Journalism because pre-med was too difficult. She is teammates and roommates with Kimberly. Last season (freshman year) she suffered from an injury. This was her first injury ever in her athletic career. This was a rough patch for her, as she was very excited to play her freshman year, and this injury was a setback. Damita reports that the coaching staff, parents, and teammates, all helped her get through the injury and recovery process.

Her sophomore year has been much better! She was excited to get back onto the court and compete. She really enjoys playing for the head coach. As Kimberly mentioned too, he has helped her basketball game go to another level. He holds them accountable in both their academics and on the basketball court. The professors and tutors have been very helpful with Damita’s schoolwork. Damita reports that her professors are understanding of the athletes’ travel schedules and the tutors ensure that they understand the work.

Damita understands that after her years at Alpha University, she does not want to continue to play basketball. She stills wants to stay in the sports field, that’s why she chose Journalism as a major. She would like to be a sports anchor or analyst for ESPN. During the off-season (when the weather permits), Damita loves to play golf with her father. Her father is her role model and keeps Damita and her siblings involved in sports.
Participant #8: Arlene

Arlene is a senior at Beta University studying Organizational Sciences with a minor in Psychology. She plans to go to graduate school to get a MBA. In addition to playing women’s basketball, Arlene is also a member of a Black sorority at Beta University. Arlene is also from the Northeast. She goes home frequently to visit her family. Her senior year has been a little rough. She reports that she was cut from the basketball team; however was still able to keep her athletic scholarship. She had many differences and issues with the newly appointed head coach. Her junior year was when she joined the sorority. This impacted her basketball season severely and was one of the main reasons; she believes she was cut from the team. Arlene reports that the coaching staff did not support her or understand the process. They gave her a hard time when she was running late for practice, even though she gave the coaching staff a heads up that she would be running late.

Besides that, Arlene, reports that she excels in the classroom. There is one professor who she truly values and has a strong bond with. Arlene reports that she can rely on this professor in time of need. This one particular professor helped Arlene in landing a summer internship. During the summer of 2017, Arlene landed an internship back in her hometown’s City Hall’s office, working for the Department of Education’s special project data collection.

Reflecting on her high school days, Arlene reports that she was named the league’s Player of the Year in her senior year. Arlene’s freshman and sophomore years at Beta University, the women’s basketball team won the conference championship. Her parents have been a support factor for Arlene. They traveled to all of her games and even
supported her through the process of becoming a sorority member. Her mother is in the same sorority, so she too could relate to Arlene’s experience. Arlene’s father is a junior college football coach near Arlene’s hometown. Arlene has been around sports her whole life. Arlene still has one more year of NCAA Athletic eligibility left, and is considering transferring to another Division I school to continue to play basketball. She misses the game and competing. She is looking at potential graduate schools closer to her hometown.

**Organization of Findings Data**

The data from this research is organized by two research questions:

1. How do Black female student athletes who attend predominately White division I institutions make meaning of their athletic and academic experiences?
2. What role does race and gender specifically play in the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at the Division I level at predominately White institutions?

There were two areas of concentration academics/athletics and race/gender. The below themes are broken up that way.

**Research Question #1:**

How do Black female student athletes who attend predominately White Division I institutions make meaning of their athletic and academic experiences?

The study participants shared their perceptions regarding their academic and athletic experiences at predominately White Division I schools. The four themes that emerged academics and athletics were: career and life goals, transitional experiences, relationships with teammates and coaches, and pressure to perform. These themes do not
appear to be unique to this population; however, the themes that emerged from research question #2, the uniqueness of racial and gender experiences are evident.

**Academics and Athletics**

*Transitional Experiences*

One of the first interview questions was to describe their transitional experiences from high school to college. Six out of the eight participants described this transition as easy, while others struggled. Some of the struggling areas included: injuries, adjustment to class and athletic schedule, and adjustment to academic coursework. Although not necessarily related to being a Black female, the transition process can be made easier or more difficult depending on the support, care, and trust the athlete perceives she has around her (Lee & Rotella, 1991). Below are examples of the participants with adjustments to the college environment:

Deena shares:

Academically, the transition was cool. Trying to get into Omega University, it was very difficult. You had to score extremely hard on the SAT/ACT testing. I didn’t take my schooling serious when I was a freshman in high school. I was a C average student. I was determined and I got the SAT score needed to get into Omega University. When I got to Omega University I took care of my books. It wasn’t an issue. But the basketball, it always was an issue. I was always bumping heads with the coach. Not even the head coach; it was my position coach. To her, she always thought that I was in the wrong or running away from her. She thought that I was not trying to involve myself. She just was on my back from day 1.

Traci explains her academic and athletic transition:

Academically, transitioning from high school to college, a lot of my course work was General Education coursework. They weren’t really challenging or hard courses. So compared to high school, it was a huge scary transition. But then, I think throughout college, when I selected my major and began to complete some of my core coursework, the difficulty level got a little harder. It was a challenge for me because I was not prepared for those classes. I didn’t study as much in
high school, so I had to learn and develop good study habits. When I first arrived at Omega University, it wasn’t a huge transition, but definitely throughout college. Athletically it was a challenge with the transition because freshman year, I tore my Achilles. I didn’t really play at all freshman year. But when I first got to Omega University, and did preseason work outs with the team, it was pretty challenging. For example, the speed, the skill level that everyone had, was much higher than mine. It was difficult to adjust because when you are in high school, you are the star of your team. Once you get to college, it’s like everyone was the star of their high school team so it’s like is the same and you don’t stand out as much. You definitely have to work harder.

Fiona who is an immigrant student, found this transition to be a bit challenging:

I think my high school coaches prepared me well for the basketball aspect of college. Definitely the drills in practice were similar. I felt like I was well prepared for basketball. The drills and conditioning helped me mentally as I was prepared for the collegiate challenge. I already knew what to expect. When it came to the academic perspective, I didn’t know how competitive it could get. I already knew basketball was competitive. In terms of academics, students really want to excel in the classroom and how much they value their time and how well they use office hours. Students here at Kappa University use their resources really well, which athletes really don’t have that much time to schedule due to our hectic schedules. It’s really interesting to see how competitive the kids are and make use of the resources that they have.

Aubree shares her transitional experience at Zeta University:

I feel like my high school coaches prepared me very well for college. Actually some of the basketball drills that we do in college, we did with my high school coaches. I felt like I was highly prepared. I was actually surprised, because when you transition from high school to college, it’s really a tough adjustment. But it was easy for me because one of my high school coaches went to Zeta University, so she had the same college experience. She did some of the same things. Academically, I felt like I was prepared academically. My high school is a high achieving education school. I felt like they prepared me pretty well. Though, I did struggle with my language courses when I first got to Zeta University. That’s the only course I really struggled with.

Arlene explains:

In relation to coursework, I think the summer session definitely helped me. Coming in I remember being stressed out for my first two summer classes. We had 5 freshman overall and I was the only one taking two different classes because I started in the Business School. So my first class was geology and I can’t remember the other one but I know that it was hard. So I had the geology class with two others, I think that they were juniors at the time. So I know that that was a struggle for me because at Beta University, a lot of professors make their own textbooks and a lot of the answers you try to figure out and their based solely on
the professor. Transitioning, I think the juniors definitely helped me out. I think it would have been different if I were with the other freshman. Like I was able to apply myself in the summer. In relation to managing my schedule, the first couple of weeks were kind of hard but I kind of got used to it. I think a downfall was the women’s basketball team played in the “Greek Tour” Tournament; therefore everything had to be rushed. I didn’t have the full freshman summer transition. I had to rush everything through that. In relation to workouts, workouts were kind of easier when I got to college. A lot of it was more of the basics. The only things your body has to get used to is lifting, going to class, and having workouts. So depending on the schedule you could have workouts first thing in the morning which could consists of conditioning, in the middle of the day, you’d probably have class, and then later on you’d have probably have practice; well we had practice because we had the Greek Tour/ basketball workouts.

Prior research on the transition of high school students to first year students shows that the above are all common experiences amongst first year students. Theories such as transition theory and adult development theory provide a framework for understanding change and adaption to transition (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) identified three components of a transition for adult learners: “Moving into the learning environment, moving through it, and preparing to leave, or moving on (p. 15). A positive transition and integration for first-year freshmen can consist of several aspects including: adaptation to college life, social and academic integration, engagement through participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and peer involvement (Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Tinto, 2006).

As the participants mentioned in the above interviews, they are experiencing a transition/ change. The above two theories Transition Theory and Adult Development Theory help to better understand this transition period and help for the student athletes to make meaning of their experiences.
Pressure to Perform

Research shows that issues that are particularly challenging for student athletes of color are social and academic integration, performance pressure in their sport, and racism and sexism on campus (Person and LeNoir, 1997). The participants in this research study shared that they felt a sense of pressure to perform in their sport. Research indicates that the pressure to perform feeling is common for many athletes, especially those recruited to compete at the D-I level (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997). Those athletes recruited to compete at the D-I level are especially vulnerable to difficult transitions (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997; Valentine & Deborah, 1999; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). Not only are many athletes unprepared to deal with the high level of competition within and outside of the institutional team, unforeseen circumstances like those of Damita and Traci, who both experienced injuries, can also be devastating for the athletes. The participants all reported that they felt pressure to perform well both in the classroom and in their individual sport. This pressure comes from the coaching staff, athletic administration, and family.

Below are the NCAA (Division I) Guidelines to remain eligible to participate in a varsity sport: Based on a 4.0 scale, student-athletes must earn a 1.8 GPA after 24 semester or 36 quarter hours, a 1.9 GPA after 48 semester or 72 quarter hours, a 2.0 GPA after both 72 semester or 108 quarter hours, and 96 semester or 144 quarter hours. 40 percent of required coursework for a degree must be completed by the end of the second year, 60 percent by the end of the third year and 80 percent by the end of their fourth year. Student-athletes are allowed five years of eligibility and athletically related
financial aid (NCAA, 2008). Given these requirements, all participants utilize the Academic Services Center for student athletes.

Each participant mentioned that they were assigned an academic advisor for the specific team. All have required meetings with their academic advisors to ensure that they are staying on track to graduation completion, meeting the required requirements to stay eligible, and assistance with course selection. In addition, they also have tutors available to help with assignments, papers, quizzes, and tests. Some tutors do travel with some of the teams for additional assistance.

Fiona shares her greatest struggle thus far with time management:

My greatest struggle right now is balancing everything doing well. I feel like I have to juggle various balls at a time (basketball- which I always have to be on top), and school (maintaining a certain GPA). Now that the season has come to an end, I feel like I can breathe! It has been really hard trying to manage my time, play basketball, and understand what is expected of me. At the same time, remembering to complete papers, quizzes, and attending study groups. I’ve learned to coordinate with the tutors and communicate with my academic advisor.

Arlene shares:

Transitioning into freshman year, you are trying to figure out the whole college thing. You are trying to make sure your grades are good, especially with basketball. You are trying to get used to things in this new environment. You are on the road one week, which means you have to coordinate and communicate with professors. I’m just focused on getting the best grades possible.

There is also pressure to perform/ high expectations as well on the playing field.

Majority of the athletes mentioned that from the moment they stepped foot on campus, as a freshman, they felt the pressure from the coaches. So much emphasis was put on winning, having a good record, and advancing to post-play.

Arlene shares her viewpoint:
I honestly think that when it comes to college athletics, it’s a business. A lot of coaches are just out for the job. I’ve seen adversity. The coaches act like they care about what we got going on in our personal lives or issues we may be experiencing at one point, then they basically try to protect themselves. Which is something that they have to do to protect their job. I honestly don’t think a lot of the coaches’ care about the student athletes’ well-being. They just care about winning.

Pressure to perform within the classroom and on the playing field aligns with the findings from Harmon’s (2009) qualitative study of Black female student athletes at predominantly White institutions. The researcher found that in addition to a host of possible issues faced by Black female student athletes, Black female athletes felt there was incongruity between the values of the coaching staff when they were recruited and the values they experienced once they began competing.

**Goals and Life Purpose**

All of the athletes have recognized that one day, basketball will come to an end. They have chosen a career that they will enjoy. For that purpose, they have selected a major and for some minors. When asked about why they have chosen their majors/minors, the responses were filled with excitement and passion!

Fiona for example shared her plans for how she plans to utilize her degree:

I plan to go home to Nigeria and start an organization to help kids like myself and provide them with the resources to a better education, and get involved in basketball. I want to present this opportunity to the youth, because growing up; I didn’t have those resources available. I also want to start my own clothing line after school. Being 6’9, I have difficulty finding clothes that fit me because I am too tall. I want to create an opportunity for tall girls who have little resources to clothing.
Deena states:

The reason I chose Criminal Justice as a major is because I don’t like our judicial system, especially when it comes to Black males. In recent news, there have been many cases where the police force is killing unarmed Black men. It is very unfair and I feel like I can be in a position to make a difference. I don’t like the unfairness of the system. It goes against the Black males. They lose every time. They don’t have a chance. I am using this degree as a tool to land a job in the real world.

Sam expresses her passion for sports:

Hopefully after I get done with basketball in college, I get a chance to play basketball professionally overseas or play in the WNBA. If that does not work out, I would like to be a sports anchor or sports broadcaster for ESPN or any sports talk show.

Traci would like to continue her education and go to graduate school. She explains:

After I graduate, I’ll probably go to an OT (Occupational Therapy) school. I am not sure where yet. I have been looking at schools closer to home, just because I miss home and I also want to make a difference in my hometown community. I think it would be nice attending school closer to home. I see myself attending graduate school closer to home and then, just going from there.

**Relationships with Teammates**

Two participants, Traci and Aubree shared their experiences with their teammates were highly impactful. Most of the women described having formed some positive relationships, especially with the coaches, who had been a source of support for them.

Traci shared:

I chose Omega University because one of my former teammates in high school went here and played lacrosse. I really wanted to play with her again. She is a great leader and friend of mine. Both of our families are close and we grew up playing in the same club team organization. I look to her for advice and guidance through the whole college process since she is ahead of me.
Aubree, too, shares her relationship with one of her teammates:

I chose Zeta University because of the “family-oriented” environment. Everyone was so nice including the coaches, professors, everybody. They had a player from my hometown already on the basketball team. I was close with her. I look up to her like a big sister. She shared with me a lot about the school. When I came for my official visit, I ended up really liking the University.

**Relationships with Coaches**

Each woman also spoke about the role her relationship with her coach had played in her experience. Aubree relayed her experience with her coaching staff:

My relationship with my head coach and assistant coaches is very well. We can come to them and talk to them about anything. They understand us. I think I have a strong relationship with my head coach because he knows where I am from. He understands me. He knows where I want to be after I graduate and I feel like he pushes me everyday to be the best that I can be. He definitely sees potential in me.

Traci also shares her positive relationship with her coach:

I would say my relationship with my head coach is pretty good. If anything were bothering me, I know she would be willing to talk with me through it whether it is something on or off the field that was bothering me. She is someone I can go to. If something happened, outside of lacrosse, I know she is someone whom I can call and she be by my side. She is like a “mother figure” here.

Sam shares:

As far as support at Delta University, I really connect well with one of the assistant coaches. Any time I look down or am not performing well in practice, she always just pulls me to the side and asks me if I am ok. Even if I tell her nothing, after practice, she will call/text me to follow up. Or vise versa, if I feel that I need to talk about something, I’ll call her whenever I need something. She is my “go-to” here at Delta University.

Damita shares:

I have a really good relationship with the Alpha University head women’s basketball coach. Actually when I committed to Alpha University, I committed to Coach J When I found out that Coach L was going to be our coach, I was really excited that I was going to be able to play for him.
Damita’s teammate Kimberly also shares her positive experience with Coach L and the Staff:

My coaching staff is amazing! Like we build on something new everyday! They support me endlessly; they support the whole team, literally like every player. You will always hear them say something positive to them. So our coaching staff is pretty good! I have to give a lot of credit to my head coach, Coach O. He has been pushing me through my bad, to realize that the only thing that can stop me is me!

There was only one reported negative relationship with the head coach from Deena:

There is no relationship with my head coach. In my junior year, they treated me like I wasn't a factor; like I was a walk on student athlete, yet, I was recruited. Because of this treatment, I want to transfer schools. Because our relationship was sour, I did not play. I did not get my turn to shine as a athlete. That's basically what it came down to.

All of the participants had a positive relationship with their coaching staff except Deena. Whether the coach was a male or female, each participant established a level of trust. Priscillas Elsass (2001) found that team performance was enhanced by the trust of players and their coach. Trust within the team dynamic is extremely important. With the exception of Deena, when the participants spoke of their relationships with the coaching staff, trust was a deeply rooted element. Traci for example, described her coach as a “motherly figure.” She can go to her for anything. Building that sense of trust is huge. Coaches get much respect when they’ve earned the trust of the members of the team.

Before discussing the research question #2 findings, I will summarize the findings from the first question relating to academics and athletics. The transition from high school to college was a common theme amongst the participants. Participants discussed the transitional adjustments such as the challenging coursework (Gen Eds in particular), difficulty with the workouts adjustment and scheduling, injuries, and competition
adjustment. Secondly, the participants felt the pressure to perform and excel in their academics and athletics. As stated above the NCAA guidelines that have been put into place, the student athletes found it hard to balance academics and athletics. They mentioned the use of the academic advisors and tutors as tools. Some even went onto build a support system outside of sports or academics and joined a campus club or organization. This leads to the next finding of goals and life purposes. About five out of the eight participants said that they did not want to continue to play at the professional level after college. Instead, they wanted to pursue a degree in their major/ minor field. When asked about their reasoning for choosing their majors, each participant was extremely passionate about the field and their responses were filled with excitement. The last theme that emerged from the first research question about academics and athletics was the relationships with teammates and coaching. These relationships were either positively or negatively impacted the student experiences. The teammates’ and coaching relationship was described more like as “family-oriented.” There was only one reported negative relationship with the coach.

The findings that emerged from the first research question all relate to the concept of sensemaking. As described in Chapter 2, sensemaking is the process of making sense of what we see and hear. As is the case with many aspects of development, sensemaking is influenced by the social, physical, and cultural contexts of the sense-maker (Spillane, 2000). In this research study, the participants make sense of their academic and athletic experiences. They specifically describe their transitional experiences, the pressure to perform, their life and career goals, and relationships with their teammates and coaches.
As I transition to the second research question, Black feminist theory, intersectionality, and sensemaking relate to research question #2 findings.

**Research Question #2:**

*What role does race and gender specifically play in the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at the Division I level at predominately White institutions?*

The themes that emerged from the race and gender codes include: racial reality, support system, self-segregation, domestic vs. international viewpoints, and gender bias. These themes all connect to Black feminist theory and intersectionality. This section of data was compelling as the participants used powerful example and descriptions of race and gender experiences. Throughout these sections, I will be making the connections to Black feminist theory and intersectionality.

**Race and Gender**

**Racial Reality**

Below are examples of shared experiences where the participants experienced racial differences different from their White teammates:

Aubree shares:

At Beta University, the Black community is extremely small. I know my freshman year; we had an incident where we as a basketball team wanted to wear, “I can’t breath T-shirts”, during warm-ups. The players on the team were majority Black. Our coach sat us down and basically said that we could not wear the shirts. Everyone was upset and mad that we could not wear the shirts. It was during the time of Eric Gardner
and we wanted to express ourselves and support a movement with these shirts. We also had seen NBA teams and WNBA teams wear the shirts so we saw nothing wrong. We were rejected. I think that had this been a group of White athletes, they would have been approved to wear the gear.

Deena states:

Honestly, I think that Black female student athletes are held to a different standard than White female student athletes. I can’t do what a White female student athlete can do. It’s really hard to explain. For example, academically, the coaching staff and academic advising staff would go the extra mile to text or call the Black girls on the team, conduct classroom checks, and check ins regarding the assignments or academic work of the Black girls; yet, I did not see them do the same for the two White girls on the team. In fact, the White girls got multiple excuses from study halls. Now, I do not know the academic situations of the White teammates; however, I am an A/B student and I felt like I was treated differently because of my race.

Kimberly states:

I know one of my friends who play’s on the women’s lacrosse team here at Alpha University, told me that the N word would be used in the locker rooms by her teammates. She didn't know how to address it, so she came to me as a resource. She was the only Black girl on the team. I told her that her teammates did not respect her. I invited her to hang out with the basketball team so that she could feel comfortable. She chose not to no longer hang out with the lacrosse players outside of lacrosse. I think that the White female student athletes have more resources available to them. Prime example, many come from wealthy families and backgrounds. When it came time for summer break, the White female student athletes’ parents would come pick them up in their BMWs and Range Rovers. My one teammate said that she was going home to work at her father’s law firm. Me on the other hand, I had to stay on campus and pick up a work study summer job. I did not have the opportunity to go home and work for a family member. I had to venture out myself to get a summer job.

As part of the Black feminist theory, author Patricia Collins, explains that, As Black women they (participants Deena and Kimberley) explained in their interview examples above, their experiences are not the same as a White female student athlete (Collins, 1984). Their experiences were different such as Deena said the coaches allowed special accommodations for the White female players or did not conduct classroom or study hall checks on the white players. On the other hand, Kimberly, shares that the
White female student athletes are privileged in a sense that their parents pick them up for summer break in luxury cars. Kimberly also mentions that they are privileged in a sense that their parents have employment opportunities available for their daughters. The Black female basketball players don't have those employment opportunities. They have to remain on campus and work “work-study” campus jobs.

Support Systems

Seven out of the eight participants each identified their support systems. They identified faculty members or staffing at the school or family members who they turn to for support.

Aubree states:

I think my support system at home is really strong. Especially in the transition of college. Starting as a freshman to now, I’ve been through some ups and downs from playing wise and I think that they helped me out a lot. I know sophomore year, I went through a phase where, basketball wasn’t really a passion to me. There was a series of events where the head coach as being pushed out/ quit; I was in the middle of joining a sorority, etc. I really didn’t have a strong passion for basketball at the time. It was kind of hard when my parents would come and noticed that I wasn’t playing; however they would always support me. Coaching wise, I honestly think that when it comes to college a lot of the coaches are just out for the job. I’ve seen adversity. The coaches act like they care at one point and then basically try to protect themselves. Which is something that they have to do because it is their job. I honestly don’t think a lot of the coaches care. But I noticed that once we got new coaches, the old coaches cared to a certain extent. They made them reach out to you periodically, but that only lasted for a little bit. Honestly I think that when kids go to college, I think their support system basically is from the people at home versus the coaches that are on campus.

Traci too finds support from her parents, coaching staff, and teammates. She states:

My greatest supporters are definitely my parents. They pushed me to be where I am both academically and athletically. If I really needed to talk to someone or needed help, I know that I could go to any one of my coaches. I also know that if there are smaller things that don't need to involve them, I also have teammates
that I can go to that I have talked to about stuff. Both my teammates and coaching staff are my support systems too.

Fiona on the other hand, finds support within the coaching staff. She shares:

At Kappa University, my support system is great! Definitely the assistant coordinator is always there when I need her. I also have the coaching staff; assistant coaches and my teammates are all the people I have in my corner when issues arise. I can communicate with them. Most importantly, they have been helpful in helping me select a major and course selection. Things like that, I have a really good support system.

Damita and Aubree too, have close relationships with the coaching staff/academic staff and consider them as supportive. Damita states:

Our academic advisor is a great source of support here because she is Black and was a former student athlete here at Alpha University. She helps us with any issues academically and she was once in our shoes.

Aubree then states:

I find support in my head coach and assistant coaches. My relationship with my head coach and assistant coaches is very well. We can come to them and talk to them about anything. They understand us. I think that I have a strong relationship with my head coach because he knows where I am from. He understands me. He knows where I want to be after my four years when I graduate. He pushes me everyday to be the best that I can be. He definitely sees potential in me.

Sam states her support comes from her professor:

As far as professor support and relationships, because I am deep in my major coursework now, going into my senior year, there is this one professor that I have taken multiple times and I really enjoy her classes. The classes that I have taken with her are usually 2½ hour classes; she is really entertaining and makes the class enjoyable. The 2½ hours really fly by. She really applies the coursework to daily life situations and real life examples. She makes everything realistic, making it easier to learn and understand from a different perspective. If I need her to sign off on anything or if I need an internship, I know I can go to her.

As Patricia Hill Collins points out in the Black feminist theory, Black females face multiple forms of oppression. She shows these forms of oppression through the matrix of domination. As a young college student, it is not easy balancing these many
roles and facing adversity. Also, keeping in mind, these students are developing and trying to establish their own identity (Chickering, 1969). In connection with the Black feminist theory, it is crucial that these Black female student athletes have support systems and resources available to help navigate and get through college.

Drawing from Damita’s quote, her connection to her academic advisor, who is also Black. I’d like to make the connection to the philosophy of the movement and saying, “Black girl magic”, as this is a prime example of “Black girl magic.” Created by CaShawn Thompson, “Black girl magic” is a concept that creates a platform where women of color can stand together against the stereotyping, colorism, and racism that is often their lived experiences (Wilson, J., 2016). By Damita having that relationship with her Black academic advisor, the academic advisor understands and can relate to the struggles the student faces and can help the student to persevere and overcome those challenges related to stereotyping, or racism. This also explains the reasoning of the title of this research paper.

“Self-Segregation”

Two of the participants gave examples where they “self-segregated” themselves from the larger White population. Please note that the phrase “self-segregation” is actually impossible. Segregation is an imposed system that divides people. What the Black female student athletes have done in the below examples, is build a community for self-protection and affirmation. It is a choice and connected to their racial identity development.

Author Beverly Tatum (1997) writes in her book, *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting together in the Cafeteria?* that self-segregation begins at the racial identity
development stage. As adolescent, Black children begin to explore racial identity differently than White children. Tatum uses theorist, William Cross’s racial identity framework as a model in understanding the stages of this development stage (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment). As adolescents move through this developmental stage, they connect best with people who look like them. Tatum makes very clear that societal views and assumptions heavily impact this development process.

Damita states:

   The black community is so small at Alpha University. I’ve noticed that there are a lot more sub-groups. The Blacks created a “GroupMe” group chat to discuss campus gossip or happenings. The Black people tend to hang out with each other and the Whites tend to hang out with each other. I’ve noticed not a lot of integrated “hanging out spots.” For example, the Blacks party here and the Whites party over there.

Kimberley states:

   And also being surrounded by so many White people, you feel the pressure to want to succeed. You don't want to be seen as “that Black girl” in class. In my kinesiology classes, many times, I am the only Black person in the class. And I choose to sit by myself. Honestly, this pushes me to want to do well. To be able to do what I am doing: Keep up with my grades, and still ball out on the court, is honestly, a proud moment.

*Gender Bias*

   All eight participants have said that they all experienced gender issues at their specific institutions. When it came to athletics, the Black female student athletes said that they were treated differently than the male athletes. The gender differences that were mentioned were media advertisement quality and exposure, better locker rooms, better and more uniforms options and athletic gear.
**Gender Difference Examples**

The participants said that the athletic department’s-media and marketing departments produce better quality media guides and marketing materials for the men’s athletic teams. For example, at the men’s games, the athletic marketing department promotes free giveaways and raffles to promote the games. The raffles are tactics to increase attendance at the games.

Arlene shares the gender differences at Beta University:

At Beta University both of the locker rooms are the same. I mean, I think the women’s locker room is better (of course) we are cleaner! The men’s locker room is a little bigger. We’ve won championships, and stuff like that, but then the men’s team will have a grey uniform, a white uniform, a navy university, a lighter blue uniform, and all we have is a blue uniform and white uniform. Like they’ll have multiple uniforms, multiple sneakers. Also, we don’t get that many people show up to our games. They don’t even promote the games as much as they’ll promote a men’s basketball game. People will show up to a men’s basketball game and they try to say, “Oh, come to a women’s basketball game.” They also have more giveaways at the men’s basketball games, which make students more inclined to want to come to a men’s basketball game versus a women’s game.

Publicity wise, there is a Beta University Men’s basketball commercial that goes across air and women’s basketball is not really broadcasted as much. For example, they’ll have clips of the men’s basketball team working out on the [lawn of the] Monument in Washington, DC and the women’s team will not even be mentioned in the commercial. I think that they also try to have the men’s team branch more out into the community versus the women’s. So people don’t really know the women’s basketball team players. The men’s team has an alumni game; the women’s team does not have that. They have closer relationships with their boosters. We only see people who’ve donated to the team, only if they come up to us after the games.

At Delta University, there seems to be some media differences too per Sam:

Most definitely I have seen gender differences at Delta University. For example now, the women’s basketball team is doing much better than the men’s basketball team. It’s like in women’s basketball, it seems like everyone turns the cheek a little bit on women’s basketball just because we can’t dunk, or we aren’t as fast as the men, we can’t jump as high as men, etc. Unless they come and see, then they would be interested. When people hear men’s basketball vs. women’s basketball,
they will always choose men’s basketball. So here at Delta University, the women’s basketball team did really well this season. Our record is 22-10. The men’s basketball team did not do well this year. They were expected to do well this year. Both teams were! They held a huge luncheon for both teams in the beginning of the year, encouraging people to come out to the men’s and women’s games. We are expecting this many people this year to attend the games. The season started and the men’s game was packed. Our first home opener, there were not as many people there. You could hear crickets in the arena. I’ve notice that when the men’s have a game, there are signs all over campus; they are on the interstate billboard, and all over social media. But when the women’s basketball team has a game, you don’t hear anything about it just because we are women; not because we aren’t good. People on campus know that we are good. They come up to us on campus and tell us that we are good, but they still won’t show up to games. I hate that its like that because I do feel like it is so unfair because we are not getting a chance to really show people what we can do. People don’t even take the opportunity to come and see us perform because we are girls. They may look up the box scores or final scores but they don’t physically come out to support us. That’s really frustrating to me.

Aubree shares the gender differences at Zeta University:

I’ve seen minor issues at Zeta University. For example the boys have way more stuff (athletic gear) than we do. However, our record is better than the men’s team. We win more games and tournaments than the men’s team. Their sweats are always nice; they always have the newest shoes, etc. I just wonder why we don’t always have that stuff when we won the Conference Championship; Advanced to post-tournaments.

As the women shared in their interviews, they have experienced gender differences. In connecting their responses to Title IX, the main purpose of Title IX is to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. Given this federal law, there seems to be violations. The women stated, the men’s teams get more advertisement (billboards, better quality media guides, etc.) more uniform options and warm up gear. The below outlines the three basic parts of Title IX as it applies to athletics: participation, scholarships, and other benefits.
Within athletics, Title IX requires that women and men be provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports. Title IX does not require schools to offer identical sports but an equal opportunity to play. Secondly, Title IX requires that female and male student athletes receive athletic scholarship dollars proportionately. Lastly, Title IX requires equal treatment of male and female student athletes in regards to the following: equipment and supplies, scheduling of games and practice times, travel and daily allowance, access to tutoring, coaching, locker rooms, practice and competition facilities, medical and training facilities and services, housing and dining facilities and services, publicity and promotions, support services, and recruitment of student athletes (NCAA, 2018).

Given the description of Title IX as it relates to athletics, participation and scholarship distribution do not appear to be an issue mentioned in the participant interviews. The “Other” benefits are where the difference lies. It appears that participation and scholarships are easily quantified and can be measured. The items listed in the “other” benefits are hard to track and not measurable.

Lastly, tying in Black feminist theory, Patricia Collins states that Black women face multiple forms of oppression. As explained above, Black women faced racial oppression; the gender bias differences examples, confirms Patricia Collins Black feminist point regarding multiple forms of oppression.
Domestic Versus International Viewpoints

In this section I will discuss the participants viewpoints on racial differences. As discussed in the participant profiles section of this chapter, Fiona is an international student. She mentioned in her interview she experienced no racial differences or issues.

Fiona states:

Personally, I have not experienced any issues with race, I am from Nigeria, and so I can’t really tell race issues. So far, my experiences here, no one has treated me unequally. Sometimes in the classroom, I find it really hard to understand the material for example the course, “American History," which was a gen ed course, coming from my Nigerian background, I barely passed that course. The White students in the class appeared to be very smart, had more resources available to them, and had a solid educational background.

Meanwhile, participants shared their racial differences experiences in the “racial reality” section of this chapter. It is important to highlight the voice of Fiona as she could be seen as an outlier of this research project. Her experience and voice still matters and brings a unique perspective to the research project. Patricia Collins (Black feminist theory) was a huge advocate for exposure of the Black women voice. Here I provided Fiona (International student) a voice to share her unique international view.

Findings Summary

Academic and Athletic Findings

Transitional Experiences

The first theme of transitional experiences specifically focused on the Black female student athletes’ academic and athletic adjustments. The women in this study reflected on their transition from high school to college. “Regardless of the degree to
which the new college environment matches what the entering freshman expected, he (or
she) faces a variety of expected and unexpected academic, intellectual, and social
challenges” (Feldmman & Newcomb, 1969, p. 89). The participants were asked to
describe their transitional experience from high school to college. Adjustment to the
coursework seemed where majority of the participants struggled with the most. It is
common for students to struggle during the transition from high school to college
academics (Pascarella & Tetenzini, 2005). Some of the participants said that their
transitions to the college environment were not difficult, while others said that they
struggled in some areas. Being away from their families and the comfort of their high
schools, these student athletes, have to start over and adjust to a whole new environment
academically and athletically. Kroger (1993) suggested that the participants learn how
they contentedly exist in this new place. This adjustment was much easier for some
participants than it was for others. Changes in roles, expectations, and privileges are part
of all normal transitions (Vernberg & Field, 1990), and a complete understanding of each
participant’s unique adjustment to college required an approach that examines the
interaction of the person in her specific situation (George, 1980; Schlossberg, 1981).

The college transitional process definitely connects with sensemaking. As these
student athletes are making these adjustments to the college environment, this theory
specifically explains the development and understanding process of the student athletes.
In addition, according to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), adjusting to the campus climate
is especially difficult: “The academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most
non-White students on predominantly White campuses are substantially different in
almost every respect from those of their White peers” (p. 644). It is important to
highlight, in regards to the Fiona (international student), her transition was much different than the others. She came from a totally different educational system in Nigeria, Africa. Adjusting to different ways of teaching, test taking, and the overall delivery of education as well as cultural norms arising from educational systems are common for international students (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Sacker, Schoon, & Barley, 2002).

**Life and Career Goals**

It was very interesting to see the diversity of responses to the reasoning why the participants selected their majors. About half of the participants had goals to play basketball overseas. The other half knew that after their four years of eligibility, they planned on entering into a career. When asked why they had chosen their specific major, they seemed to be extremely excited about their field. For example, Sam has a passion for all sports and aspires to be a sports anchor or analyst for ESPN one day if her overseas dreams don't work out. Fiona too had dreams of going back to Nigeria to begin a clothing line for taller women like her who struggle to find clothes that fit properly. She also wanted to provide opportunities to athletes in her country who are limited in resources. She wants to provide educational and athletic resources to the youth in Nigeria. Professional opportunities are extremely limited and the likelihood of a college athlete becoming a professional athlete is very low. The NCAA 2016 draft data, reports the percentage of NCAA Women’s basketball players to the WNBA is 0.9% (NCAA, 2016).

**Relationships with Teammates & Coaches**

In answering the first research question, participants shared their complex relationships with coaching staff member, teammates, and faculty members. Some of the participants had very close relationships with their coaches, teammates, and faculty
members. For example, Traci looked up to her head coach, and described her as a “motherly-figure.” While on the other hand, since freshman year, Deena’s relationship with her coach was rocky. This is a part of Deena’s reasoning for wanting to transfer schools because she cannot build a relationship with her coach. In terms of teammate relationships, there were no negative relationships reported. In fact, research has found that peer group influence and involvement is a major factor affecting campus survival for students of color (Haralson, 1996).

It appeared that these student athletes formed a “sisterhood” or close knit bond. In a few of the interviews, the younger classmen looked up to the older teammates for guidance and support. Lastly, the student athletes looked to faculty members for support. Sam mentioned, that one professor in particular whom she enjoys her class sessions, as one of her favorite professors thus far at Delta University. Sam said that she could go to this one particular professor at any time of need.

**Pressure to Perform**

Pressure to perform was another theme that emerged from this study. In discussing their transitional experiences, the participants talked about living up to the athletic and academic expectations. As Fiona described it, “juggling many balls.” With the NCAA Academic guidelines in place, student athletes must meet a certain grade point average in order to remain eligible to compete. Research indicates athletes recruited to compete at the Division I level are especially vulnerable to difficult transitions (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997; Valentine & Deborah, 1999; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). Not only are many of the athletes unprepared to deal with the high level of competition within and outside of the institutional team, unforeseen circumstances like those of Traci and
Damita, whom both experienced injuries their freshman year, can also be devastating for
the athlete. None of the athletes had academic issues where they were ineligible to
participate. It appeared that the younger athletes (sophomores), were still experiencing
the transitional adjustments and “working out the kinks.” The upper classmen seemed
more in control of their schedules, as they were deeper into their majors and core classes.
When speaking to the upper classmen, Arlene, Sam, and Deena, they appeared to have
mastered the navigating aspect of college. They spoke about the importance of
establishing relationships with the professors and communicating schedule conflicts, or
searching for internship options, or communicating with the coaching staff. The others
seemed to be still trying to figure it out and become acclimated.

*Racial Reality*

Participants Deena and Kimberly reported instances here they felt their
experiences were different than the White female student athletes. It was different in a
sense that as Patricia Collins explains in the Black feminist theory, “unique experience
than the White privileged woman.” Deena and Kimberly explained just that. They were
not able to do the things a White female student athlete could do. Deena gave the
example regarding, excused study hall time. The coaches made it a mandatory and
consistent process to attend study halls or conduct classroom checks. The White players
constantly got approved for excused time. Kimberly too, observed her White teammates
going home during summer breaks to work at their father’s law firm or family business.
Meanwhile, the Black female players work summer work study jobs on campus
throughout the summer break.
Support System

Various forms of support were discussed above. This ranges from parental support, to coaching staff, to professors, to academic advisors, to teammates. The players each identified someone who they can go to in time of need and get assistance from.

“Self Segregation”

Participants Aubree and Kimberly each mentioned that they link to the other Black students at the universities. Since the Black population is small at these schools, they find support and comfort with the other Black students. Kimberly, reports that in her kinesiology classes, there are few Black students in the medical field. She sometimes sits alone in class or sits with another Black student in the class.

Domestic vs. International Viewpoints

As pointed out earlier, participant, Fiona (immigrant student) did not perceive the racial experiences as the same as the other Black female student athletes. In fact, her exact words were “Personally, I have not had any issues with race. I am from Nigeria, so I can’t really tell.” Ogbu (2008) asserts that immigrant minorities compare their situations in the United States with what they have been “back home.” Perhaps, Fiona had not experienced any racial discrimination back home in Nigeria; therefore, she cannot recognize any racial differences.

Gender Bias

All eight participants said that they noticed that the men’s sports have better quality locker rooms, media guides, marketing materials, uniforms, etc. Sam specifically said that the men’s basketball team has a billboard on the interstate highway. This made
them feel left out and not important; especially, when some of the women’s basketball teams had better records than the men’s teams.

**Theoretical Connections**

This study connected two theoretical frameworks, Black feminist theory and intersectionality and the concept of sensemaking. Within higher education, Black feminist theory can inform qualitative analysis of Black female student athletes constructed attitudes towards racial and gender equality. “A primary feminist principle focused on by African American women is ‘coming to voice’” (Collins, 1998). “They believe they deserve the opportunity to speak and write about their experiences in their own words” (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005). Through the interviews, the women got the opportunity to share their stories.

The participants shared their academic experiences, athletic experiences, and experiences with race and gender on the college campus. Black feminist theory specifically points out that race, gender, and class oppression are all closely bound together. Intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberlee Crenshaw, adds more oppression to the equations such as sex, religion, disability, etc. It also explains how these additional oppressions all intersect.

In the interviews, the participants spoke about racial differences and gender differences on campus. A combination of these issues experienced on campus has impacted the Black female student athletes overall collegiate experience. Arlene’s report of the women’s basketball team not being able to wear the Black Lives Matter T-shirts during warm-ups; the men’s teams have better locker rooms, more uniforms, advertisement and marketing materials even though their season record was not as good
as the women’s teams directly correlate to the Black feminist theory and intersectionality theory.

Research has shown that, traditionally, women of color have had few opportunities to be noticed or have their voices heard in American society and sports (Smith, 1992). Silencing, a concept used in a previous study (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005), was defined as the lack of voice and absence of spoken or written opinions of Black female student athletes. Aubree’s report of the women’s basketball team not being able to wear the Black Lives Matter T-shirts during warm-ups would definitely be an example of silencing. The coaching staff rejected the team’s request to wear the shirts during warm-ups. The rejection of the athletic staff not allowing the staff to wear the Black Lives Matter T-shirts was a form of silencing as the shirts were a way from the members of the team to express the injustice in the Black community especially as it pertained to the recent police shooting during that time period.

Collins (2000) argued that the fact that so many African American women have grown to womanhood able to resist the damaging effects of stereotyping demonstrates the significance of Black feminist thought and the strength and survival capabilities of Black women. During the introductory interview, the participants all reported that they were A/B students. As Collins describes in the quote above, despite Black women facing these “distractions” or inequalities, they still excel in school and flourish as students. As Kimberly stated:

Being a Black female student athlete is something that I take pride in. To do some of the things that I’ve done and accomplish it, not only being a female but also to be a Black female, have been very moving in my life. It is a powerful statement coming from my family, like to the people who support me in order to get here.
Collins' theoretical framework allowed consideration of how subordinated groups are strengthened by their experiences, despite the prevalence of sexist, racist, homophobic, and classist ideologies (Withycombe, 2011). In interviewing the participants, they all appeared to want to excel and make progress in life. They were not allowing these differences to set them back. They pushed towards their life goals and future aspirations. As the principle investigator, I noticed during the interview process when asking the open-ended questions, the interviews derived their direction based upon each participants response(s). The open-ended facet of the interviews allowed the respondents to share their experiences fully, even if certain accounts diverged from the expressed purposes of the interview (Patton, 2002).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented nine themes uncovered in this study. The first theme focused on the Black female student athletes’ transitional experiences. The second theme was life and career goals. The third theme was relationships with teammates and coaches. Next, the participants described the viewpoints on the pressure to perform both athletically and academically. The women stated that they had are constantly having to manage and balance the academic expectations and athletic expectations as a student athlete. As the discussion moved to race and gender, the next theme was racial reality where the participants identified racial differences.

The sixth theme the participants described their support systems. The seventh theme was self-segregation. The eighth theme described was domestic versus international viewpoints. Lastly, the ninth theme was gender bias. The participants noticed gender differences in media advertisement and marketing, uniforms and athletic apparel, and
locker rooms between the men and women teams. Data from the individual interviews revealed the participants experiences. By using the participants’ own words through extensive quotes, I hope to have provided an illustration of the experiences of the eight Black female student athletes at this particular institution and at this particular time in their lives. All reveal that despite complications, Black girl magic prevails. The next chapter will be the discussion.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and explore the academic and athletic experiences of Black female student athletes. A better understanding of the experiences of Black female student athletes may help higher education administrators by providing them with information to make decisions about student affairs programs, policies, services, and practice. In addition, this study aimed to give voice to a group of young women whom have historically been underrepresented in research. The data was collected through conducting in-depth interviews. Participants in this study included eight Black female student athletes at large Division I schools. The data was coded, analyzed, and organized. Themes were then developed. The study was based on the following research questions:

1. How do Black female student athletes who attend predominately White Division I institutions make meaning of their athletic and academic experiences?

2. What role do race and gender specifically play in the athletic and academic experiences of Black female student athletes at the Division I Level at predominately White institutions?

This chapter is organized into four parts. The first part lists the implications for practice. The second part outlines the institutional and policy recommendations. The following third section presents recommendations for future research and practice. Lastly, I discuss the limitations and complications of the study. This research contributes to our knowledge of the experiences of the Black female student athletes. The results of the study indicate that Black female student athletes struggle with racism, gender differences
on campus, transitional experiences, and pressure to perform academically and athletically. Despite these struggles, the Black female student athletes still rise to the top. Black girl magic is the major premise that developed from this study. As a result, eight themes (listed in Chapter 4) emerged.

**Implications for Practice and Institutional Recommendations**

**CTS Framework**

All athletic programs should adopt one framework presented by Eddie Comeaux, the career transition scorecard for student athletes, I believe. This model bridges the gap between athletics and academics. In doing so, it was designed to foster evidence-based practices for improving the well-being of Division I athletes. Comeaux describes the model as “shaping and advancing the future direction of athletic organization” (Comeaux, 2015). The NCAA utilizes the APR (Academic Progression Rate) to measure the academic culture of the athletic teams. The APR, as a measurement tool, provides a great snapshot of the retention rates and eligibility of the student athletes. Comeaux created the CTS with the intention to enhance the APR initiative. He wanted to hold athletic administration (athletic advisors, coaches, etc.) accountable and provide a more in-depth assessment plan to measure their impact on learning outcomes for athletes.

One of the key foundational components to the CTS framework is the Diversity Scorecard (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vellejo, 2004). The Diversity Scorecard was used to “address the opportunity gap for historically underrepresented students.” It is premised on the understanding that awareness of inequities leads to interpretations of the situation, which can lead to action” (Comeaux, 2015). The four main goals of the CTS
are: (1) to help bridge the gap between research and practice in academic support centers for Division I athletes, (2) address the lack of explicit and positive learning environments aimed to influence desirable educational outcomes of athletes across race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport (3) foster evidence-based practices among higher education practitioners to understand the educational patterns of athletes and (4) enhance the quality of athletes’ school-to-career transition.

The CTS framework is unique to each institution. The student population at each institution is different, so therefore, the facilitators, practitioners-researchers are in a sense developing a unique implementation intervention strategy. For the purpose of this study, the CTS is a fairly new framework that utilizing and encompasses existing data to develop an action plan. Emphasizing the opportunity gap for the underrepresented student athlete group, this framework is applicable to the population group for this study.

**Development of Black Female Role Models/ Mentoring Program**

Previous research has shown that having role models who care for Black female student athletes, and whom they trust, is related to their being able to navigate through their educational experience. Athletic departments need to be intentional in their hiring practices to search for candidates that meet the criteria of women and or minority coaches who can add value to the coaching positions. Moses (1999) recommended finding creative strategies to both locate and attract Black female candidates. Moses suggested contacting minority colleagues to ask for recommendations, and creating a hiring panel/committee. Harmon (2009) suggested that by athletic departments changing the culture by increasing the number of Black females working on the college campus, may in turn increase and enrich the level of support Black female students perceive.
Once Black female student athletes arrive on campus they should be paired or introduced to a faculty member or staff member of color of whom they could help to mentor and build a relationship to help navigate through college. Forming this mentor/mentee relationship is beneficial and rewarding from both perspectives. Tying the Black feminist theory to the mentoring programs, the black student athletes can build relationships with people who look like them and who have experienced some of the same situations and struggles as them. As the Black feminist theory states, the black woman’s lived experiences are different than the White woman. Given this statement, Black female student athletes can use Black female faculty members as resources and to help navigate the college experiences at predominantly White schools.

**Summer Transitional Enrichment Programs for Black Female Athletes**

Although five out of the eight participants said that their transition to college was not an issue; I still would recommend athletic programs implementing summer transitional programs for the student athletes. Research has shown that many colleges and universities have developed summer programs designed to assist students with the transition from high school to the rigors of college. Historically, these programs focused on providing academic and social support to minority and low-income students (Garcia and Paz 2009; Kezar 2001). Summer bridge programs are aimed at the development of study and time management skills, the ability to utilize university services (e.g. library or tutoring), while providing exposure to college coursework and faculty (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). As Aubree, Arlene, and Fiona mentioned that they struggled in the general education coursework when they first got to college. Time management was a repeated issue that the student athletes mentioned in their interviews. Summer sessions can give
the student athletes time to adjust to the demands of the college campus and become familiar with the college level coursework and expectations.

Coming from an athletic perspective, through the summer transitional program, student athletes can also become familiar with the training programs and pre-season workouts that are required. As Traci explained in her interview presented in Chapter 4, she says:

When I first came, I noticed, the speed, the skill level that everyone had, was much higher than mine. It was difficult to adjust because when you are in high school, you are the star of your team. Once you get to college, it’s like everyone was the star of their high school team so it’s like its the same and you don’t stand out as much. You definitely have to work harder.

In recognizing the skill level difference, implementing a summer transitional program will help athletic trainers and the coaching staff access talent levels and get everyone started on a synced work out plan. Two out of the eight participants also mentioned their injuries during their freshman years. Having a program as such will have certified trainers working with the team in hopes to provide preventative injury workouts and trainings.

**Increase Diversity Training**

Annually the NCAA currently conducts on campus diversity educational workshops open to student athletes, coaches, athletic administration, faculty and staff. These workshops are open to all those who would like to enhance their knowledge and understanding of diversity. Though these are open workshops, I would make this a requirement for all coaching staff, student athletes, athletic administration, faculty and staff. More than one should be offered throughout the course of the year to give everyone options and topics of interest. For example, have a diversity training geared more towards
the freshman student athlete class or newly hired coaching staffing group or senior level administrators. Doing so may promote awareness.

**Defining a Culture (Academically and Athletically)**

As leadership within the universities, defining the culture of the school and athletic program is extremely important. Morgan (2006) states:

> It is a challenge of transforming the mind-sets, visions, paradigms, images, metaphors, beliefs, and shared meanings that sustain existing business realities and of creating a detailed language and code of behavior through which the desired new reality can be lived on a daily basis (p. 138).

The aspect of defining culture applies to any school or athletic programs. At times this can be a challenging task. There are multiple factors that play a part in defining the culture of the school such as lack of resources, enrollment downfall, etc. to just name a few. Within organizations, policies and rules set the foundation and structure for how people act within the organization; i.e. handbooks (Morgan, 2006). In relation to the athletics and academic issues showcased in this qualitative research study as well as other research studies, senior leadership should not only rely on quantitative figures in the decision making process, but take into consideration the voices of the underrepresented and provide a solution.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended that future research replicate the methodology with additional participants who represent all of the different NCAA Division levels. This would help to determine if the experiences at the different levels are the same or different. Specifically, I would recommend the use of technology such as (Skype, texting, FaceTime, email, etc.) and social media with similar college students. With the use of technology, the
participants were easily accessible especially with the constant use of smart phone apps. In today’s culture, technology and social media plays a huge role in data collection. I learned that the participants want a quick and efficient interview process. With the use of technology resources, I was able to deliver a quick and efficient interview process for each participant.

Secondly, future research will need to include additional sports. In this study, only women’s basketball and women’s lacrosse were represented. Additional participants would provide additional representation. Another recommendation is to include freshman in the study. There weren’t any freshman represented in this study. It would have been interesting to compare their experiences with juniors or seniors to see if there were any similarities or differences. Ultimately, I would recommend adding athletic and academic administrator participants in this research study. Their experiences may be different and it would be interesting to get their perspective on this research topic.

**Limitations and Complications**

Although there are limitations, this study provides meaningful data that has implications for practice. These are limitations that should be considered. First, the research sample was very small, comprising of eight participants. I think that if I had more participants from different sports, the data would have been more diverse. Second, as the researcher, I could have been more consistent with the data collection process. I went to see some of the participants’ basketball games and took field notes. Due to distance, it was very difficult to travel to see each of the participants compete. More consistency in the data collection process would have greatly strengthened the findings.
Third, I personally coached a few of the participants during their high school years a few years ago. I noticed that when interviewing those participants, they were giving more in-depth answers and had an open conversation. The vibe of the interview was much different as the comfort was evident in the depth of their responses and the personal nature of some of the stories. Compared to the other interviewees, whom it was my first time speaking to them, they were very short in their responses. The rapport was developed during the interview process creating a different dynamic. I had to ask follow up questions/ probing questions to get more of a response from the participants.

Fourth, the focus on the study was on Black female student athletes within a specific context. The perceptions of women at different Division I institutions, from different regions of the country, and in different athletic conferences are represented. Thus, the implications can be drawn are specific only to the experiences of this sample group. The results could be different depending upon factors such as athletic conference or division level.

Fifth, the interviews were taken while the participants were in season. The interviews usually took place late at night around 9pm or 10pm after the participants had finished their games or late study halls. I took into considerations, their hectic schedules and thanked them for their time. Perhaps if the interviews were done, during the off-season, the participants could have contributed more time and depth in responses in the interviews.

Although I have identified a number of limitations of this study, the value and contribution of this study are unquestionable. The purpose of this research study was to expose the voices of Black female student athletes and to gain insight on their
experiences. This study did just that. I gave the Black female student athletes empowerment to share their experiences since theirs is rarely heard.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the limitations, implications for practice, institutional and policy recommendations, and recommendations for future research. As the whole research project comes full circle and I reflect on the content in each chapter, there is still work to be done. Knowing about this population helps us understand, support, and celebrate Black female student athletes. This sample group, are just a few of the many Black female student athletes that are experiencing racism or gender inequality on their college campus. College athletics today has exploded into a multi-million dollar enterprise. It’s a shame that these student athletes have to suffer from these types of issues. As student affairs professional and the athletic department administrator, we owe it to the student athletes to have the best experiences as possible.
REFERENCES CITED


Education and Title VI. (2018, September 25). Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html


Dear Student,

I am a current doctoral student at Temple University studying educational leadership. I am in the dissertation stage of my program where I am conducting researching examining the Black female student athlete experience. Specifically, I am looking at the role of race and gender within your academic and athletic experiences. Through three in-depth interviews, I hope to gain a better understanding of the whole experience.

You have been identified as someone who meets the criteria of this study and I would love for you to participate to share your story. In meeting with you today, I am hoping that you will volunteer to participate in my research that is being supervised by my advisor, Dr. James Earl Davis, Professor of Higher Education and Educational Leadership (phone: 215-204-3002; email: jdavis21@temple.edu).

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out the information below. Filling out this information does not commit you to participating in the study. Submission of this information is completely voluntary and refusal to provide it will not subject you to any adverse treatment. Instead, the information will allow me to contact you to set up a preliminary meeting that includes you, a parent/guardian (if you are under the age of 18), and myself. At this meeting, we will discuss the purpose of the research project and the nature of the interview process.

Please contact me at the address or telephone number listed below if you have any questions or if you would like to discuss your potential participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Breanna Ockimey
Ritter Annex
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 510-8734
tuf61558@temple.edu
Name: ____________________________ Date of Birth: __________________________

Mailing Address: __________________________________________________________

City: ____________________ State: ____________________ Zip: ____________________

Phone Number: ____________________________

Email Address: ____________________________

What year are you in college: ____________________________

What is your major: ____________________________

Are you/did you receive a college athletic scholarship: ____________________________

Graduation Date/ Anticipated Graduation Date: ____________________________

Self-Identity (Race)- Please Circle One:
  • American Indian/ Alaska Native
  • Asian
  • Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  • Black
  • White
  • Two or more Races

Gender (Please Circle One):
  • No Selection
  • Male
  • Female
Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student at Temple University studying educational leadership. I am in the dissertation stage of my program where I am conducting research examining the black female student athlete experience. Through three in-depth interviews, I hope to gain a better understanding of role of race and gender in Black female student athletes’ academic and athletic experiences.

The three interviews will be tape recorded with your permission and conducted at specific times over the course of the Fall 2017/ Spring Semester. The interviews are each expected to last approximately one hour in length.

All interviews will be taped recorded with your permission and transcribed verbatim.

I hope that you will participate in all three interviews, but your participation is voluntary. If you choose to discontinue participation at any time, you are free to do so without any consequences or fear of retaliation.

By signing the consent form, you acknowledge understanding that there are no financial or material benefits to you from participating in this study. There are no physical, psychological, or social risks anticipated from participating. Possible benefits from participating include: (1) the opportunity to think critical about your college experience thus far/ overall/ your role as an administrator (2) the opportunity to contribute to a research study through the expression of your own personal beliefs and opinions, and (3) the opportunity to impact how the NCAA and athletic departments interact and serve the black female student athlete population.

All information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not appear in any presentation or publication. If partial or full quotes are appropriate to illustrate the date analysis and/or findings, a unique pseudonym will be used to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity with any identifying information deleted. By participating, you have the right to obtain the results of this study and have them explained. The results may be obtained up to three years after the study has been completed.

You can ask questions at any time during the participation of this study by calling me at (215) 510-8734. If you have any additional questions regarding your
rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. James Earl Davis, College of Education, Professor of Higher Education and Educational Leadership, Temple University (215) 204-3002.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this consent form and that you agree to participate in this research.

Sincerely,

Breanna Ockimey
Ritter Annex
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 510-8734
tuf61558@temple.edu

Participant’s Name (please print);_________________________

Participant’s Signature:____________________________________ Date:_______

Participant’s Pseudonym:____________________________

Researcher’s Signature:____________________________________ Date:_______
APPENDIX C
PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE

Researcher’s Name: Breanna Ockimey, MPA
Department: Temple University, College of Education, Educational Leadership
Project Title: “Scholar Athletes: Understanding the academic and athletics experiences of
black female NCAA Division I athletes at predominately white institutions”

Participant: ____________________________ Date: __________________

I give Breanna Ockimey permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only
for the following purpose:

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as part of a research project at Temple University. I have
already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time
will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?
I agree to be audiotaped during the time period (to be filled in at interview)

____________________ to _______________________

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?
I give my permission for these tapes to be used from (to be filled in at interview):

____________________ to _______________________

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?
I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the
audiotaped(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my relationship with Temple
University in any way.

OTHER
I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at
any time, I can contact:
Researcher’s Name and Contact Information: Breanna Ockimey, MPA
Temple University
College of Education
Ritter Annex
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 510-8734
tuf61558@temple.edu

I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research
participant, I may contact the Office of the Vice Provost for Research of Temple
University by calling (215) 204-6875.

Participant’s Signature:_____________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature:_____________________________________________
APPENDIX D
INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Initial Interview

The initial interview will include the following questions:

1. As a part of the ongoing consent process for this research, do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as a part of this research project?
2. Tell me about your educational background and high school experience.
3. Tell me what factors led you to study at this university.
4. Tell me about your athletic career. Highlights? Low points?
5. Are you a first generation college student? If you are, tell me how and why you chose to pursue college credentials?
6. How do you manage your schoolwork and play women’s basketball?
7. Do you enjoy college?
8. What do you plan on studying??
9. How are your academics and school? Current GPA?
10. What are your plans after you graduate?
11. Any additional thoughts that might be of interest regarding your background experience?
APPENDIX E
INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEW

Intermediate Interview

The intermediate interview protocol included the following questions:

1. As a part of the ongoing consent process for this research, do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as a part of this research project?
2. Describe your ultimate career goal?
3. What role has race and gender played in your undergraduate experience (athletically and academically)?
4. What has been the greatest struggle for you thus far?
5. Do you feel you have enough support at college?
6. What are your classes like?
7. How do you balance classes, practices, tutoring, study halls, strength and condition sessions, your social life, etc.?
8. What role do your coaches, academic advisor, tutors play? Do you have a good relationship with them? Anyone in particular you rely on?
9. Did you feel prepared (academically, athletically, mentally) for your transition from high school to college?
10. Continuing off of question 10, what was the decision making process like?
11. Any additional thoughts that might be of interest regarding your overall experience?
Final Interview (Member Check)

The final interview protocol included the following questions:

1. As a part of the ongoing consent process for this research, do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as a part of this research project?
2. Please allow me to present you with a transcript of your previous two interviews. Is there anything in the transcripts that you would like to add or delete?
3. Do you have any questions or concerns for me regarding any aspect of this research project?
APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Participant #_______

Name: ________________________________

___ Demographic Questionnaire Completed

___ Discussed Informed Consent with participant

___ Signed Informed Consent

___ Scheduled Interviews #2 & 3 with participant?

___ Interview #1 (Life Course/Background) Date ________

___ Field Notes #1

___ Interview #2 (student athlete experience & race) Date ________

___ Field Notes #2

___ Interview #3 (Member Check) Date ________

___ Transcripts Reviewed by Participant

___ Field Notes #3

___ Supporting Docs Related to Participants Program
Field Notes – Interview #1,2, or 3

Date: ______________ Participant # ____

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APPENDIX I

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL TIMELINE

Obtaining a Signed Proposal

✓ Selecting the dissertation chairperson and discuss topic—08/2016
✓ Select members of the Dissertation Advisory Committee—09/2016
✓ Submit first draft of proposal to dissertation chairperson and discuss revisions—01/2017
✓ Submit revised proposal to other members of the DAC and meet to discuss—05/2017
✓ Schedule the Proposal defense—08/2017
✓ At the Proposal defense, have the “Dissertation Proposal Transmittal” Form—08/2017
✓ Submit proposal and signed form to Doreen Conway—08/2017

Obtaining Approval from the Institutional Review Board

✓ Submit proposal to IRB—note that the DAC chair is the PI for this purpose—08/2017
✓ Final approval by IRB will be sent to student and dissertation chair—11/2017

Researching and Writing the Dissertation

✓ Meet annually with DAC—2017/2018
✓ Submit first draft to dissertation chair and Advisory Committee—08/2018
✓ Revise and re-submit as required 06/2018-03/2019

Scheduling the Dissertation Oral Defense

✓ In consultation with the dissertation chair, select the members of the Dissertation Examining Committee (DEC) 09/2016
✓ Members of the DAC and DEC indicate that they have read the dissertation and that the final defense may proceed
✓ Submit the “Announcement of Oral Defense” Form to Doreen Conway in enough time to meet the 10 day notification required by the Graduate school—03/12/2019
Definitions

Division I Institutions

Division I (D-I) institutions are active membership schools of the NCAA. They are divided into divisions for purposes of bylaws legislations and competition (NCAA, 2005). D-I schools have to at least sponsor seven sports for men and seven sports women (or six for men and eight for women) with two sports for each gender. Division I schools must meet performance criteria such as minimum scheduling requirements, minimum game- attendance requirements, scholarship distribution and GPA/ academic requirements. Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletic budgets, and offer the most number of scholarships. There are close to 350 college and universities who have Division I membership, and more than 6,000 athletic teams (NCAA, 2005).

Predominately White Institutions

Predominately White institutions (PWIs) is a term used to describe institutions in higher education in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010). Many (66%) PWIs are public institutions, which they receive government funding (grants, etc.) for support. 34% of PWIs are private institutions. The Morrill Act of 1890, also known as the Land Grant Act, was influential as it gave Blacks the opportunity to receive higher education under the new governmental policies and legislation. Prior to the passing of this Act, education was not made available to everyone.
Black Females

For the purpose of this research paper, the term Black will be used to reference a racial group with dark skin. Black is defining a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. In the Appendix A- Letter of Initial Meeting, the interviewees will be invited to self-identify their race and gender. In relations to Ethnic and Racial Identity, researchers such as Phinney (1996) and Josselson (1987), help to provide an understanding through theory development (race & gender).

Ethnic identity involves an emphasis on how group members understand and interpret their own identity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper, 2003). Josselson (1987) provided a model of identity development for women that has been used for some time to explain the path most women take to a differentiate sense to self. Options on the intake form will include: (American Indian/ Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Black, White, or Two or more Races). Those who select Black will move forward with the interviews. Gender Options will include: No Selection, Male, and Female. Male is a person who identifies as a male and female is a person who identifies as a female. Those who select female will move forward with the interview process. For consistency purposes of this paper, the term Black will be used. African American will not be used interchangeably.

Student athletes

There are more than 170,000 student athletes who compete in the NCAA each year (NCAA, 2005). For the purpose of this research paper, student athletes are defined as participants in any Division I participating institution who has received any type of
financial aid (scholarship, grants, tuition waiver). At the Division I level, not all athletes receive funding. Some may be considered “Walk-ons.”

**Athletic and Academic Experiences**

To remain academically eligible within the NCAA, student athletes must maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher (NCAA, 2005). That same standard remains in place for the purpose of this research. Academic experiences refer to the student athletes’ class schedules, interactions with faculty, the Academic Advising Unit, and peers. The athletic experience refers to student athletes’ participation in athletics (practice time, competition, coaching staff, team, athletic department, etc.).

**Graduation Success Rate**

Used to measure the graduation rates amongst all Division I student athletes who receive athletic scholarships. It accounts for student athletes who transfer in and discount students who transfer out if eligible at transfer (NCAA, 2017). The annual report breaks down by sport category, gender, and race.
APPENDIX K
(IRB APPROVAL LETTER)

Certification of Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects

Date: 18-Oct-2017

Protocol Number: 24729
PI: DAVIS, JAMES
Review Type: EXEMPT
Approved On: 18-Oct-2017

Approved From:
Committee: A1
School/College: EDUCATION (1900)
Department: ED LEADERSHIP: HIGHER EDUCATION (19031)
Sponsor: NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR
Project Title: Black Girl Magic: Exploring and Understanding the academic and athletic experiences of Black Female Student Athletes at Predominantly White Institutions (Division I Level)

The IRB approved the protocol 24729.

If the study was approved under expedited or full board review, the approval period can be found above. Otherwise, the study was deemed exempt and does not have an IRB approval period.

If applicable to your study, you can access your IRB-approved, stamped consent document or consent script through ERA. Open the Attachments tab and open the stamped documents by clicking the Latest link next to each document. The stamped documents are labeled as such. Copies of the IRB approved stamped consent document or consent script must be used in obtaining consent.

Before an approval period ends, you must submit the Continuing Review form via the ERA module. Please note that though an item is submitted in ERA, it is not received in the IRB office until the principal investigator approves it. Consequently, please submit the Continuing Review form via the ERA module at least 60 days, and preferably 90 days, before the study's expiration date.

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee (“MRC”); Radiation Safety Committee (“RSC”); Institutional Biosafety Committee (“IBC”); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee (“TUSCC”). Please visit these Committees’ websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit the following:

- Amendment requests - all changes to the study must be approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of