HOW DO BLACK FEMALE ATHLETES PERCEIVE, NEGOTIATE, AND RECONCILE THE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OF FEMININITY?

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ABSTRACT

Faced with a unique oppression due to their racial and gender identity, a great disservice has been done to Black female athletes (BFAs) within the sporting literature as they have historically been silenced and rendered invisible, either in failure to include them in research, or in fragmenting their identities along racial or gender lines, thus presenting incomplete and inaccurate representations of their experiences. Employing a theoretical framework grounded in Black feminist standpoint theory, this study explored BFAs' conceptualizations of femininity and microaggressions, as well as how their racial, gender, class, and athletic identities affect them within and outside of sporting environments. This study sought BFAs at 83 Division I institutions, asking them to complete a survey including the Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short (BSRI-S), the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS). Six BFAs opted-in to a qualitative interview. These BFAs presented multiple interpretations of femininity, discussed experiences with microaggressions, and spoke to how they navigated various contexts given their racial, gender, and athletic identities. While identifying hardships of being BFAs on college campuses and Black women in the United States, interview participants also discussed how their ability to withstand the unique mistreatment of BFAs and Black women left them feeling empowered and resilient. Implications for practitioners and researchers are also included.

INDEX WORDS: Black Female Athletes, Femininity, Black Womanhood, Black Feminism, Standpoint Theory, Intersectionality, Microaggressions

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"*The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.*" – Malcolm X

Black women's position in the United States within a "matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions" (Collins, 2000, p. 23) has historically resulted in experiences of social, political, and economic exclusion and inequality due to their racial, gender, and class identities (Brown & Keith, 2003; Geronimus, 2001; Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, & Bound, 2006; Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008). As a result, they have been left "exposed to disproportionately high levels of stress" (Woods-Giscombé, Lobel, Zimmer, Cene, & Corbie-Smith, 2015, p. 710), and are more prone to emotional isolation, depression, anxiety, obesity, and use of counterproductive coping strategies (Carr, Szymanski, Taha, West & Kaslow, 2014; Frame, Williams, & Green, 1999; Kessler, 1997; Moradi & Subich, 2003). Examining and conceptualizing this matrix of domination within a Black feminist standpoint theoretical framework allows for an exploration of additional ways in which this country's oppressive white patriarchy affects Black women. In particular, focusing on femininity, this theoretical framework highlights the ways in which hegemonic femininity, the most ideal or socially privileged form of femininity (Collins, 2004; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004), was conceptualized to intentionally exclude Black women as a means of clarifying the boundaries for other women (Collins, 2000). With roots in slavery, several gender and racial stereotypes or controlling images of Black women are still propagated today through various institutions and structures controlled by white patriarchy, for example, television shows, films, magazines, and other forms of media. These stereotypes and controlling images "are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social

injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p. 69), working to "justify U.S. Black women's oppression" (p. 69) today and during slavery at the hands of White slaveholders.

As there is research to support that the lived experiences of Black female athletes and White female athletes differ (Douglas, 2002; McKay & Johnson, 2008; Schultz, 2005; Scraton, Caudwell, & Holland, 2005; Spencer, 2004; Withycombe, 2011), this study took an "oppositional gaze" (hooks, 1992) towards these stereotypes, examining the sociocultural and historical context within which they were created, their evolution over time, and how they can control Black women's consciousness and, if internalized, limit their concept of femininity. Moreover, this study sought to combat the silencing of Black female athletes in sporting literature by providing a space in which they could feel empowered to "come to voice" (Collins, 1998), or interpret and define their experiences, and thoughts on, femininity in their own words (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005; Collins, 1998; Collins, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which Black female intercollegiate athletes (BFAs) have come to conceptualize what femininity is and how it uniquely affects them based on their racial, gender, and athletic identities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. How do Black, female intercollegiate athletes define femininity?
2. What strategies do Black female intercollegiate athletes use to appear more feminine?
3. How do Black female intercollegiate athletes navigate their racial, gender, and athletic identities in various contexts?

4. What strategies do Black female intercollegiate athletes use in response to microaggressions?
5. What is it like being a Black female athlete?
6. What is it like being a Black woman?
7. Based on traditional, Western-bound definitions of femininity, how feminine are Black female intercollegiate athletes?
8. Which microaggressions do Black female intercollegiate athletes experience most frequently?

Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. *The response rate*: Despite efforts to contact participants for this study and present the accompanying scales in as inconveniencing of a format as possible, there was no way to ensure that participants responded or fully completed the surveys provided. In that same vein, not all coaches contacted likely elected to forward the study to their college athletes. Unpredictability of the response rate also affected the generalizability of results.
2. *Full disclosure*: This study was based on self-report measures. As such, the study was dependent on the participants' levels of openness and comfort in sharing their experiences.
3. *Trust*: Resulting from their social, economic, and political discrimination and oppressions in the United States, Black people have adopted a healthy paranoia when dealing with most situations. Also known as "playing it cool" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 94), this is a survival tactic adopted by Black people "aimed at reducing one's

vulnerability to harm and exploitation in a hostile environment" (p, 94). As such, BFAs may have chosen to not participate in this study due to uncertainty about what would happen with their results, or may have omitted some information in responding to the study's questions as a way of self-protecting.

4. *Cultural awareness*: Conversations surrounding femininity, microaggressions, and among others, racial and gender identity, require levels of cultural awareness and self-awareness that some BFAs may not have fully developed, thus limiting their conceptualizations of the topics previously mentioned.
5. *Understanding of microaggressions*: BFAs understanding of microaggressions and their ability to frame them properly was an additional potential limitation, especially during the qualitative interviews.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were present in this study:

1. This study was delimited to the 83 NCAA Division I basketball schools within a 325-mile radius of Philadelphia, PA.
2. This study was delimited to Division I female intercollegiate athletes.
3. This study was delimited to Division I female intercollegiate athletes that racially self-identify as Black.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined as follows:

Athletic identity: The degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993).

Black: An individual whose family originates from any nation within the African Diaspora. The African Diaspora refers to any region or community in the world that has had high concentrations of people from Africa move to it. As this study is not meant to only include experiences of Black Americans, this term speaks to a global racial experience (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Blackness: The degree to which one identifies with Black culture and their Black racial identity. This term is being operationalized via Helms' Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS). The BRIAS is a 60-item self-report measure used to assess self-conceptions of Black people with respect to membership in their own racial group in contrast to how they react to people of other racial groups (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010, p. 6). Based on Cross's (1971, 1991) model of psychological nigrescence, the process of becoming Black, Helms's BRIAS measures Black people's development of racial consciousness across five schemas: Pre-Encounter/Conformity, Post-Encounter/Dissonance, Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization. These schemas span from "denial of Blackness and low self-regard to a stage of acceptance of Blackness" (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010, p. 6).

Black feminism: A power-shifting relationship and critical social theory that Black women self-define and design to oppose a system of racial, gendered, sexual, and class oppression and to resist the negative images of Black womanhood existing in patriarchy and discriminatory social practices (Beyond the Moment, 2017).

Class: A group of individuals who occupy a similar position in the economic system of production.

Culture: Shared customs, beliefs, characteristics, and knowledge of a group of people in a particular place and time that are transmitted from one generation to the next via language, values, norms, and symbols. It is through culture that people and groups come to define themselves.

Division I: The highest level of intercollegiate athletics under the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the largest and most well known collegiate athletics governing body in the United States. Division I schools "generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships" (NCAA.org/about). There are currently 351 Division I basketball schools; of this number, 83 are within this study's geographical parameters.

Ethnicity: A form of human categorization in which individuals identify with each other along shared ancestry, geography, language, or religion. Members of an ethnic group "see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups" (People & Bailey, 2011, p. 389).

Femininity: A socially constructed, normalized standard of behavior, attributes, and gender roles for girls and women (Krane et al., 2004). This term is being operationalized via the Bem Sex-Role Inventory-Short (BSRI-S), a 30-item self-report measure used to assess an individual's levels of masculinity and femininity.

Feminism: The ideological critique of gender relations and advocacy for the social, economic, and political empowerment of women.

Feminist consciousness: Awareness of one's gender identity and the ways that this identity interact with one's other identities, as well as the ways that this gender identity impacts one's social, political, and economic position.

Gender: Refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity (APA, 2012). Gender implies the psychological, behavioral, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (i.e., masculinity or femininity) (APA, 2015).

Hegemony: Cultural or political dominance of one group over other groups. For the purposes of this study, "dominant culture," "dominant group," or "dominant society" refers to White people – particularly White middle-class and upper-class males – as a racial collective and the processes by which they have historically amassed and maintained power and control in the United States.

Identity: Social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories (Shields, 2008, p. 301).

Intersectionality: The notion that traditional conceptualizations of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) do not act independently but rather are interdependent and form a "matrix of domination" or "vectors of oppression and privilege" (Nadal et al., 2015, p. 149).

Microaggression: Subtle forms of discrimination, often unintentional and unconscious, which send negative and denigrating messages to various individuals and groups (Nadal et al., 2015, p. 147). This term will be operationalized with the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions

Scale (REMS), a 45-item self-report measure that uses dichotomous answers ("0" and "1") to quantitatively measure the microaggressions that people of color experiences in their everyday lives (Nadal, 2011 p. 2).

Microassault: Blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 154).

Microinsult: Unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 155) towards a person's target group membership.

Microinvalidation: Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 155).

Patriarchy: A form of social stratification and power-relationships in society that favors men, mainly White men, and grants them more rights and privileges over women and oppresses women's social, political, financial, sexual and human rights (Beyond the Moment, 2017).

Power: The ability to define contextual relations and reality (as cited in Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005).

Race: A socially constructed method of human categorization used to group people with similar physical characteristics.

Sex: Refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs and external genitalia (APA, 2012).

Silencing: The resulting ignoring or invisibility of Black women in sport and sporting literature (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005).

White: A racial classification of individuals whose ancestors originated from Europe (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which Black female intercollegiate athletes (BFAs) have come to conceptualize what femininity is and how it uniquely affects them based on their racial, gender, and athletic identities.

While the body of research on Black women and Black female athletes is growing, these women still receive less attention, and are less represented, in the sporting literature (Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005; Hall, 2002; Scheurich, 1992; Withycombe, 2011) than the "substantial body of research available on white female and African American male athletes" (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011, p. 478). Much of that research has been comparative, using white women as the standard against which Black women have been evaluated (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000), while other works have focused on stereotypes of Black girls and women in sport and their effects (Bruening, 2005; Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004; Douglas, 2002; Withycombe, 2011) and microaggressions experienced by Black athletes (Jordan, 2010).

In this study, the focus will be on Black female athletes' femininity, more specifically, how some Black female athletes define, negotiate, and reconcile the social expectations of femininity. The theoretical framework for this study will be presented, allowing for a subsequent examination of the racial and gender stereotypes that have been created by dominant society to manipulate and limit ideas about Black womanhood and femininity (Collins, 2000, p. 69), as well as the standards of hegemonic femininity. Microaggressions will also be discussed. Coupled with the accounts from this study's participants, a review of the topics previously noted serves two purposes. First, it creates a "context from which to examine the experiences of women of color that operates at multiple levels: the level of personal biography, the group level of the

cultural contexts created by race, class, and gender, and the systemic level of social institutions" (as cited in Bruening, 2004, p. 330). Second, it contextualizes the pervasiveness and influence of the white, male patriarchy on which the United States was founded, and continues to operate on, including in athletics. "Sport," Hartmann (2002) states, "is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive racial force, an avenue of racial progress and an arena of racial harmony," which is a view capable of "deflect[ing] attention away from, obscur[ing], or minimiz[ing] the more general problems of racial inequalities and racism" (p. 409). In that vein, this study aims to bring an element of critical race scholarship that examines Black female athletes' intersecting gender, racial, and athletic identities as they create a "matrix of domination" for Black women (Collins, 2000, p. 299).

Theoretical Foundation

No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture…. When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women – bell hooks, 1981

This sentiment has been echoed in critiques of the erasure of Black women and their multiple consciousness from the sporting literature (Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005; Withycombe, 2011). As such, with feminism having been long criticized for operating from a position of whiteness, and assuming a universal womanhood for all women, yet excluding the perspectives and experiences of non-white women (Collins, 1996; hooks, 1981, 1984; Walker, 1983; Yancy, 2000), this study has opted instead for a framework grounded in Black feminist standpoint theory.

This framework builds on King's model of multiple jeopardy (1988) and theories of intersectionality presented by Collins (1990) and Crenshaw (1991). King eschewed the race-sex analogy that had been used in the United States to "draw parallels between the systems and

experiences of domination for blacks and those for women" (p. 43), which assumed that racism and sexism were comparable and of equal psychological distress to those experiencing them. Instead, her model asserted that there was a multiplicative, not additive, relationship between the various oppressions that simultaneously afflicted Black women (p. 47). Crenshaw's intersectionality explored the invisibility of Black women resulting from analyzing sex and race oppression and discrimination as independent, mutually exclusive experiences. As Bruening (2005) and Withycombe (2011) noted, Collins' intersectionality complemented that of Crenshaw's as it focused on how domination and power resulted in an interlocking web of oppression for Black women. Collins (2000) later applied Black feminist standpoint theory principles to this interlocking web of oppression to examine what she called the "matrix of domination" (p. 299; Bruening, 2005).

Black feminist thought addresses the ways that race, class, gender, sexuality and other sociocultural factors combine to create oppression for Black women. Collins (2000) and Davis (1983) identify the three dimensions that interact to create Black women's oppression in the United States: economic, political, and ideological. The economic dimension acknowledges Black women's "long-standing ghettoization in service occupations" (Collins, 2000, p, 4), as well as the historical economic exploitation of these women, highlighting the importance of the role of class alongside race and gender oppression. The political dimension takes into consideration the laws and policies that historically and contemporarily restricted voting rights and equal access to education to Black women. The ideological dimension refers to the negative controlling images and stereotypes that present limited depictions of who Black women are. According to Collins (2000), these dimensions "function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep [Black] women in an assigned, subordinate place" (p. 5).

Feminist standpoint theory "seeks to expose both acts of oppression and acts of resistance by asking disenfranchised persons to describe and discuss their experiences with hope that their knowledge will reveal otherwise unexposed aspects of the social order" (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999, p. 409). As such, it reaffirms the individual's ability to create knowledge and define reality. Coupled with Black feminism, which addresses the economic and political exploitation and oppression of Black women globally (Collins, 2000; Ross, 2006), feminist standpoint theory becomes a powerful tool capable of combatting the historical silencing and pathologizing of Black women in sporting literature (Bruening, 2004; Bruening et al., 2005; Corbett & Johnson, 2000; Green, 2000; Green, Oglesby, Alexander, & Franke, 1981). Employing this method, I look to "explore the tensions between the controlling ideologies of gender and race that position these women as [less feminine] and their own self definitions" (Withycombe, 2011, p. 483) of femininity.

Race and Gender Stereotypes and Black Femininity/Womanhood

As previously discussed, the ideological dimension of Black women's oppression in the United States revolves around the propagation of negative stereotypes and controlling images created by dominant society meant to justify and maintain Black women's oppression and exploitation (Collins, 2000). Examining these controlling images born during slavery are important for understanding not only how they operated during that time, but also how they have evolved over time and continue to control Black women's consciousness and, if internalized, limit their views of themselves and their femininity. The four main stereotypes of Black women include the mammy, sapphire, jezebel, and welfare queen, each stigmatizing Black American women and defining them as deviant (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 633), yet also related to the others.

The mammy stereotype grew from female slaves doing domestic work for slave owner families. Usually presented as asexual, typically dark-skinned, and overweight, but also comfortable with her situation (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000), the mammy depicted the perfect slave as she was loyal, faithful, obedient, and deferred to the White man (Collins, 2000; West, 2008; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). This stereotype accomplished several things. As West notes, the mammy stereotype "exacerbates role strain by reinforcing the belief that Black women happily seek multiple roles rather than assuming them out of necessity, that they effortlessly meet their many obligations, and that they have no desire to delegate responsibilities to others" (2008, p. 290). Post-slavery, many Black women worked outside of the home, typically in caretaker roles for others (Collins, 2004; hooks, 1991); their incomes essential to family survival, Black women were criticized for "usurp[ing] Black male authority within Black families" (Collins, 2004, p. 199; Bruening, 2005). Perceived as deviant then, Black women responded by defining and adhering to a femininity and womanhood centered around protection, survival, procreation, and resistance (Davis, 1983; Stevenson, 1996; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). While taking pride in these ideals, however, Black women were simultaneously internalizing aspects of the mammy stereotype, defining themselves by an image created by White slave owners to idealize a deferent slave. Her physical appearance also worked to have the mammy serve as a foil to the ideal beauty, one that celebrated whiteness, straight, blond hair, and thinness (West, 2008, p. 291), encouraging colorist beliefs that viewed lighter skin as more beautiful than darker-skinned complexions. Lastly, sexual assault and harassment at the hands of White slave owners "would go unheard because no one would believe that a man would desire an asexual woman" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 639).

Several have researched the mammy's modern-day evolution, the superwoman (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 2009; Black, 2008; Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everett, 2009; Mullings, 2006; Romero, 2000; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombé, 2010), and their possible negative effects on Black women who have internalized this role. Characterized by an obligation to manifest strength, obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, determination to succeed despite limited resources, and obligation to help others (Woods-Giscombé, 2010, p. 672), the superwoman role was found to contribute to levels of selflessness, powerlessness, and self-silencing that contributed to psychological distress and heightened risk for depression (Woods-Giscombé, 2010, Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). In noting what Black women viewed as the requirements for fulfilling the superwoman role, mention of hooks' (1992) oppositional gaze theory is important. "Spaces of agency exist for Black people," she writes, "wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back … naming what we see" (p. 116). The "Other" she mentions refers to dominant society and the dominant cultural narratives that define Black women and their femininity. Through the oppositional gaze, Black women can identify what others expect from them and can choose to succumb to those expectations or not. Manifesting strength, resisting emotion, and the other characteristics of being a superwoman identified by Black women speak to what it is they believe White men, White women, Black men and everyone else expects of them, namely, being and appearing non-threatening.

At the root of the second stereotype, the jezebel, is the sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery being used to pathologize Black women. Despite being the victims of institutionalized rape, these women were categorized as sexually immoral and deviant (Collins, 2000, 2004; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). A jezebel is labeled as an erotically appealing and

openly seductive Black woman who takes advantage of men through sex (Brown, White-Johnson, & Fennell, 2013; Patton, 2006; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). She "is the promiscuous female with an insatiable sexual appetite" (as cited in Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 637). Depicting her as such "redefined Black women's bodies as sites of wild, unrestrained sexuality that could be tamed but never completely subdued" (Collins, 2004, p. 56), justifying and excusing the violence and sexual abuse that slave owners used against Black women (as cited in Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 638). More contemporarily, the jezebel is also known as "the hoochie," "the ho," or "the freak" (Collins, 2000; West, 2008). Regardless, the main objective of the stereotype remains – control. These women are inherently deviant because their sexuality is not controlled by the White man, or any man, contrasting the sexuality of women hegemonically feminine who are passive in sexual expression, letting the men take the lead.

The third stereotype, the sapphire, saw Black women used as scapegoats for the discriminatory social policies and economic inequalities that contributed to the absence of Black men in Black homes (Collins, 2000; West, 2008). Instead of acknowledging that White slave owners sold Black men and children, Black women were blamed for breaking up their homes and emasculating Black men. Contrasted against the passive, frail, and domestic White, idealized femininity, the sapphire grew from Black slave women who worked in the fields and did the same work as Black slave men (Davis, 1983; West, 2008). The contemporary version if the sapphire is "the wise-cracking, balls-crushing, emasculating woman" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 636), portrayed as evil, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful (p. 638). Yarbrough & Bennett note that she has no specific physical feature other than typically having a brown or dark brown

complexion, again, encouraging colorist beliefs that darker-skinned Black women are less feminine, more aggressive and emasculating, preventing men from being "real men."

The fourth major controlling image or stereotype of Black women is the breeder woman, which has evolved today into the welfare queen or welfare mother (Collins, 2000; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Both, again, speak to issues of control, in this case, control over Black women's fertility and bodies. Seen as subhuman, Black slaves were valuable property for White slave owners; the breeder woman image "portrayed Black women as more suitable for having children than White women" (Collins, 2000, p. 78). This then provided an economic justification for slave owners forcing Black women to breed; the more children Black women birthed, the more workers the owner had, and the more money he could make if selling the children on the slave market. Unlike the breeder mother where assumed fertility was viewed positively in the economic climate of slavery, the welfare queen is viewed as an economic liability (Collins, 2000; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Characterized as lazy, the welfare queen is portrayed as taking advantage of the system by having more children instead of working or looking for a job; she looks for handouts. As Collins notes, this stereotype "provides ideological justifications for intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class" (2000, p. 79). She lacks work ethic and is usually a single mother, resulting in her also being viewed as the cause of her own poverty and stigmatized for not having a male presence in the home (Collins, 2000). As such, this image views Black women negatively for not being linked to a man, but also ignores the sociopolitical and economic conditions that contribute to the absence of Black men, mainly the war on drugs and the prison industrial complex. Each of these four stereotypes or images speak to issues of control over Black women and their bodies, and raises questions surrounding agency.

An additional stereotype that Black female athletes must contend with is that of the "natural athlete" (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2002; Hall, 2002; Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Calling back to slavery, where Black women's ability to accomplish the same demanding tasks as their male counterparts were credited to natural abilities coming from their African heritage (Davis, 1983; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998), this stereotype attributes Black female athletes' success in athletic endeavors to a biological predisposition to be stronger than, faster than, and physically superior to others. This stereotype is also inherently linked to the myth of Black athletes being unintelligent and intellectually inferior (Bruening, 2005; Collins, 2004; Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005); their athletic success comes not from learning their sport and excelling due to a high athletic IQ, but rather from strength, power, and ability that they "were born with." While Black male athletes may be celebrated, and perceived as more masculine for their athletic build, power, and strength, Black female athletes are viewed as "manly" or "mannish" and, thus, less feminine.

McKay and Johnson (2008) put forth analyzing Black female athletes "within the historical context of black women's enslavement, colonial conquest, and exhibition as ethnographic 'grotesquerie'" (as cited in Withycombe, 2011, p. 479). In addition to the aforementioned, this study also places Black female athletes with the converging frameworks of whiteness and hegemonic femininity in the United States, highlighting not only that the Black body and blackness have been "othered" (Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011) within sport, but that this "other[ing]" "continues … when the Black female athletes' images are opposed to the dominant image of white female athletes" (as cited in Withycombe, 2011, p. 480). When this occurs, so, too, does the fusing of the "jezebel" and "natural athlete" stereotypes. Withycombe writes that "[w]hile [Black] women athletes are stereotypically depicted as 'manly,'

strong athletes, they are, often simultaneously, represented in a highly sexualized manner" (2011, p. 480), a practice that celebrates their success, but also despises it (p. 481). Several factors are to be considered in these conversations, though, one of which is colorism, the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007, p. 237). Arguably the greatest tennis player of all time, the discourse surrounding Serena Williams illustrates the ways in which aspects of the previously mentioned stereotypes and controlling images are still at play today. Her physical body exemplifies the "workhorse" of the Black slave women who worked in the fields; field slaves were not to be sexualized. This entails aspects of the mammy, too, who was asexual and whose femininity and beauty were not to be elevated, but rather contrasted against the beauty and hegemonic beauty of her White, middle-classed counterpart. Lighter-skinned Black female athletes, however, are discussed differently, take Lolo Jones, for example, whose femininity is tokenized. Possessing less Afrocentric and more Eurocentric features, Jones is rarely met with the same level of misogynoir reserved for Serena Williams. In fact, coverage of Jones tends to be more forgiving. Douglas (2002) explores the dominant cultural narratives at play in mainstream and sporting media surrounding Williams. These images and stereotypes, though, are "indispensable to the maintenance of an interlocking system of oppression based on race and gender that operates to the determinant of all women and all blacks" (Caldwell, 2000, p. 280). The discourse surrounding Serena Williams, Lolo Jones, and other Black female athletes in mainstream and sporting media reflect the racialized and sexist biases that have been woven into the fabric of United States culture since this country's inception. Even though the stereotypes and discrimination that Black female athletes experience can affect them in their sport, and are also capable of negatively affecting their physical and mental health (Krane, Surface, & Alexander,

2005, p. 43), they have "often formed the vanguard of those pioneering new sports ground for women in general … only because a racist culture did not define them as 'real' women" (as cited in Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 632).

Hegemonic Femininity

Defined as a socially constructed standard for women's appearance, demeanor, and values (Bordo, 1993), or socially valued female characteristics (Kauer & Krane, 2006), discussing femininity becomes more complex when taking into account factors like race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Chow, 1999), which results in various forms of femininity to consider. "Although there are multiple femininties in the Western world," Krane et al. (2004) state, "there also is a privileged, or hegemonic, form of femininity" (p. 316). While 'hegemonic' has traditionally been used in reference to masculinity, several (Collins, 2004; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004) have begun using it to "denote the [aforementioned] socially privileged form of femininity" (Kauer & Krane, 2006, p. 44).

Krane (2001) offers being emotional, passive, dependent, maternal, compassionate, and gentle (p. 117) as characteristics of hegemonic femininity, while Krane et al. (2004) adds that hegemonic femininity "is constructed within a White, heterosexual, and class-based structure … [with] strong associations with heterosexual sex and romance" (p. 316). Collins (2004) echoes this, and goes even further in characterizing hegemonic femininity by providing four benchmarks, the first of which is simply not being like men (p. 193). There are two ways in which women should not be like men: physically and behaviorally. Achieving hegemonic femininity physically would require not resembling men, so the presence of body parts typically associated with women – breasts and hips – are encouraged, as is the absence of muscles. "Historically, in the American context," Collins states, "young women with milky White skin,

long blond hair, and slim figures were deemed to be the most beautiful and therefore the most feminine women" (p. 194). This aspect rings back to the definition of hegmonic femininity provided by Krane et al., highlighting the importance of appearance, while also introducing skin color, body type, hair texture, and facial features as important dimensions of femininity (Collins, 2004, p. 194). Behaviorally, women seeking to achieve hegemonic femininity are to avoid male characteristics like strength, competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence, and independence (Collins, 2004, p. 196; Krane, 2001, p. 117). They are also expected to defer to men and be submissive (Collins, 2004; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 640). This benchmark of femininity excludes female athletes, for the most part, as it encourages a body type and demeanor at odds with that necessary to be successful in their respective sports (Hall, 1996; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004).

Heterosexuality is the second benchmark of hegemonic femininity presented by Collins (2004), citing the most important aspect of this being that women "adher[e] to male-defined norms about who controls women's sexuality" (p. 197). The stereotypes and controlling images of Black women previously addressed spoke to this power. White men held the power to control Black women's sexuality during slavery, but stigmatized and pathologized these women because of the combination of their race and gender. The third benchmark emphasizes the "significance of work and [heterosexual] marriage in accessing income and wealth" (Collins, 2004, p. 198), a benchmark Black women cannot achieve due to the social, political, and economic situations contributing to the lack of employment opportunities for Black men and the dearth of Black men eligible for marriage. Unable to achieve hegemonic masculinity, Black men are further emasculated in their inability to provide economic stability for Black women.

The last benchmark of hegemonic femininity is race (Collins, 2004). Intentionally created to be diametrically opposed to them, Black women "cannot achieve this idealized feminin[ity] because the fact of Blackness excludes them" (Collins, 2004, p. 199). The emergence of the unique racialized chattel slavery established in the United States lay the foundation for a hegemonic White masculinity that depended upon racial and gender subordination (Collins, 2004; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Similar to whiteness, which requires an "other," this hegemonic White masculinity required an accompanying White femininity to enhance its value. Although subordinate to men as a group, the "hegemonic racialized order" (Schultz, 2005, p. 340) in place in the United States juxtaposed Black women against White women to idealize the latter as everything that the former was not (Collins, 2004; Greene, 1994; Patton, 2006). Without Black women, an idealized femininity could not exist, meaning hegemonic White masculinity could not exist. As such, Black women needed to occupy the bottom of the racial and gender hierarchies for the White, male patriarchy to properly operate (Collins, 2004; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000).

Whiteness

"In a racially imperialist nation such as ours, it is the dominant race that reserves for itself the luxury of dismissing racial identity while the oppressed race is made daily aware of their racial identity. It is the dominant race that can make it seem their experience is representative." – bell hooks, 1981

Important are the ways in which sport mirror, perpetuate, and maintain the values, beliefs, practices, laws, and policies of United States society at large. Further light, then, can be shed on questions pertaining to opportunity, experiences within, and access to sport by examining the laws, policies, and practices outside of sport that impact those within it. Specifically, whiteness and the ways in which it works are of interest in relation to sport and sporting literature.

Since its inception, the United States has been "established [on] structures encouraging a possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 2). Examples of such "structures" were legally sanctioned attacks on the indigenous population, racialized chattel slavery, xenophobic and exclusionary immigration policies, and more contemporarily, exploitative labor laws, racist federal housing and governmental practices, and racialized mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010; Lipsitz, 2006; Rose, 1994), demonstrating that "the ways in which power, property, and the politics of race in our society continue to contain unacknowledged and unacceptable allegiances to white supremacy … that generate economic advantages for European Americans" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 1).

Frankenberg (1993) discusses the "tripartite dimensions of whiteness" (Yancy, 2000, p. 157), stating, "First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness,' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p. 1). While whiteness manifests itself in various ways, the presence of an "other" is always required, serving as a foil against which whiteness may prop itself upon. Yancy adds that

> …whiteness functions as an epistemological and ontological anchorage…. As such whiteness assumes the authority to marginalize other identities, discourses, perspectives, and voices. By constituting itself as center, non-white voices are Othered, marginalized and rendered voiceless. Whiteness creates a binary relationship of self-Other, subject-object, dominator-dominated, center-margin, universal-particular. Whiteness arranges these binary terms hierarchically, where the former term is normatively superior to the latter. (p. 157)

It is important to note that not only white people are responsible for upholding whiteness. Dependent on the exclusion of others (Lipsitz, 2006), prejudice and discrimination also occurs in non-white communities, through colorism and other anti-Black beliefs and practices. Whiteness, then, is ever-present, manifesting itself in a multitude of ways both macro (policy and law), and micro (through the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of individuals). Despite its pervasiveness, however, it goes mostly unacknowledged, operating unnamed, a sign of the magnitude of its power (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1997). "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed," Lipsitz (2006) says, "whiteness never has to speak its name" (p. 1), yet maintains its position as the norm, the standard against which all else is compared. Although Yancy (2000) singles out philosophy as a site "constituted in and governed by white male institutional power" (p. 157) where whiteness and maleness became normalized and subsequently unchallengeable, this phenomenon is evident elsewhere. In literature, non-white authors are lauded as hyphenated American greats; in science and medicine, pseudoscientific practices and customs, phrenology, for example, justified racist beliefs of the inferiority of non-whites. This also occurs in sports, like in baseball, where, upon celebration and flair, athletes – typically non-white – are the targets of critique from media, and retaliation by pitchers, for not 'respecting the game' and playing the game 'the right way.'

Rather than a practice of political correctness or the workings of a 'social justice warrior,' addressing whiteness in relation to this study of femininity among Black female athletes "displaces it from [its] unmarked, unnamed status" (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 6) and confronts its responsibility for the structures and practices that work to invalidate the experiences of Black women in U.S. society at large, and how that invalidation carries into and is perpetuated in sport and sporting literature.

Microaggressions

While Chester Pierce originally used the term racial microaggressions, "to describe the subtle and often automatic put-downs that African Americans face" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 150). The term has since evolved to include members of any group facing oppression or discrimination. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007) defined microaggression as "brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group" (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 153). Sue and Sue note three types of microaggressions, the first of which are microassaults, blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments (p. 154). One of the BFAs interviewed noted an instance of a microassault in which one of her assistant coaches, a Black woman, was called the n-word by a spectator. In instances of microassaults, there is no uncertainty between the microaggressor and the person who received the microaggression about what happened. Microinsults and microinvalidations, however, are unintentional, potentially creating a sense of uncertainty for the microaggressed about what they experienced. Sue & Sue define microinsults as "unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity" (p. 155) towards a person's target group membership, while microinvalidations are "verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group" (p. 155). Research has been conducted on the effects of racial microaggressions on Black college athletes (Jordan, 2010), and Black people (Sue et al., 2008; Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010), while Nadal et al. (2015), inspired by intersectionality theory, explore intersectional microaggressions, subtle forms of discrimination that may be influenced by more than one identity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which Black female intercollegiate athletes (BFAs) have come to conceptualize what femininity is and how it uniquely affects them based on their racial, gender, and athletic identities. The methodology is presented in the following sections: research design, participants, instrumentation, procedure, data analysis, and bias statement.

Research Design

This study is grounded in Black feminist standpoint theory, which "seeks to expose both acts of oppression and acts of resistance by asking disenfranchised persons to describe and discuss their experiences with hope that their knowledge will reveal otherwise unexposed aspects of the social order" (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999, p. 409). All participants will complete a demographic questionnaire, the BSRI-Short, the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale, and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale. Participants for the interview will be randomly selected from those who have indicated interest on the appropriate section of the demographic questionnaire.

Participants

The study's population of interest was Black female intercollegiate athletes attending Division I basketball schools within a 325-mile radius of Philadelphia, PA. Of the 83 female intercollegiate athletes who accessed the survey, 30 racially self-identified as Black. Ethnically, participants identified as African (n = 4), African American (n = 19), Afro-Latina (n = 1), Biracial (n = 3), Caribbean (n = 8), Latina (n = 1), and West Indian (n = 5). Six participants were freshmen, nine were sophomores, five were juniors, one was a senior, and four were graduate

students. This study included Black female intercollegiate athletes from various sports: basketball (*n* = 2), bowling (*n* = 2), cross country (*n* = 3), rugby (*n* = 2), tennis (*n* = 2), indoor track & field (*n* = 14), outdoor track & field (*n* = 13), and volleyball (*n* = 1). Along conference lines, participants belonged to schools in the American East (*n* = 2), Atlantic 10 (*n* = 3), Atlantic Coast (*n* = 1), Big 10 (*n* = 1), Ivy League (*n* = 6), Metro Atlantic Athletic (*n* = 4), Mid-Eastern Athletic (*n* = 3), and Northeast (*n* = 4) conferences; one participant attended a college or university that was Independent.

Instrumentation/Measures

The following instruments were used to measure variables of interest in the present study:

- *Demographic Questionnaire:* Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions that asked, among other demographic information, the participants' age, ethnicity, athletic conference, and sport(s) played. The Demographic Questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.
- *Bem Sex-Role Inventory-Short (BSRI-S):* The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a self-report measure used to assess an individual's levels of masculinity and femininity. The BSRI is a 60-item questionnaire in which participants rate themselves using a seven point Likert scale for each trait: femininity, masculinity, androgyny, and undifferentiated. Instead of the long from of the BSRI, though, the BSRI-Short (BSRI-S) will be used. The BSRI-S is a 30-item questionnaire that asks the individual to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale how well the 30 characteristics describe them (Bem, 1981, p. 4). The BSRI-S has a .84 coefficient alpha for the femininity scale, and on the masculinity scale, .84 and

.86 for the two samples the scale was tested with. The correlation between the original and short form BSRI are .85 or greater for both scales.

- *Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS):* The BRIAS is a 60-item self-report measure used to assess self-conceptions of Black people with respect to membership in their own racial group in contrast to how they react to people of other racial groups (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010, p. 6). Based on Cross's (1971, 1991) model of psychological nigrescence, the process of becoming Black, Helms's BRIAS measures Black people's development of racial consciousness across five schemas: Pre-Encounter/Conformity, Post-Encounter/Dissonance, Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization. These schemas span from "denial of Blackness and low self-regard to a stage of acceptance of Blackness" (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010, p. 6). Coefficient alphas for each schema are as follows: .76 (Conformity), .51 (Dissonance), .69 (Immersion-Emersion), and .80 (Internalization) (Helms & Parham, 1996; Mizock & Harkins, 2009).
- *Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS)*: A 45-item self-report measure that uses dichotomous answers ("0 = I did not experience this event" and "1 = I experienced this event at least once in the past six months") to quantitatively measure the microaggressions that people of color experiences in their everyday lives (Nadal et al., 2011 p. 2). The REMS overall has a Cronbach's alpha of .912 and that of the subscales range from .783 to .873.

- *Interview* A semi-structured interview will consist of questions that address microaggressions, experiences with coaches and teammates, femininity, and cultural experiences. The interview questions have been included.

Procedure

Emails containing a link to an online web-based survey were sent to the 1,610 head and assistant coaches of women's and coed sports teams at the 83 NCAA Division I basketball schools within the 325-mile radius of Philadelphia, PA to which this study was delimited to. Coaches were informed of the purpose of this study and asked to forward the email containing the link to all their female intercollegiate athletes. Upon clicking the link, participants were met with an electronic informed consent form; if participants clicked the button agreeing to consent, they were granted access to the next page with the survey's first question. If participants indicated that they did not give consent, they were ushered to the end of the survey and thanked for their participation. The survey's first question asked if the participant self-identified as Black; if they responded in the negative, they were taken to the end of the survey. All participants who responded in the affirmative were granted access to the rest of the survey that included a demographic questionnaire and the BSRI-S, REMS, and BRIAS. Upon completing the aforementioned measures, one question asked if the participant wanted to be considered for a follow-up qualitative interview; if she responded in the affirmative, a space was provided in which she could include contact information (i.e., name and email) to be notified if she were randomly selected.

The contact information and names of participants that opted in to be considered for follow-up interviews were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on the researcher's computer. Each participant was then assigned a code name. Upon randomly selecting eight

participants for interviews and notifying said participants of their selection via email, all identifying information was deleted from the spreadsheet. Participants were reminded in the email that interviews were voluntary and that they could opt-out at any point; due scheduling conflicts, two participants were no longer able to participate in the interview. In all transcription of interviews, interviewees are referred to by their code names. All interviews took place over Skype; after providing participants with her Skype username, the researcher was only able to contact participants for the interviews if they added her as a contact. At the onset of each interview, participants were (1) notified that the interview was being digitally recorded for transcription at a later time, (2) reminded of the purpose of this study, (3) provided with the general format of the interview, and (4) reassured that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics; findings among this sample of Black female athletes (BFA) for the BSRI-S and the REMS were compared against psychometric measures provided in the BSRI Manual (Bem, 1981) and by Nadal (2011), respectively. The initial goal was to use inferential statistics to analyze the BSRI-S across ethnicity and sport, for the REMS across sport, and for the BRIAS across sport, ethnicity, and microaggression, but the number of participants was too small to make these analyses meaningful and so they were not conducted. Qualitative data were coded, categorized, and converted into concepts using Lichtman's (2013) six steps. Prior to this, the interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. Lichtman's first step is initial coding, in which each interview transcripts were reviewed and coded; this process occurred for each interview. After initially coding, codes were revisited and reviewed for repetitive codes and clarification of codes. Subsequently, codes from

all interviews were reviewed and initially categorized. Categories were modified as seen fit, reviewed, and then classified into higher order themes.

Bias Statement

"Will the girl in the pink jacket please come to the front."

Years later, that day remains etched in my memory. From the overcast sky, to the fateful decision to wear my hot pink jacket, usually reserved for church and other special occasions, instead of the usual cornflower blue parka, I can recall the most minute of details about the events preceding and following the incident. Later that day, I carried out my punishment: standing and staring at a wall for one hour. To my left and right stood students who had disrespected their teachers or their peers in some way; that my actions were considered the same as their's was illogical. Having grown up in a West Indian, Catholic household, I knew better than to break rules. In fact, I usually feared breaking rules. On this day, though, there was no fear of further punishment from my mother, only confusion and anger. At the age of six, I had received my first and only detention in 13 years of elementary, middle, and high school, for playing football with the boys.

Prior to this, things were simple. The boys wanted me to play football with them because I was good, and I wanted to play football with them because it was fun. Receiving detention did not deter me from athletics, but it did make me aware of an unwritten set of rules and expectations that I was apparently supposed to follow because I was a girl. Rule #1: Girls do not play with boys. (Implied) Rule #2: Girls do not play sports.

As I got older, I pursued more sports. My family did not necessarily disapprove, but my enjoying athletics confused them. My mother jokingly called me her "little boy," and when I got

dressed up, cousins exclaimed, “You actually look like a girl!” (Implied) Rule #3 seemed to be that girls that play sports are not “real” girls, but I never considered myself a boy, and felt that I always looked like a girl. With age and experience came more rules, none of which I cared to entertain, none of which made me insecure in my simultaneous athleticism and womanness, but all of which I found fascinating. They seemed to be accepted and upheld by many despite their arbitrariness. My experiences, though, are unique to me. I am the daughter of immigrants, one from the West Indies, the other from West Africa. My family are devout Catholics. All other factors considered, I am only one Black woman. While there may be some commonalities among Black female athletes given the unique historical subjugation of Black women in the United States and its subsequent reverberations within sporting contexts, we are diverse. As such, with Black women traditionally being silenced and ignored, I pursue questions about femininity and Black female athletes with no expectations of finding those with experiences similar to mine. Rather, the goal is to provide a platform for Black female voices and gain as much of an understanding as possible about the ways in which sociocultural factors have impacted Black female athletes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which Black female intercollegiate athletes (BFAs) have come to conceptualize what femininity is and how it uniquely affects them based on their racial, gender, and athletic identities. Results for the Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short (BSRI), the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) are presented, followed by findings from interviews conducted with study participants, as well as discussion of what to make of these findings.

Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short (BSRI-S)

Using "stereotypically feminine…and stereotypically masculine" (Bem, 1981, p. 4) characteristics and traits, the BSRI-S provided an opportunity to objectively measure the femininity of this study's participants. Conceptually centered around gender role expectations in the United States of America, the BSRI-S asks individuals to "indicate … how well each of the characteristics describes herself or himself" (Bem, 1981, p. 4). While there is a physical appearance component to hegemonic femininity that this measure does not account for, the BSRI-S allows for discussion surrounding the behavioral component of femininity.

This study's participants were classified using a median split, a method recommended by Spence, Helmrich, and Stapp (1975) and Strahan (1975) to distinguish between participants who scored high on both the femininity and masculinity scales, and those who scored low on both. As such, there are four potential categories of classification: androgynous, feminine, masculine, and undifferentiated. Employing the median-split methods, participants classified as androgynous are those with scores above the medians for the femininity and masculinity scales, while those

classified as undifferentiated have scores below the medians for both scales. Those classified as feminine have scores above the median for femininity, but below the median for masculinity, while participants categorized as masculine have scores above the median for masculinity, but below the median for femininity. The chart below provides a visual for this categorization.

		Masculinity Score	
		Below Median	**Above Median**
Femininity Score	**Below Median**	Undifferentiated (Low, Low)	Masculine (Low Fem, High Masc)
	Above Median	Feminine (High Fem, Low Masc)	Androgynous (High, High)

To score, the sum of the ratings for each scale was calculated then divided by 10, the total number of items in each scale, resulting in an average raw score for the femininity scale and an average raw score for the masculinity scale. Using the median split method, to classify each participant as androgynous, feminine, masculine, or undifferentiated, participants' average raw scores are to be compared to the median raw scores of a select sample. Given the small sample size of those who completed this instrument (n = 22), participants were compared against three sets of median raw scores provided in the BSRI manual (Bem, 1981): that of a mixed sex normative sample, a sample of females, and a sample of males. The median raw scores for each sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

BSRI-S Mean, Median, Standard Deviation vs. Bem's Samples (via Bem, 1981, p. 12)

	Sexes Combined[a]	Females (*n*= 340)	Males (*n*= 476)	BFAs (*n*= 22)
Femininity				
Mean	5.38	5.57	5.19	5.20
Median	5.50	5.70	5.30	5.20
S.D.	0.79	0.76	0.78	0.60
Masculinity				
Mean	4.83	4.78	4.88	5.04
Median	4.80	4.80	4.90	5.05
S.D.	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.84

[a]This sample has been statistically weighted so as to equalize the number of males and females (Bem, 1981, p. 12)

Versus mixed sex sample. The normative mixed sex sample had median scores of 5.50 on the femininity scale and 4.80 on the masculinity scale. Using these medians as the basis of the median split, three participants had femininity scale scores above 5.50 and masculinity scores above 4.80, categorizing them as androgynous, while four participants were classified as undifferentiated, with femininity and masculinity scores below 5.50 and 4.80, respectively. Four participants were categorized as feminine, with femininity scores above 5.50 and masculinity scores below 4.80; ten had femininity scores below 5.50 and masculinity scores above 4.80, categorizing them as masculine. There was one participant not categorized. She had a femininity score of 5.30, which was below the median score of 5.50, but her masculinity scale score was 4.80, the same as the normative sample's masculinity scale score. As such, her masculinity scale score was neither above or below the median, making it difficult to categorize her as either undifferentiated or masculine. The mean for the normative sample's femininity and masculinity scores was 5.38 and 4.83, respectively. Comparatively, this study's participants had a mean femininity score of 5.20 (*s* =0.60) and a mean masculinity score of 5.04 (*s* =0.84).

Versus female sample. Bem's sample of females (n =340) had a median femininity scale score of 5.70 and a median masculinity scale score of 4.80. Compared against this standard, the number of Black female athletes categorized as androgynous and masculine remained unchanged at three and ten, respectively. The number of participants categorized as undifferentiated – both femininity and masculinity scores below the medians – increased from four to five, while the number of participants categorized as feminine – femininity scale score above the median, masculinity scale score below the median – decreased from four to one. Instead of one instance of a non-classifiable participant, there were three instances of this when using 5.70 as the median for the femininity scale score. Compared against the mixed sex sample, two of the three difficult-to-categorize BFAs were feminine; with this new standard, however, these two BFAs had masculinity scores below 4.80, but their femininity scores were 5.70 exactly. The mean femininity score for Bem's female sample was 5.57 and the mean masculinity score was 4.78; the mean femininity scale score for this study's BFAs was 5.20, and 5.04 for the masculinity scale.

Versus male sample. The median femininity and masculinity scale scores for Bem's sample of males (n =476) was 5.30 and 4.90, respectively. Based on these medians, four BFAs were androgynous, four were feminine, seven were masculine, and four were undifferentiated. Three BFAs could not be categorized because their femininity scale scores were exactly 5.30. The mean for the sample of males was 5.19 and 4.88 for the femininity and masculinity scales, respectively. For a summary of all findings, please refer to Table 1.

Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS)

The mean REMS total for this sample of BFAs (n = 20) was 0.388 (s = 0.22). Each subscale had the following results – Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority ($\bar{x}$ = 0.450, s = 0.36),

Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizen and Assumptions of Criminality ($\bar{x}$ = 0.336, s = 0.34), Subscale 3: Microinvalidations ($\bar{x}$ = 0.550, s = 0.34), Subscale 4: Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity ($\bar{x}$ = 0.317, s = 0.29), Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions ($\bar{x}$ = 0.358, s = 0.26), and Subscale 6: Workplace and School Microaggressions ($\bar{x}$ = 0.240, s = 0.32). These results can be compared against Nadal's (2011) sample (n = 262), for which figures are presented in Table 2. Although not generalizable due to the small sample size, REMS scores by participant, athletic conference, and sport can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2
REMS Mean and Standard Deviation vs. Nadal's (2011) Sample

	Nadal's (2011) Sample (n = 262)		BFAs (n = 20)	
	M	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*s*
REMS average	0.556	0.18	0.388	0.22
Subscale 1	0.421	0.34	0.450	0.36
Subscale 2	0.418	0.29	0.336	0.34
Subscale 3	0.467	0.27	0.550	0.34
Subscale 4	0.724	0.21	0.317	0.29
Subscale 5[a]	0.288	0.27	0.358	0.26
Subscale 6	0.423	0.28	0.240	0.32

[a]Scores for Subscale 5 are calculated using inverse scores.

Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS)

The BRIAS measures Black people's racial identity development. The scale includes five stages, or schemas: conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion, and internalization. The scores for each schema were summed and then converted into to t-scores. The lowest and highest possible scores for each schema are as follows: conformity (27.59, 121.86), dissonance (29.16, 106.60), immersion (18.28, 85.60), emersion (1.99, 66.15), and internalization (-13.48, 70.21). With Helms asserting that progression through the schemas was not linear and that "individuals were more likely to possess, concurrently, attitudes and behaviors from each dimension" (Harris,

2003, p. 24), participants' scores from each schema have been presented in Table 3 and will be further elaborated on in the "Discussion" section.

Table 3
BFAs' (n =18) BRIAS Scores

Participant	Conformity	Dissonance	Immersion	Emersion	Internalization
#7	53.93	58.20	59.15	56.13	47.68
#9	34.52	24.32	50.73	30.06	23.54
#20	58.09	55.78	71.17	64.15	58.94
#22	59.47	63.04	51.94	42.09	44.46
#23	59.47	53.36	51.94	50.11	49.28
#31	48.38	55.78	61.55	54.12	57.33
#34	42.84	55.78	55.54	66.15	52.50
#37	52.54	48.52	53.14	58.13	54.11
#47	45.61	48.52	43.52	44.10	49.28
#49	49.77	43.68	50.73	60.14	62.16
#54	41.45	48.52	32.70	38.08	33.19
#56	42.84	55.78	55.54	58.13	55.72
#71	58.09	63.04	48.33	54.12	55.72
#73	33.13	41.26	33.90	46.10	54.11
#75	49.77	43.68	48.33	44.10	57.33
#78	41.45	34.00	33.90	54.12	60.55
#79	55.31	58.20	55.54	44.10	41.24
#81	73.34	42.32	42.32	36.08	42.85

Qualitative Interview

As both their racial and athletic identities exclude them from achieving hegemonic femininity (Collins, 2004; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004), the ways in which Black female athletes (BFAs) define femininity and view themselves as feminine beings are of particular interest. In addition to femininity, participants discussed experiencing microaggressions, navigating serval identities in various contexts, and their thoughts on being Black female athletes and Black women in the United States.

Table 4
Description of Participants

Code	Age	Yr. in School	Race, Ethnicity	Sport	Position
B2	23	Grad student	Black, "Jamerican" (i.e. Jamaican-American)	Track & Field	Jumps
C3	18	Freshman	Black, African-American	Soccer	Goalkeeper
E5	19	Sophomore	Black, African-American	Soccer	Midfielder/Forward
F6	19	Sophomore	Black, Haitian-American	Rugby	
H8	21	Junior	Black	Track & Field	Short Sprints
I9	20	Junior	Black	Bowling	--

Note. The dash (--) represents no position assigned based on the type of sport.

Femininity. The BFAs interviewed provided various definitions of femininity. Several, spoke of not ascribing to a prototypic femininity, like interviewee B2, who commented, "I don't think that appearance speaks to femininity even though society may try to make it that way." Similarly, interviewee H8 stated,

> I don't really agree that you have to look like a Barbie doll or you gotta look like this. I think of it [femininity] more as a woman who's, like, confident in herself and carries herself with dignity and respect and kind of just, like, knows who she is … because I went through all that in my life and it just wasn't worth it.

Her response alludes to the two categories of behavior that BFAs identified as quintessential femininity, the first being behavior for or directed towards one's self. Three themes emerged within this category: engaging in self-love and self-like behaviors, being in touch with one's inner self, and intentionality in one's actions.

When asked, interviewee E5 defined femininity as "pretty much any female who is, like, into themselves, like, knows how to carry herself in public. I feel like that's it, knowing how to take care of yourself in public." This is how self-love and self-like behaviors came to be defined, actions demonstrating one being "into herself." Explicitly mentioned by H8, confidence was one

such behavior echoed throughout the interviews, as was being strong-willed. The second theme of this category, being in touch with one's inner self, was brought up by interviewee I9 who said that femininity was "getting in touch with one's womanness." In elaborating, she explained that that meant "tak[ing] a step back from being so rough" and "stepping away from the mentality used in one's sport." The third theme, intentionality in one's actions, was elaborated upon by interviewee F6, who believed that while feminine is what women are told to be, femininity was not "skirts and dresses, but more behaviors and how much you are willing to feed into social stereotypes." True femininity, she said, is about "being yourself" and

> How [and if] you choose to use those structures … [and] being aware of those messages and working it to your own desire and personality. [It is] knowing why you do what you do and deciding that you want to be this way. You have your own mind and decide how you want to be feminine or if you want to be feminine at all.

The second category of behavior identified as quintessential femininity by BFAs was behavior directed towards or intended for others. In her earlier quote, H8 discussed viewing femininity as part confidence, but also as carrying one's self with dignity and respect, which falls within the first theme of this category: knowing how to carry one's self. While H8 was the most specific, several other BFAs spoke about "carrying yourself in public properly," especially in order to combat the negative stereotypes that others had of Black women. Discussing job interviews, H8 said, "As a Black female, I have to come off as not stereotypical as possible, so I used to put my hair up in a bun, make sure it looked straight, or I would straighten my hair or get a straight weave just so they weren't focusing on that." In her opinion, the stereotype for Black women "is that if our hair is colored, we're from a background where we're underprivileged or we're uneducated and that we don't really have respect for the professional work space."

Interestingly enough, aspects of the stereotype she identified allude to that of the welfare queen. Asked what she believed the stereotypes about Black women were, E5 stated, "Just that we have attitudes, we're loud. I feel like those are the two main ones." Believing that others assumed them to be loud and uncouth, these women deemed it necessary to proactively debunk those labels. The second theme in this category was the essentialist belief that certain characteristics and ways of being are inherent in women. "Men and women are biologically different," B2 stated, with men being "natural protectors" and aggressive while femininity was about being "homely, more sensitive, and more nurturing." Agreeing with her that being nurturing was a key component of femininity, E5 added that femininity was about caring for others, "trying to help out everyone else and being able to read people," in other words, being intuitive.

Even if defining femininity as behavioral, the BFAs interviewed acknowledged feeling pressure from standards and expectations externally established. For one interviewee, most of that pressure came from the environment fostered by her university. As she said,

> From experience I feel like it doesn't matter what clothes you wear. I don't know how Temple is but from what people that go to PWIs tell me it's very relaxed. Here at [an HBCU], people are dressed up all the time for every occasion and with me being an athlete and coming from that high school and everything, I wore sweats my whole senior year and coming here it was like even though I was an athlete, I was expected to dress up all the time and I was like I don't think I need to, you know? I just came from practice I don't know why you are looking at me weird cause I have on sweats, but if I still act like a woman or look like a woman then that shouldn't matter. … My mom was athletic and she was a cheerleader, … she went here too so she's a product of [this HBCU]. She had her expectations and she was trying to teach me but I didn't get it until I came here.

Media and comments from others were additional sources of pressure specifically mentioned by BFAs. Take the following quote, for example, in which one BFA noted,

> You look at like TV and everything and I always had the Barbie dolls with the perfect little hour glass, twiggy looking thing, and I was surrounded by people who like developed earlier than me. I was like the one in the group literally until high school, had no type of shape, no type of nothing and it freaked me out to the point where I was like okay well at least I have my skinniness and that's supposed to be feminine right to the point where I just pushed myself down the path of developing eating disorders and then I realized wait this isn't cute either. This isn't what people want to see and I just kind of got lost in all of that and I was like I shouldn't be trying to focus on what society thinks, but it took me a good eight, nine years to figure that out and then it was like rough, so then again I was just like I don't really care what I look like anymore or what people have to say as long as I'm healthy I just don't care.

Not caring and resisting the externally established standards and expectations of femininity were echoed by others, too. As one BFA summed it up, "I still don't care, I'm still going to wear whatever I want to wear … when I want to wear it."

Conflicts resulting from sport participation. Each BFA was asked if participating in sports and being an athlete ever conflicted with their definitions of femininity and/or the gender role expectations that their families had for them. Results were mixed, so each interviewee's response will be shared. Upon being asked, I9 immediately responded, "Not really." For her, there was an easy balance between maintaining femininity and being successful in bowling. "I think it's a really good balance in bowling," she started, "I think one could be athletic, but then

also tap into one's femininity and do whatever she needs to do to feel that way within the sport. [Someone] can maintain femininity, be cute and be a top notch bowler." Not as verbose, B2 was asked the same questions and simply responded that her participation in sports never conflicted with her definition of femininity or the gender role expectations from family. E5 also found no conflict between her participation in sports and her definition of femininity or the gender role expectations that her family had for her, she felt that others expected women to dress up and wear makeup, which being an athlete interfered with. In her words, "If I didn't play sports I'd have more time to dress up and if I wanted to do makeup and hair and all that other stuff."

C3 found no conflict between her definition of femininity and sport participation, but acknowledged conflict with gender role expectations that her mother had for her, in particular, the style of dress she is fond of. Due to her wearing sweatpants so often, she has come to expect her mother making comments like, "You look like a little boy." For F6, her family "expects my brother to cook and clean, too," so there was no conflict around gender role expectations. At times, however, she felt the need to compromise her personality around others and make it more light and gentle because of the combination of her race, participation in sports, and sexually identifying as queer.

Although finding no conflict between participating in sports and her personal definition of femininity, there was a period during which a lack of diversity in body type among female professional athletes had H8 believing that only women of that ilk were capable of being considered feminine by larger society. As a result, her first encounter with a Black female athlete who broke that mold and embodied both strength/muscularity and femininity was unforgettable. She explains:

> It's never conflicted with that definition but it has conflicted with the idea of you gotta be pretty, you gotta be this, you gotta be that because I would see professional athletes who for the most part are, you know, they don't get too overly, like, muscular or anything, and I was like, 'Okay so there's like a limit, there's a standard?' Like how do you know what's too much and too strong? I couldn't figure it out and then I saw Carmelita Jeter, the American sprinter, and I saw she was like 'padoww,' but she still had it all going on and I was like, 'Ohh, okay all right there isn't really a boundary, this is good to know,' and I was okay with it and I was like, 'Okay, as long as you're with it I guess that's fine right?' My world changed quick once I saw that.

There were also conflicts with family members who took issue with aspects of her participation in athletics:

> Yes, like I said with my parents and the whole like, 'You're too cute to do this, you're too cute to do that.' I don't know, I guess my mom expected me to go back to cheerleading once I got to high school because she would always bring it up and I was in, actually, one of my electives in school was dance, so she was like, 'All right, it's fine she does dance,' and then in my sophomore year I was like, 'Mom I'm gonna quit dance,' and that conversation did not go well. She was like, 'You need to keep you flexible to keep you' — well as a track student, I'm a hurdler, like duh, what is she talking about? And then she was like, 'No you gotta stay, you gotta stay like, you know, dainty,' and I was like wait I'm not dainty first of all. I've never been dainty so that kind of conflicted, and then my dad's kind of weird about the whole track athlete world where you wear no clothes when you're running [laughter], and he's kind like, 'Well shouldn't you wear the long tights,' and I'm like, 'Well did [her brother] race in the long tights,' like, no, okay,

> then I'm going to wear my short spandex. I'm not going to show the world my body, I'm just racing in what we're given. It's just the uniform, but that was like a big debate in my house for a long time and my dad just wasn't feeling it, he's like, 'I really think you should wear more clothes,' and actually, one of my youth coaches had to talk to him like, 'This is what they wear, like, it doesn't interfere with movement, this is the best option,' and to this day I see my dad at some meets and he's looking around he's just like "no, no," so I'll like throw my sweats on before going to talk to my dad after a race. I be like, 'Hey, dad' [laughter]. … He is not with it at all, but he never had any issues with my brothers so I was like, 'All right, that's a big gender play but okay.'

Balancing femininity with being an athlete. Three of the BFAs interviewed noted that balancing femininity with being an athlete was not difficult. For F6, the difficulty conceptualizing her ability to fill multiple roles at once lay more with others than with her, saying:

> I guess for some people it seems odd to them. … This is just who I am and I can do all these things at once. It's kind of empowering actually. People seem confused by the fact that, 'Yes, she can wear a dress and tackle people.'

Prior to this interview, questions of conflict between femininity and being an athlete never crossed B2's mind. "I never really had any identity problems when it came to my femininity," she declared. As for I9, the sport of bowling presented no issues on this front. Concisely, she stated, "There's really no struggle. It's perfect, honestly." H8 was of a different mind, though. Managing expectations was a theme repeated throughout her response. First, she spoke of managing the expectations that others had for her properly performing femininity, saying,

> I also struggle with the whole, you know, athletes, we tend to wear our sweats all day to class and around and sometimes it feels like you're getting judged after a while like, 'Oooh does she shower, does she,' and it's like, 'Yes I shower it's just that I decided to put on more sweats because it's comfortable,' so it's like once in a while, like once a week, I'll be like, 'All right let me look like a regular student for a day; just do it to make yourself feel better and maybe people would stop looking at you all the time,' but it doesn't always work. I still end up in sweatpants.

A strong sense of athletic identity also interferes with other aspects of her life at times, too. Performance in one aspect of her life affects the others, which affects her overall well-being and self-perception. H8 explained,

> When I'm not confident in my running abilities I'm not confident in myself in general and I'm just kind of like, I don't know, I let sports get too involved in how I feel about myself in general, so if I'm not doing well on the track, my grades start to falter a little bit. They start to fluctuate and I get frustrated over that and I kind of define myself off of those two things so I'm just like, "Wow, I hate myself. I gotta get my [stuff] together." I get all down in the dumps and get really frustrated, or, if I put my uniform on and I see a little bit of a pudge, I'm like, 'Aww come on. This is my track body. This don't look like track body anymore. Like, come on. Get it together.' So, I'll feel a little down.

Strategies and methods to feel more feminine. For those that employed strategies and methods of feeling more feminine, four themes emerged, the first of which was approaching being more feminine as a mental activity. On this, E5 stated, "I feel like it's not really a strategy, it's more like accepting that you're an athlete and you're not going to want to dress up all the

time." Similarly, although H8 spoke of taking showers as a method, the act's ability to transform her mentality was noteworthy:

> Just a lot of bathing, a lot of showers [laughter], because some days I really feel because I showered I am automatically more feminine because I am clean and that's just like, I would take like two showers and be like, 'All right, I'm good for the day, I'm good for a while, no worries.'

Earlier on in the interview, H8 shared how she had internalized messages about femininity and equated feminine with White and thin; after learning to accept herself as she is, she began to adopt a more carefree, go-with-the-flow attitude that she speaks to in the above quote. The second theme was adhering to one's own desires and resisting the externally established and imposed expectations of others. E5 accomplished this by "being in tune with [her] inner self and saying, 'Okay, I don't need to do this [dress up] all the time, I don't need to impress anyone.' If I'm going to go work out, I don't need to look like this." Of similar mind was F6, who shared that she did not feel the need to prove her womanhood to anyone, a mentality inspired by her mother, an immigrant from a Black island. Growing up, she recalled her mother refusing to allow others to restrict or dissuade her from professional advancement. "How dare white Americans tell me I can't do this," her mother would ask. This is the approach F6 has adopted, embracing parts of herself that are not the norm. Leaning into hobbies to help her feel more feminine, she says that she loves dancing and music, evidenced by her membership in an all-female rock band as a drummer.

Use of cosmetics was the third theme. This included some BFAs doing a full face of makeup while others opted simply for mascara. Doing one's eyebrows and painting one's nails

were other methods and strategies within this theme. The last theme was clothing and accessories. As C3 stated:

> I usually don't wear makeup, but sometimes I like going away to the game and dressing up. That was kind of my way of showing my feminine side, dressing up before going on the court. … Instead of maybe coming out with sweats and a sweatshirt, I would come out with my jeans and a shirt instead. …You put the uniform on, it's like all your femininity just went away.

She was not the only BFA interviewed to cite dressing up as a method. E5 discussed selectively dressing up, or as it is known at her university, "popping out":

> Here, popping out is a thing, so it's like getting dressed to the "t" …, but I feel like if you're popping out every day that's not popping out that's the norm. So, for athletes like us, I feel like to me and my definition of pop out, we're actually popping out because we'll look like this one time but you'll see us in another setting and we'll look not totally different, but for society, I guess we look like women so that's surprising to some people. Like, they'll be like, 'Oh, they can actually dress, they can actually do such and such,' so it's not a strategy it's just like [picking] when and where [to pop out].

H8 made an "attempt once a week to not wear sweatpants" but also used jewelry during competition, saying, "I also made the decision to run with my earrings on. I actually just got my third hole pierced just to kind of be like, 'Yeah, that's my accessory when I run.'" As for her teammates:

> I know a lot of my teammates won't even leave their dorm without makeup, but for some reason, on meet day, suddenly they are on a whole fashion show. They get their hair

> done, they get their nails done, their face is beat, they have the contour going on. I'm just like, 'Geez, I put some mascara on, but you came out here like you're about to go to a Beyoncé concert.

C3 also spoke about the strategies that she witnessed teammates and other BFAs use, all of which fell into one of the four themes already presented:

> [I]t's something some people are really into. They really care. 'I have to keep my makeup on for the game [and wear] waterproof makeup so when I sweat, my face is set.' It's like people would go to extremes in order for them to feel like they're feminine. I feel like I see it most in track, but it's starting to show more in basketball. I've seen it in soccer, too, but not as much. Track and basketball are the two major sports where I see it, but especially track. ...I know some people like to wear jewelry, [but in certain sports] you can't do that. Some people, I know they try to fix their hair in a way it won't mess up.

As for her, though, "I don't really care, I just keep going." B2 also expressed not having any methods or strategies for feeling more feminine because being an athlete never made her feel less feminine or question her femininity:

> It [femininity] is not something I ever thought about or questioned. It was just kind of like, 'Okay, I'm just a girl who just so happens to be gifted with athletic ability.' I always thought I was pretty balanced when it came to masculine energy and feminine energy. I always thought of myself as really balanced, I never felt I had to overcompensate on femininity because I was an athlete.

Microaggressions. Every BFA interviewed spoke to experiencing a myriad of microaggressions. When asked, I9 stated, "I feel like I experience them all the time." One of the

most commonly cited theme of microaggression was assumption of unintelligence, a theme similar to Sue and Sue's (2013) ascription of intelligence. Their race combined with their status as athletes resulted in many concluding that these BFAs were admitted to their colleges and universities solely for athletics. Four of the six BFAs shared experiences in which other students, athletes and non-athletes alike, made comments questioning these women's academic capabilities. H8 shared:

> So, you know I've heard an array of things. 'Oh, you're D1,' and I would be like, 'Yeah, I'm D1, what about it' and they would be like, 'Oh you know, usually people don't have the grades,' and I was like, 'People don't have the grades? Oh, you mean black people,' and they are like, "No, I didn't mean it like that,' and I'm like, 'You didn't say it to any of the white people sitting here,' and they are like, 'Oh, well I guess, you know, because black people usually come from disadvantaged communities,' and I was like, 'Um, I'm from the whitest high school in New Jersey and you're going to say this to me? Like, are you for real, is this real life?'

The response from the microaggressor in the above quote of, "No, I didn't mean it like that," in response to H8 confronting the individual about assuming she was not academically capable is an example of an invaliation, an instance in which the individual dismissed H8's perception of the situation. Here, in response to this microassault, she defends herself with a response that indicates some internalized oppression, "I was like, 'Um, I'm from the whitest high school in New Jersey and you're going to say this to me?'" Such a response conveys a belief that living in a predominantly White neighborhood would somehow shield her from experiencing racial microaggressions. She shared another story from a track meet in high school, in which another microassault occurred:

> In high school, the officials would talk to us during the events because, you know, they are volunteering their time, they want to interact a little with the athletes, which is fine. I was talking to one guy, he was an old white guy, very old, probably about 70. I'm surprised he was out there in the heat like that, but he was, and we were just having a conversation and they [the officials] were like, when we won, 'Well, it was nice talking to you,' and he's like, 'You're really articulate.' I was like, 'What? What do you mean? I've never heard you say that to anyone, why am I articulate?' He said, 'You know, like, for you. You're really articulate,' and I knew right away. I was like oh, 'for you.' I made a little mental note and was like, 'It's because I'm black. Right. Okay, got it.'

Other BFAs shared similar experiences, though the comments were sometimes more straightforward than that of the track and field official that H8 encountered. C3 recalled she was once told, simply, "You speak well for a Black person." BFAs on predominantly non-Black teams spoke to another theme of microaggressions: assumption of similarity. Microaggressions within this theme are statements or behaviors that convey that members of a group, in this case Black people, are all the same. For one BFA, this manifested in a teammate asking, "Why do Black people like Jordans [a brand of sneakers and clothing] so much?" Asked to speak as a representative for an entire race, she instead explained that not all Black people are the same:

> Not everybody is the same, people are different. Depending on where you came from it is going to be a totally different view. … Everybody in different areas like different styles, different types of clothes, like, I can't really speak on it [speak for all Black people].

She believes, however, that attending an HBCU has contributed to her experiencing fewer racial microaggressions than when she was younger. This was not the case for another BFA attending a

PWI. On her team, and on her campus at large, racial microaggressions were not uncommon. Take, for example, when her teammates assumed that she did not have hair:

> When I got to college, I took out my weave. They were like, 'Oh, you have hair,' and I was like, 'Oh yeah, I have hair," and they were like, 'Oh, we're just not used to that, you know? When so and so would take out her hair she had like really, really short hair,' and I was like, 'That's because she cut off all her hair, that's why she didn't have hair. Like, you think we magically just appear with this stuff on our head like that?'

This was not the only instance in which hair was brought up when discussing microaggressions on a predominantly non-Black team. Upon wearing her natural hair in an afro, another BFA was met with several teammates seeking permission to touch her hair; she never wore her hair in an afro around her team again.

Microaggressions are not always verbally expressed; they can be conveyed in behavior and body language, but also through the environment in which one is situated. When discussing these environmental microaggressions, these BFAs spoke more of "get[ting] a vibe" that they were not welcomed. I9 says that she was made to feel excluded at non-conference bowling competitions where opponents and the parents of opponents would be rude to her:

> I just feel like they just don't like me and I'm over here and they're just walking and I don't want to think it's because [of her race], I never like to think that, but you're over there talking to Jessica, being nice, you say excuse me, but to me [they don't] … It just feels weird, … I don't feel like I am respected.

Another BFA shared a similar sentiment, stating that she felt she was tolerated because of her athletic ability, but nothing more.

While these BFAs have witnessed other BFA teammates and Black coaches being called the n-word, or have themselves had non-Black teammates make comments about being "almost as tan as" them, they also mentioned microaggressions that came from other Black people. These microaggressions sought to call into question these women's blackness by likening them or their sport to being White. The three examples given were, "Oh, soccer is a white sport," "You talk like a White girl," and, "You must live in a White neighborhood." The BFA who was told that soccer is a white sport discussed confronting those who made this claim by educating them on the growth of the game in this country and the strides towards a more inclusive game being made by US Soccer. Other than this, however, BFAs dealt with these microaggressions in much the same way as they dealt with other types of microaggressions that came from non-Black people. Strategies and methods of dealing with microaggressions will be discussed in a later section.

The last type of microaggressions experienced by BFAs were gendered microaggressions, which are microaggressions based on these women's gender identity. All microaggressions reported in this category came from men, athletes and non-athletes alike, and most centered around these BFAs' athletic abilities. In pickup basketball, there was reluctance on the part of these men to choose F6 for their team; if she beat them, she said, they were surprised and shocked. Male athletes on campus also made comments, C3 stated, to and about the female athletes. "You're strong to be girls," they would proclaim, or, when in the weight room, they would comment, "That's a lot of weight for a girl to be lifting."

Microaggressions affected blackness or femininity? When asked if the microaggressions experienced had affected her blackness or femininity, one BFA responded, "Yeah, definitely. It kind of affects the way I dress now." Due to a lot of male coaches in the weight room, and in an effort to avoid objectification from catcallers, she now wears looser clothing. The five other

BFAs interviewed stated that microaggressions did not affect either their blackness or their femininity. One BFA shared how her parents helped her grow comfortable with her blackness:

> No, like I said my parents told me, 'Don't let it compromise anything, like, you are who you are and be proud of that,' and it's like even growing up where I did — like me and my best friend are the same we came from two Black parents who were well off, but I know other people came from the same thing but have more white friends and [they do] not identify with white people, but gravitate to them more than they do to people inside their own race so it's like, for me, I was like even though I came from that I still feel more comfortable in my own circle kind of thing.

Another BFA did admit that while these microaggressions have not made her feel less Black or feminine, they do give her pause at times:

> People do say things and I stop for a second and think, 'What was that supposed to mean,' then I brush it off and keep going.' … I don't really think [microaggressions have] really affected my life in any major way because I like myself. My parents always tell me, 'Don't listen, you know what you are, you know where you came from,' so that's kind of what I grew up learning.

When faced with microaggressions, then, she reframes the situation, by telling herself to ignore the implications of the microaggression and to remember who she is and where she has come from. In response to this question, one BFA stated, "I don't feel like stuff fazes me at all. I'm not fazed by anything, honestly." She attributed her ability to focus, in part, to her sport. For another BFA interviewed, microaggressions may affect her day-to-day mood, but not her blackness, femininity, or performance:

> I would say it's mainly just, like, annoyances. I remember I saw like some video that talks about microaggressions and they were kind of like comparing it to a mosquito. So, like, a mosquito always buzzes around in your ear and you're shaking your hands to get it away and then eventually more mosquitos start buzzing and then next thing you know, you have bites all over you and you're itchy, so I thought that was really good comparison. So, you see, it's annoyances, they don't really affect me, it's just something that's just annoying. I just kind of grew to semi-tolerate them just for the time being because it's not worth my energy to lash out … it's not worth the energy. I kind of pick and choose my battles.

Another BFA went as far as to say that experiencing microaggressions, in fact, strengthened her level of comfort with both her blackness and her femininity:

> I think it actually made me embrace my blackness more because growing up in my town it was just — I would try to ignore the like, 'Oh, we don't see color,' and I would be like, 'Oh, oh, so we don't see color? We're not supposed to see color? Because I know you're a lot paler than I am.' So, I would come home and be like, 'Mom, my teacher said we don't see color,' and she would be like, 'Yeah, because all those decades of slavery didn't see color,' and I'm like oh, that's a good point. Like, the white people weren't slaves, were they? It was just us. So, I was like from now on, I kind of have to start embracing Black, that there's nothing wrong with it, but that's definitely not how my environment outside of my house tried to bring it up because they were like, 'Oh, no, we don't see you any differently than us,' and I'm like, 'But I am. We are. We are in fact different, like, I don't even know how you can say that we're not.' And then in terms of femininity, I don't know, it kind of was a joke to me, femininity, because it's like, 'Oh, you play like a

> girl,' and I'm like, 'Yeah, and I can still beat your ass.' … I never really had an issue with it in terms of being feminine or not.

Strategies and methods of dealing with microaggressions. The BFAs interviewed cited predominant use of avoidant and deflective strategies and methods. Only one spoke of consistently using a proactive method of confronting the sources of microaggressions:

> My parents always told me, like, if you don't think something is right then say something to it. So, if someone said something like that I would be like, 'Why do you think it's [soccer] a white sport? Even if it's not common in this area doesn't mean it's not common at all, so that's just to you,' and with white people saying stuff about skin color or hair or whatever it's just like, nip it in the bud now. Yeah, I might have, when I was younger, been more lenient of them. I'm sure, like, you think you're going to lose friendships over that so you're not totally getting on them about it, but as I got older I was like, 'No, you need to not say that.'

Other BFAs also noted use of proactive methods, but they were used conditionally, as these women stressed the importance of picking and choosing their battles wisely. As one BFA stated, since the responsibility of deciding whether to address microaggressions fell to her, she chose to only exert energy on friends of hers, ignoring the microaggressions that came from others. In her words:

> I was just like, 'You know what, I just got to get used to it.' I think it's just I'm at the point where they go in one ear and out the other because it's just so common at a school like mine [a PWI], so common. … I tried the whole approach of, you know, like checking people and letting them know the facts and it doesn't really seem to make that much of a

> difference when they are raised differently, so I'm just like, 'All right, well just don't talk to me. I'm not your friend.' I'm like, 'You're going to say it to the wrong person one day.' And with my friends, I'm like, 'You know, you sound really ignorant right now,' and they are like, 'I'm not trying to.' So, if it's someone I'm actually friends with, I'll explain to them, I'm like, 'You know, that comes off really offensive, here's why,' and they're just kind of like, 'Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.' Then they are kind of awkward around me for like a week or so until they feel comfortable again [laughter].

Sometimes, picking and choosing one's battles was less about others and more about how that BFA felt in the moment. Depending on her mood, one interviewee noted, she may engage in conversation or walk away. "It does get annoying sometimes," she said of dealing with microaggressions. As such, she may "sarcastically play along or just nod my head and walk away. It depends on my overall mood of the day." Being "racially outnumbered" and having more to lose were the primary reasons another interviewee cited for picking her battles wisely. "Going to college is different for Black girls," she stated. For this reason, she is even cautious when confronting transgressors, evidenced by the time in which she sought a moderator for a situation with a teammate. "I wasn't about to have this get lost in translation," she started, "with the way the world works, I would be the one blamed." Her leadership status on her team, however, has been an asset for her. In making her mood and seriousness apparent when upset, her teammates are usually able to recognize their wrongdoing. Shifting the responsibility of addressing microaggressions from herself to the perpetrator, this BFA spoke of "letting people sit in their guilt" and having them take ownership of what they did.

The two other BFAs interviewed used solely avoidant and deflective strategies and methods. Maintaining her composure was of the utmost importance for one BFA who noted

using these types of techniques. From a young age, her mother taught her, “In through one ear and out the other.” She continued, “No one is worth getting out of character. I try not to let [microaggressions] get to me. If I let them get to me, it’s going to mess up my game.” For another, reframing situations and deflecting with humor were most effective:

> When it happens, I’ll kind of make a joke and just go along with it … I just laugh about it. It’s kind of like, I won’t be mad about it, … I just change something positive that’s negative. I don’t really do anything else. I really don’t get mad … I’ll just laugh about it and walk away.

Navigating one’s identities in various contexts. Interviewees had an array of responses when asked if at any point in time they felt the need to tone down or emphasize aspects of their identities depending on the context. For some, like B2, navigating and negotiating was very straightforward:

> I go to practice, I know that I’m preparing myself for some physical activity and if I’m going to class, I know I’m preparing myself for a more mental activity. If I’m going out to a party with my friends, I know I’m kind of preparing myself for a more social activity. There isn’t much preparation on how to navigate myself. You’re kind of like turning a switch on, so it’s like, ‘Okay, it’s time for this, let me turn this switch on. Okay, I’m going to do something physical, it’s time to go to psychology class, let me turn my brain switch on.’ It’s kind of like that.

For others, this process was more complex. As a queer Black woman, one BFA “absolutely” felt that she had to hide or tone down aspects of her identity. Around extended family, the Black community at her university, and “predominantly woman or feminine spaces,” she deemed it

necessary to tone down her queer identity. While she opened up to members of her immediate family about her sexuality, this was not the case with extended family members, among whom dating is a topic typically avoided. Her style of dress at home is also "a lot more feminine than it would be on campus." Within her school's Black community, toning down her queer identity is a way of circumnavigating issues in a predominantly Black dorm and hypermasculinity among Black men. A lot of navigating also takes place in the training room where she says her blackness is apparent. She does not much socialize with other athletes, a "very white, privileged community," and often gets confused for other Black female athletes on campus. All of this combined contributes to an environment in which uncertainty brews. Internally, questions of if she should rap all the songs being played, if she should tone down her dancing, and how she should wear her natural hair arise. Two spaces in which she absolutely refuses to tone down her blackness, however, are in the queer community and on the field or with her team. In the former, she says does not tone it down because she wants to know who she is dealing with before getting involved with someone. As for the latter, if her teammates forget that she is Black, more microaggressions may take place. More importantly, though, in her own words, "I don't want anyone on my team to forget that I'm Black. … If they remember that I'm Black, they will remember that this person that they care about is Black and therefore they learn to care about Black people."

Dealing with one's racial identity around teammates was touched on by other BFAs interviewed, one of whom had a different experience with her blackness on predominantly non-Black teams:

> Sometimes I would say I had to tone down my African-American identity to get along with other people on my team. … A lot of times I had different views [politically] from

> them, so I would like, kind of, you know, tone it down and go along with the majority. … I'm not really going to say anything…keep my feelings on the inside.

On teams that are predominantly non-Black, this BFA silences her Black identity and internalizes the microaggressions, choosing to say nothing and let the moment pass. While this BFA stated earlier that microaggressions do not make her feel less Black or feminine and that she reframes the experience, she also noted the use of humor to deflect when faced with microaggressions. A growing sense of comfortability with the interviewer may have contributed to this BFA sharing this at this time. Coming into college, H8 had concerns about her blackness at a PWI, but, in time, those concerns were assuaged:

> I didn't think I was going to fit in. I didn't really tone down my blackness but I just kind of didn't talk which wasn't characteristic of myself and I kind of just observed and it took me a while to get comfortable, and once I got comfortable I was like, 'Okay I'll be fine being myself here. I don't have to fake it.' I was very nervous about that because of my past experiences where I did have to fake it, like, in volleyball, and for a little while in field hockey, so I was just, I was hesitant for sure to just be myself, but after a while I was just like, 'Ah, no, never mind. It's acceptable here, its fine.' [laughter]

While not in athletics, there was one environment in which she had to think twice about her blackness:

> I think the only time where I really have a heightened awareness of how I'm coming off is if I'm going for a job interview. It is when I know, as a female, I'm at a disadvantage, and as a Black female, I'm like okay, well I kind of have to come off as not stereotypical as possible, so I used to put my hair up in a bun, make sure it looked straight, or I would

> straighten my hair or get a straight weave just so they weren't focusing on that, and now I don't care as much. … Coming up now, this is still kind of in the back of my mind. I'm trying to apply for internships in [an] area [that] is still very racist so I'm kind of going back and forth and I'm like, 'Well, do I take the risk because these internships are so competitive or do I wait until I get a job and come with my hair like this? I'm contemplating dying it darker because it is red and there're just so many things that I am considering that I'm sure the white girls do not think about. So, I'm like, I don't know. I struggle with it in terms of that, but other than trying to get a job or anything I tend not to care.

She is not the only one concerned about what happens to her hair, though:

> I know my mom used to grow up in an even whiter town than me and it drives her crazy that I wear my hair natural because she got her hair pressed every week. It was always laid, it was straight because that's how it was supposed to be and whenever I'm telling her, 'Hey, I've got an interview coming up,' she's like, 'You're going to straighten your hair right,' and I'm like, 'I'm not too sure. Why would it matter? I could straighten it, I don't have to straighten it,' and she's like, 'Well, I really think you should straighten it, it looks more professional.' I'm like, 'Well, why does it look more professional? A lot of women have curly hair or they have wavy hair. How is that not professional?' Then she's like, 'Well, it's because you're Black. It gives them a reason that you stand out and it's not always in a good way,' and it's something I have to think about.

Outside of blackness, one BFA noted a need to tone down her athletic side:

> I know my mom would tell me, 'You're always so focused on sports, you really don't get to do anything else.' Now, I kind of toned it down, I learned how to balance playing a sport but I still can do this [and get] involved in clubs at school, like, doing different things.

A couple BFAs shared feeling the desire and need to emphasize their blackness more than any other identity. As a member of a predominantly White team and resident of a predominantly White neighborhood, one BFA recalled having to negotiate her racial identity with teammates or others who were not Black:

> Just having those people around you playing soccer and they think because you're their teammate, because you guys are cool, that they can get away with some stuff and it's like, until you say something about it [then] they are like, 'Oh,' but no, it doesn't matter that we're cool, [there are] just some things you shouldn't say, some things you shouldn't do. Like, there are boundaries.

Outside of athletic contexts, however, there was no need to emphasize or tone down aspects of her identity:

> Aside from the sports, nothing has happened where I had to emphasize and negotiate in a classroom, so I feel like [it was] because I was only around White people in sports in high school. I haven't had to do any of that since then and I've always been around people who are like me so that wasn't an issue at all.

There were no spaces in which another BFA felt the need to tone down parts of herself. "I emphasize that I'm Black and proud to be Black," she declared. As evidence of this, around the time during which National Football League quarterback Colin Kaepernick was silently

protesting during the playing of the national anthem, she held up a Black power fist, a la John Carlos and Tommie Smith, during a tournament that featured a predominantly White crowd. "I'm proud of all three of my identities," she proclaimed, "I'm proud of all my accomplishments. I worked my ass off to be here."

What is it like being a Black female athlete? One prominent theme that emerged in responses to this question were the challenges one endured as a Black female athlete. "It's hard sometimes," one BFA stated when asked. Another BFA felt her race was used against her, stating, "Sometimes, I feel like because I was Black, I wasn't given the opportunity of getting the information on how to do everything in the right way. It was hard for me to actually work myself up [in the soccer world]." She continued,

> If I focus on soccer, it is kind of hard. … I came from a predominantly Black area … we didn't have a lot of training and we didn't have a lot of teams. … So then playing in the fact that I'm Black also, I didn't get a lot of training. It's kind of hard to make it. I really had to make myself be known. … Once you get your name out there, they always remember you as the Black goalkeeper from so-and-so; they got to put your race in it.

She also believed that a lot of generalizations were routinely made about BFAs, especially Black female basketball players. Comments about these women looking and "[being] built like dudes," as well as assumptions about their sexuality, she felt, were reserved for sports with high percentages of Black women. These, she believed, were the sports discussed the most negatively:

> Softball girls basically have kind of like, the same build as basketball girls. I feel like they are in the gym the same, building their muscles…but I don't see people talking about the softball players' build as much as they talk about the track runners and

> basketball players, like, 'Basketball players and track runners are so muscular.' You get any type of muscle tone and you start looking like a dude.

More thoughts were shared regarding navigating the oft conflicting messages from others:

> Black female athletes have to do the extra stuff to keep our so-called femininity to the world and still be able to play sports … but then at the same time, they still say, 'Oh, you're soft,' but its's like, I'm soft, but I'm a dude.

In confronting the negativity, then, particularly on her university's campus, one BFA interviewed felt obligated to take on a role as advocate when met with students who believe college athletics to be unnecessary. "I'm not just an athlete," she stated, "I feel the need to defend athletics, but also the need to defend my right to be at [my school]."

The importance of Black female athlete role models was another emergent theme. As a bowler, I9 found it disheartening that she knew of no Black female professional bowlers. For H8, this was a phenomenon observed since youth:

> Growing up it was kind of strange being a Black female athlete because there weren't a lot of role models portrayed in the media and as I got older there was Carmelita Jeter, Allyson Felix, … there are these two African American women that were on the USA volleyball team for Beijing and I was like, 'Whoa, Black people in volleyball? Holy cr*p." … Yeah, and I think actually there are quite a few Black girls on the volleyball team for the USA now so it's like, 'Okay, that's a change,' but they just were never shown in the media so it kind of, like, worried me. I was like, 'So, do only white women do sports?' And then as Venus and Serena got better and better in their careers they started becoming focal points and I was like, 'Wow, okay that's two very strong, two

> very powerful Black women who the media, I mean not always, but was putting them out there, so that was kind of acceptance, even though they were too busy focusing on, 'Oh, who wears this to play tennis' or 'why is her butt so big' or 'why do they wear their hair like that?' Just the stupidest things. Like, why? But all right, they exist, like, they are there. So then I would gain more confidence the more positive role models I saw.

Serena Williams was an athlete cited by several of the BFAs as a role model. Regarding the seemingly disproportionate amount of negative comments and media coverage directed at her, the BFAs felt her race was the primary reason:

> If she was white [and] she was the same way, I just feel like they would praise her as a tennis player. If she was as good as Serena and had the same body type, they'd just be like, 'Oh, she's so great.'

While acknowledging the less than positive, these women also praised Serena's greatness. In addition to being "so attractive," these women respected the fact that she honored her feelings. "She's herself at all times," one BFA stated. "If she gets pissed, she's not, you know, a robot," she continued. All of this and "still [being] on top of her game" led these BFAs to conclude that "she is the model for Black female athletes." Skylar Diggins, Candace Parker, and Carmelita Jeter were other Black female athletes recognized as "beautiful and Black," as well as great at their sports.

Increased expectations from others due to their race was the third theme that emerged. All BFAs interviewed testified to having others assume them to be superior athletes or exceptionally fast. To an extent, their performances continued beyond the field of play. Not only do these women have to perform in competition, they also have to perform behavior wise. One

BFA shared, “I feel like I have to work just as hard as these White girls do. … This is a job, this is business. Another thing, I have to carry myself to a certain degree because of all those people.”

An emergent theme that should be further researched is the way that class intersects with the other identities of Black female athletes. While some interviewees mentioned their families being financially well off, one opened up about the ways in which race and class stymied her athletic career. A lack of resources in her neighborhood forced her to leave the area in which she lived to get training an hour away in the hopes of “being up to par with the girls in [the] state.” Financially, these trainings were a burden, but she was most frustrated with the lack of social capital acquired. “I didn’t have the opportunity to get the knowledge that I felt like I should have had access to,” she explained. Her family did not know how the college recruiting system worked, leaving her to do a lot of the research herself, at times receiving help from teammates and their parents. “I was really behind the recruiting curve. I didn’t even start playing travel soccer until my junior year in high school.”

For all its challenges, though, several interviewees rounded out their responses noting the positives of being Black female athletes. According to one, “It makes you work harder … and offers discipline. You don’t have the luxury to waste your time when you’re an athlete.” The camaraderie with other BFAs on her college team was a worthwhile experience for another interviewee:

> I love it. From my experience, it hasn’t really been an issue. Like I’ve explained, it’s definitely had its moments where it’s like okay, ‘I’ve known the whole time,’ but it’s just like you can see it sometimes. Here at an HBCU, it’s like, okay, now I have a whole team where other Black girls who are at the same level and if not, I want to better them. It’s all

> about building each other as a Black female athlete, and being told that soccer is a white sport, and then coming here, there're other Black people who play. It's like now we have to stick together even more. Like, we can't let outside factors of what we've seen in the past continue to affect us.

Overall, most took pride in being BFAs and found it empowering. According to H8, "It kind of, I don't know, gave me this feeling of being badass, like, 'Yeah, I'm a girl and I do sports.'" There was one BFA, though, that did not find anything unique about being a BFA:

> I never felt like I had superior benefits over everyone else. … I never really felt like anything is super special about me. I was just a student getting my education who was doing a sport … as opposed to joining the art club.

What is it like being a Black woman? This question was a particularly difficult one for most of the BFAs to answer. To provide context, one interviewee prefaced her response with an analysis of the unique position within the United States occupied by Black women:

> Black women are also the most understanding people in America because you have to understand how White people think, people of other races who are lighter than you think, and how men think, and so you are the most empathetic and you understand how people think. … On the flip side, White people, people of other races, and Black men don't know how you think, and don't have to think about you.

She continued, "I feel like society is dependent on us, and a lot of labor is dependent on us as Black women." Other BFAs were candid in their thoughts on the plight of Black women in this country. To them, hardship and neglect were intrinsic aspects of Black women's lives. In the words of one BFA:

> You feel that abuse for all the efforts that Black women put into everything to be successful and other movements. … I feel like the work I'm putting in is not appreciated and I'm just getting hurt but I have to care at the same time. Part of being a Black woman is carrying this love you have to give to everyone because at some point you hope that the love will come back to you but it doesn't.

Similar sentiments were expressed by another interviewee who expounded on some of the issues of concern for Black women:

> It's hard because even just outside sports, we have to worry about so many other things. We have the controversy over getting stereotyped by our male counterparts, who are like, 'Black women are always angry, I'm not going to marry Black, my kids will be mixed because I will not marry a Black woman,' and all this other junk. And you're just like, 'Okay, so how are we supposed to defeat the stereotypes put on us by White people and other races when we have to deal with our own male counterparts labelling us as these angry individuals?' Then we have to deal with fitting into societal norms that no other race, or the male gender, has to worry about. Like, if you look at the modeling industry, you hardly ever see … a Vogue campaign where a Black women truly gets to be herself and wear her natural hair. She usually has to have a weave, and it's usually pin straight, and if she has the cover it's usually because it's her and someone else who is White, so we're just never in favor and we have to jump through so many more hoops and do all these fancy tricks to make people favor us, and it's just ridiculous at times. It's tiring. We have to just worry about our skin tone in general walking out the door and it's just not right, it just really isn't right.

Asked how she dealt with these feelings of rejection and unfairness, she responded,

> I just try not to let it affect me and just try to stay who I am, but there are times when after things you would question yourself and be like, 'Well, am I going about this the right way or should I just give in to society,' and there's like a little voice in the back of your head like, 'Hell no, girl! Don't give in, keep pressing because one day this will be the norm and we'll all be accepted,' but getting there is not easy. So, I just really try to embrace who I am and it's taken a long time for me to reach this point because at first I was like, 'All right, White is right I guess, so just be as White as possible.' Then I was like, 'Wait, this is not fun, this is not enjoyable. This is not who I am,' and I just finally gave up on it. Now, I don't know, life has gotten more carefree now that I can just be myself. I've lost some friends along the way who don't necessarily agree, but it is what it is.

An additional method of combatting the explicitly and implicitly negative messages propagated was taking it upon one's self to support other Black women. Of the Black female community at her university, one BFA admitted,

> We'll help each other out, even if we don't like each other, … especially in the STEM department. We all support each other. That's the nice thing, that at the very least, we share this experience of discrimination regardless of how we were raised and we're willing to like, build each other up because we know it's going to be hard, and so we try, I think, to make it easier for each other, especially in this place.

Also a STEM major, another BFA stated:

> I was nervous because I am a science major and I was like, 'There aren't going to be any of us,' and I got there and I actually saw the most minority of women in the science

> department, and I'm just like, 'Yes, thank God! Like, I can fit in here, this is great, this is wonderful. I won't always be the only one in the class.' Though, we are different science majors, so we tend to be separated, but when we are together it's comforting like, 'Hey, you. How you doing? I see you girl, I see you.'

Of note, both of these women attend PWIs. As such, they emphasized the importance of the support they received from other Black women on campus, and the support that they gave to other Black women. Also enrolled at a PWI, another BFA shared:

> Especially on a predominantly White campus, and also coming from a predominantly White high school, I can say like, sometimes you go through your days and you do get hit with a lot of microaggressions from your peers, whether it's about something like, 'How does your hair do that,' or, 'Do you know how to dab,' or whatever dance is popular at the time, and so it does get annoying. It's kind of like in the mosquito comparison and getting all these mosquito bites. Other than that, I feel like a Black person, especially in this society, it's like, you know there are odds against you, you don't get as much privilege. So, kind of like, deep down, you kind of have this in your head. Like, okay, I may have to work a little harder … [but] I never really use it as a crutch … I'm a person who's naturally motivated, naturally wants to work hard to succeed. … But it's just like, something in the back of your mind. If you're ever put in a situation where something is unfair, where you're not offered a job that is offered to someone else, it's a possibility it could be because of that reason or it's a possibility that you may have to do a little bit above average just to reap the same benefits or rewards.

This moment was notable as this BFA earlier stated that the only microaggressions she experienced were people assuming she was an athlete because of her height, not her race or

gender. To hear her state in this moment that she experienced many other types of microaggressions, again, spoke to either her growing comfortability with the interviewer or her growing awareness of what microaggressions were.

Several BFAs did, however, identify positive aspects of being Black women and expressed optimism regarding the future for Black women collectively in the United States. One interviewee responded:

> Being a Black woman, I like seeing how in recent times we are realizing our worth and realizing that whatever stereotypes society has on us, we are able to overcome them. We are able to show that … we are not just a stereotype, and it's seeing that, I guess you can say Black girl magic, it's good to see. Like, it's happy, it makes me happy, and definitely makes me feel good.

Another BFA had this to say about being a Black woman:

> It's fun. We have a lot of very influential Black women [we are] able to look up to. I feel like I have nothing to hold me back now. I mean, that's just a big push because there're so many places where Black women have not gotten to, I feel like there are so many places I can go and make a name for myself. … We're still being firsts. This is the best time, you can still be a first. I feel like I have one of the greatest opportunities to do something good. They're always going to see us as inferior to men and they also putting our race on top of it … [so] you're going to have to really work to get there, but it can be done.

These women felt the hardships and challenges endured had, in fact, benefited them, with one BFA declaring,

> I wouldn't trade it for anything. … It gets tough, but it's something I wouldn't change. It gives me confidence, a lot of confidence. … It makes me feel good about myself, even when stuff is terrible and we're made to look bad. I still embrace it. I wouldn't trade it for anything and I'm proud to be Black.

It was powerful to hear the strengthened resolve in the voices of these women as they described continuing in their pursuits despite the obstacles they encountered. One interviewee perfectly articulated this process of negotiating pain with optimism and determination, saying:

> For me, being a Black woman is a sense of pride because I already, on a daily basis, go through so much. … There's this sense of pride from being able to deal with all this stuff and still be standing, even though it's hard and we shouldn't have to put this much work in. I think it's also that power from dealing with all these struggles, and this form of resilience, but also this deep ingrained pain from having to keep everything together all the time. There's also this battle fatigue, but also like, but you're still working…. I can sit here and be hurt all the time or I can fix it, and I'm on the side of I gotta fix it, so I gotta deal with this pain, but also work through it and get stronger from it. So I think that's part of being a Black woman.

Discussion

Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short. This sample of Black female athletes had a lower femininity mean and higher masculinity mean than Bem's normative and female samples; they also had a higher masculinity mean than Bem's male sample, meaning they were more masculine than all three sample groups. The femininity mean for this sample of BFAs ($\bar{x}$ =5.20) was only slightly higher than that of the male sample ($\bar{x}$ =5.19), so this study's BFAs were also almost less

feminine than all three samples. Comparison against the female sample was actually where the largest difference between the number of feminine-categorized participants was found. The sample of BFAs went from four feminine-categorized women using the medians for the normative sample to only one feminine-categorized woman using the increased femininity median for the female sample.

One of the BSRI-S's strengths, though, is that it treats femininity and masculinity as two independent dimensions rather than as two ends of a single dimension (Bem, 1981, p. 5), allowing a comprehensive analysis of these BFA's femininity. Even though, on average, this group of BFAs was more masculine than all Bem's sample groups, they scored the highest on femininity and masculinity traits that correspond with the ideals of Black femininity previously discussed. On the masculinity scale, the BFAs scored the highest on "independent" ($\bar{x}$ =6.18), followed by "have leadership abilities" ($\bar{x}$ =5.86), "strong personality" ($\bar{x}$ =5.82), "defend my own beliefs" ($\bar{x}$ =5.55), "willing to take a stand" ($\bar{x}$ =5.5), and "assertive" ($\bar{x}$ =5.18)". While these characteristics are deemed masculine in the United States' ideals of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, they were characteristics necessary for the survival of Black women and the Black family that have been passed through generations. BFAs also scored high on the following femininity scale characteristics: "understanding" ($\bar{x}$ =5.86), "compassionate" ($\bar{x}$ =5.77), "loves children" ($\bar{x}$ =5.55), and "sensitive to the needs of others" ($\bar{x}$ =5.32), indicating that while they exhibit characteristics seen as stereotypically masculine by United States society at large, those are as much a part of their femininity as stereotypically feminine traits, which they also exhibit.

Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale. Nadal's (2011) Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale serves as a "quantitative instrument on racial microaggressions that could measure the microaggressions that people of color experience in their everyday lives" (p.

2). The mean "REMS average" scores, then, indicate whether this sample of BFAs has experienced microaggressions of any type over the past six months. The sample's mean of 0.388, however, was much lower than that of Nadal's sample, indicating that the BFAs experienced fewer microaggressions of any type in the past six months than Nadal's sample. There are two proposed explanations for this. First, 16% of participants were from Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) schools, a conference of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). It is possible that in attending an HBCU, BFAs experienced less racial microaggressions, which are what the REMS measures. Along those lines, the second possible explanation may be attributed to the fact that the highest number of BFAs in this study participated in track and field, both indoor (n = 14) and outdoor (n = 13). Along with basketball, track and field has traditionally been recognized as a sport in which Black women are typically overrepresented (Bruening, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). According to the NCAA, Black women accounted for 49.2% of Division-I women's basketball players, 27% of women's outdoor track participants, and 27.3% of women's indoor track participants during the 2015-2016 academic year (NCAA Diversity). As such, the high concentration of Black women in these sports may reduce the number of racial microaggressions experienced by this sample's BFAs.

In addition to calculating racial microaggressions overall, the REMS also consists of six subscales of microaggressions. Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority measures microaggressions in which "people of color are assumed to be poor, . . . hold substandard careers" (Nadal, 2011, p. 2), or inferior in other capacities. This study's sample of BFAs had a mean of 0.450 on this scale, slightly greater than Nadal's sample, which had a mean of 0.421 on this scale. While Nadal's sample consisted of, among others, undergraduate students, the myth of unintelligence among Black athletes (Bruening, 2005; Sue et al., 2008; Withycombe, 2011),

which BFAs commented on during the qualitative interviews, and difficulty adjusting to their schools (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Inyama, Williams, & McCauley, 2016) may contribute to the slightly higher mean on this subscale for BFAs. Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizens and Assumptions of Criminality measure microaggressions in which "people of color are stereotyped to be deviant or criminals" (p. 2) and when "a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 158). The mean of Nadal's sample for this subscale was 0.418 whereas the mean for this sample of BFAs was 0.336. Filled with scenarios like, "Someone's body language showed they were scared of me, because of my race," "someone clenched her/his purse or wallet upon seeing me because of my race," and, "someone assumed that I would physically hurt them because of my race," many of this subscale's situations played on racial stereotypes typically reserved for males, particularly Black males, serving as a potential rationale for this being the subscale on which BFAs scored the third lowest.

Microinvalidations, or "verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 155) are the focus of the REMS's third subscale. Filled with scenarios pertaining to colorblindness (e.g., "Someone told me that she or he was colorblind," "Someone told me that they 'don't see color'") and times now being "post-racial" (e.g., "I was told that people of color do not experience racism anymore," "Someone told me that people should not think about race anymore"), BFAs experienced this form of microaggression most often. While 12% of BFAs in this study attended MEAC schools, 24% attended Ivy League schools, 16% attended colleges and universities part of the Metro Atlantic Athletic conference (MAAC) and 16% attended Northeast conference schools, meaning that at least 56% of participants attended predominantly

white institutions (PWIs). Several researchers have explored the difficulties that Black students may have adjusting to PWIs (Hawkins, 2010; Inyama et al., 2016), especially surrounding sometimes unintentional comments from non-Black peers and faculty that further exacerbated the feelings of differentness (Hannon et al., 2016; Jordan, 2010) experienced. As will be further elaborated on in presenting findings from the interviews, several BFAs also touched on experiencing microinvalidations from teammates and coaches.

BFAs in this sample scored the lowest on Subscale 4: Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity, and surprisingly, Subscale 6: Workplace and School Microaggressions. Of all subscales, the largest discrepancy between Nadal's (2011) sample and this sample of BFAs existed on Subscale 4, which measured microaggressions in which BFAs were "treated as a foreign object for the pleasure/entertainment of others" (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 159) and/or viewed as the same as all other members of her race (e.g., "Someone wanted to date me only because of my race," "Someone told me that all people in my racial group are all the same," "Someone told me that all people in my racial group look alike"). However, given that this study focuses on BFAs, Nadal's sample was more racially diverse – 35% Latina/os, 20% Black/African Americans, 13% multiracial persons, [and] 12% Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (p. 7) – which might explain the difference. Many of the items in this subscale refer to stereotypes that are not typically assigned to Black people in the United States. For example, one scenario reads, "Someone assumed that I spoke a language other than English," while another states "Someone asked me to teach them words in my 'native language.'" While there are other ways in which BFAs have historically been viewed as homogenous, be it body type – assumed to have big lips and butts, or be physically strong – or by character and temperament – sexually deviant, animalistic, angry, manipulative (Bruening, 2005, Patton, 2006; Withycombe, 2011; Yarbrough

& Bennett, 2000) – the stereotype of them speaking another language has not typically been part of the narrative put forth by others. Despite high scores on Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority, BFAs in this sample scored the lowest on Subscale 6. Including scenarios like, "I was ignored at school or at work because of my race," "An employer or co-worker treated me differently than White co-workers," and "Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups," this was the most surprising result in REMS findings. Prior research on microaggressions and experiences of Black women in educational settings (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Watkins, LaBerrie, & Appio, 2010) led to the belief that this sample of BFAs would have reported more experiences with microaggressions in this subscale. The possibility of there being few school and workplace microaggressions occurring exists, but it would be interesting to further explore how and if these women's roles as athletes serves as a buffer for these types of microaggressions.

Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions explores microaggressions delivered through physical surroundings such that people of color are made to feel unwelcome, isolated, unsafe, and alienated (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 153). Including items such as, "I observed people of my race in prominent positions at my workplace or school," and "I observed people of my race portrayed positively on television," this subscale presented positive scenarios in which people of color found themselves represented in media (television, movies, magazines) and leadership positions (government, school, corporations). Unlike the other subscales, this subscale was calculated inversely, meaning that scores were converted to their opposites. The more often BFAs selected "0 = I did not experience this event," the stronger the environmental microaggression. Although this sample of BFAs did not have as low of a mean as Nadal's (2011) sample, they still had frequent experiences of environmental microaggressions.

Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale. Analyzing BFAs' results on this scale is less about classifying them in any one category than it is about understanding where in their Black identity development they may be and, subsequently, which views they may hold on their blackness. Schemas with the highest scores (i.e., dominant statuses) are the statuses that the individual uses most often when faced with racial stimuli in their internal and external environment, whereas schemas with the lowest scores (i.e., recessive statuses) are those that the individual uses the least often (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010). In the Conformity stage, the individual internalizes beliefs about race and racism held by the dominant society and shows a preference for the dominant culture over Black culture (Huentity Psychological Consulting, 2010). According to Sue and Sue (2013), those in this stage tend to have self-deprecating attitudes and beliefs towards themselves and other members of their racial group, discriminatory attitudes and beliefs toward other non-white racial groups, and a belief in the superiority of dominant (White) culture. At some point, an event occurs that causes these individuals to reconsider the denigrating beliefs that they previously held about their racial group. This stage – dissonance – is characterized by confusion and an uncertainty regarding how to feel about one's self, one's racial group, other non-white racial groups, and the beliefs and cultural values of dominant society that were previously accepted without challenge.

Immersion is characterized by a complete rejection of all members and aspects of dominant culture and society, whereas Emersion is characterized by fully embracing and enjoying cultural aspects of one's racial group. In the former, individuals are motivated to participate in Black culture by anti-White sentiments, as opposed to pro-Black sentiments in the latter. Lastly, in the Internalization stage, the individuals achieve a balance of embracing and appreciating their racial group with selective appreciation of and interaction with people and

aspects from dominant culture that also look to combat racism and other forms of oppression. High scores in this stage also indicate a commitment to fighting all forms of oppression (Sue & Sue, 2013). In processing the BRIAS results for this sample, there were three main profiles into which these BFAs generally fit into, the first of which was a somewhat even distribution of scores across all five schemas. Participants #7 and #47, for example, have similar scores across all stages, indicating that these participants have not yet developed any specific attitudes regarding their blackness. While they agreed with statements from more developed stages like Emersion (e.g., "I feel excitement and joy in Black surroundings.") and Internalization (e.g., "I feel good about being Black, but do not limit myself to Black activities"), they did not refute statements from the Conformity (e.g., "I believe that a Black person's most effective weapon for solving problems is to become part of the White person's world") and Dissonance schemas (e.g., "I feel guilty or anxious about some of the things I believe about Black people").

The second grouping of BFAs had two or three specific stages for which, relative to the other stages, scores were particularly high. Participants #22 and #49 demonstrate this. Compared to scores on the three other schemas, participant #22 has higher scores in the Conformity (59.47) and Dissonance (63.04) stages, indicating that there is possibly some conflict with previously held beliefs about blackness and Black culture. While her Dissonance scores are higher than her Conformity scores, they are not so by much, potentially indicating wavering between beliefs in congruence with each stage. Of note, though, is that her third highest score comes on the Immersion schema, a stage characterized by delving into Black culture due to anti-White motivations or sentiments. Participant #49, on the other hand, has her two highest scores in the last two stages, indicating developed racial identity attitudes that are primarily pro-Black, but not anti-White. Her highest score occurs on the Internalization schema, suggesting a healthy balance

of embracing her blackness, while also being able to embrace and appreciate aspects of non-Black cultures.

Participants #9, #34, and #81 are examples of the third profile. These BFAs have scores on one schema that far exceed all others, indicating strongly developed beliefs in accordance with that schema – Immersion for participant #9, Emersion for participant #34, and Conformity for participant #81. High scores in these stages do not, however, suggest that these BFAs may not simultaneously hold beliefs about Black culture and their blackness that correspond to other stages. Furthermore, progression through these stages is not necessarily linear. As evidenced by participant #20, whose lowest scores come in the Dissonance schema, development of racial identity attitudes can occur in any order.

How do Black female intercollegiate athletes define femininity? Unanimously rejecting the notion of femininity as a physical standard, these BFAs' definitions of femininity aligned with Davis (1983), hooks (1991), and Stevenson's (1996) assertions that femininity among Black women is behavior-based. There were several noteworthy takeaways from the categories and themes that emerged. In the first category of behavior, the three themes were engaging in self-love and self-like behaviors, being in touch with one's inner self, and intentionality in one's actions. Contextualizing these definitions of femininity within the historical dehumanization and exploitation of Black women in the United States (Collins, 2004; Davis, 1983; Patton, 2006) emphasizes the magnitude of these themes being verbalized by these women. Analyzed collectively, these three themes convey agency, which Black women have traditionally been denied. From explicit degradation during chattel slavery when laws institutionalized held no penalty for slave owners raping Black women and stripping them of legal rights to their children (Davis, 1983; Truth, 1851), to, more contemporarily, the required

exclusion and othering necessary in maintaining hegemonic femininity, Black women loving themselves and taking ownership of their bodies has never been looked upon favorably in United States society at large. These BFAs rejecting hegemonic standards of femininity speaks to a reclamation of their power and right to define themselves. Essentially, these themes signal these women's defiance and refusal to succumb to externally established standards seeking to suppress their multidimensionality.

There were two themes in the second category of behavior, the first being knowing how to carry one's self. One of the BFAs discussed "carrying yourself in public properly" in order to proactively combat the negative stereotypes about Black women held by others. This method calls back to the Black Ladies societies that were created "to uplift the race to a level equal to or exceeding that of a White woman" (Patton, 2006, p. 27). "As if to blot out the humiliation of working in the white woman's kitchen all day, [and] of being virtuously defenseless before the sexual advances of white men," Wallace explained that women in the societies performed aspects of high society to "make her[self] more of a lady, more clean, [and] more proper than any White woman could hope to be" (as cited in Patton, 2006, p. 27). The BFAs that mentioned this type of behavior spoke specifically about carrying one's self "properly" in public, not for their self-satisfaction, but to avoid the ire of others. That there are some Black women still using this method today demonstrates how little of a priority fostering better institutional and societal treatment of this group has been since the end of slavery in the United States.

Part of the second theme within this category presents the essentialist view that women are naturally more sensitive and nurturing than men. Although an argument that socialization plays a role in this could be made, more important is that nurturing and caring for others are elements of the new womanhood examined earlier in the literature review. Black women

cultivating spaces in which other Black people and children were supported, protected, and taken care of was, and continues to be, an act of defiance (hooks, 1990). As such, even though this theme is similar to some of the behavioral components of hegemonic femininity, specifically, being maternal and compassionate (Krane, 2001), these actions are inherently political and defiant when done by Black women.

What strategies do Black female intercollegiate athletes use to appear more feminine? The strategies identified by BFAs to appear more feminine were almost identical to those identified by the athletes in Krane et al.'s (2004) study on athletes and femininity. In addition to dressing up and putting on makeup, both groups shared similar sentiments regarding femininity and athleticism, specifically, expressing the desire to dress up more and do their makeup every day, but acknowledging that the effort necessary to sustain those undertakings conflict with being an athlete. One BFA's discussion about popping out, what getting dressed up was referred to as at her school, echoed what two of the athletes in Krane et al.'s work had to say in their summary regarding being female athletes and feminine individuals. "Athletes have like two sides to them. Like on the field or the court or in the pool or whatever," one concluded, with another agreeing, stating, "If you're an athlete, then you have to like transform into entirely someone else when you come off the field or the ice or whatever." The comments made about BFAs popping out and surprising their peers at school with their transformations outside of sport brought to mind the aforementioned comments from Krane et al.'s athletes.

What strategies do Black female intercollegiate athletes use in response to microaggressions? Regarding microaggressions, there is support in the literature for this study's findings. In his qualitative study on racial microaggressions and Black college athletes, Jordan (2010) found four similar themes: ascription of unintelligence/status, exoticism of Black athletes,

second-class citizen, and assumed universality. Ascription of Intelligence/Status included participant responses identifying microaggressions in which Black college athletes' intelligence was questioned. This theme had similar responses to the current study's theme of Assumption of Unintelligence. Some of the microaggressions noted by these BFAs were instances in which other college students or non-Black college athletes assumed athletic ability, not academic merit, gained these women acceptance to their colleges and universities. However, one BFA also spoke of her new head coach who, upon arrival, tested her majority Black team's sport IQ with paper-and-pencil issued quizzes, conveying to many on the team that he assumed them to be athletic but have low sport intelligence.

Jordan's (2010) theme of Exoticism of Black Athletes echoed responses from these BFAs regarding the expectations that others had of them because of assumptions that their race afforded them superior athleticism. Discussed in Chapter 2, this "natural athlete" stereotype undermines the hard work these women put into excelling at their sports, instead, attributing their success to an inherent skill or talent resulting from their race. His themes of Second-Class Citizen and Assumed Universality were also echoed among responses from this study's participants. The former "occurred when Black athletes felt as though they received differential treatment from White people at local establishments, the classroom and sport" (Jordan, 2010, p. 37). One BFA gave two examples of this type of treatment, the first being a three-year-long encounter with an assistant field hockey coach notorious for reprimanding Black female field hockey players. She shared:

> She was definitely a lot harder on us and if something went wrong, we were kind of always the target and then one day, because the head coach, she was real cool, she kind of called her out on it in front of us and was like, 'Why do you treat them differently,' and

> she just didn't have an answer. She was just like, 'Oh, I just feel like they can work harder,' and she was like, 'They are working just as hard as the other girls. You shouldn't really treat them this way.' But that always stuck with me because I could never figure out on my own why I wasn't liked. I was like, 'Well, I scored the goals, I get back on defense, like, why does she [not like me]?' I felt like I was hated and it really wasn't so much of me, but more of my skin tone, and literally after that conversation she kind of stopped talking to all of us [the Black girls].

On her current collegiate team, she says,

> There's two of us that are Black and we hurdle, and hurdles require a lot of discipline, a lot of attention to detail, and we're kind of just put off to the wayside like, 'Oh, they'll figure it out, they're talented,' and with the other ones, it's just like, 'Oh, you have to fix this, you have to fix that.' So I kind of had to develop a sense of independence to get better, but I don't know, just yeah, they [the White athletes] could kind of do no wrong. It's kind of like the trend I've seen through my life versus I have to work three times as hard just to be as good as them.

Of note are the ways in which aspects of the "natural athlete" stereotype are at play in each of these examples. The latter theme, Assumed Universality, spoke to similar content as this study's emergent theme of Assumption of Similarity.

At play for these BFAs were at least three identities, their identity as athletes, as well as their racial and gender identities. Jordan's (2010) focus on racial microaggressions, then, has limitations in presenting a comprehensive understanding of the microaggressions that these women experience as a result of all of their identities. To address this, Nadal et al. (2015)

conducted qualitative research on microaggressions that occur due to multiple identities, also known as intersectional microaggressions (p. 148). Two of the themes in that research that were also found in responses from BFAs were Women of Color as Spokesperson and Assumption of Inferior Status for Women of Color. As with Jordan's Assumed Universality, Nadal et al.'s Women of Color as Spokesperson speaks to an assumed similarity, but focuses specifically on women of color who may "often feel like they represent the universal experience of their racial group" (p. 158). Assumption of Inferior Status for Women of Color "consists of both in-group and out-group expressions of the assumption that women of color do not hold high-ranking positions or are in some way inferior to the majority group," (p. 155), but instances of in-group expressions were the ones that these BFAs were most affected by. The statement from one BFA discussing Black men labeling Black women as "always angry" and expressing desires from mixed-race children best exemplified that.

The proactive strategy of dealing with microaggressions that one BFA cited using consistently is a hybrid of resistance, the process of confronting the perpetrators of a discriminatory behavior (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016), and education/advocacy, the primary engagement coping strategies that extant literature has found Black women to use (Everett, Hall, & Hamilton-Mason, 2010; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell, & Bonett, 2010). However, while engagement coping methods and strategies were at times used by this current study's BFAs, they preferred the use of avoidant coping methods, a finding consistent with other studies (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). In fact, as with these BFAs, the Black college athletes that Jordan (2010) interviewed spoke specifically about not letting microaggressions get to them or affect them, and

carefully picking and choosing which microaggressions to address and which to ignore. Although West, Donovan, and Roemer (2010) found use of high levels of avoidant-focused coping to be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight found that it "significantly mediated the relations between gendered racism and psychological distress for African American women" (as cited in Szymanski & Lewis, 2016, p. 237). Essed's (1991) term "gendered racism" speaks to how the intersectionality of one's racial and gender identities results in intersectional discrimination. Similar to Nadal et al.'s (2015) intersectional microaggressions, gendered racism takes race and gender into account, acknowledging how racism and sexism interact to create a unique phenomenon.

Three primary explanations have been put forth for Black women's use of avoidant coping strategies. While Feagin (1991) and Neal-Barnett (2003) posit that acknowledging and confronting microaggressors is counterproductive because it takes up a lot of these women's time and energy, others believe it to either be a matter of Black women viewing these situations as beyond their control (Lewis et al., 2013; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008), or them being socialized to be strong and using these avoidance coping as a method of "keep[ing] the façade of strength and competence" (Thomas et al., 2008. p. 312). The first two were echoed throughout interviews with the current study's BFAs. Regardless of why it is Black women seem to prefer this style of coping, it does appear to protect them from the negative effects of microaggressions, especially when experiencing a high volume of microaggressions (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016).

How do Black female intercollegiate athletes navigate their racial, gender, and athletic identities in various contexts? All BFAs spoke to emphasizing or toning down aspects of their identity depending on the context. Most commonly discussed was toning down one's

racial identity around White teammates, but there was discussion about toning down one's identity as an athlete, navigating being a queer Black woman athlete, and emphasizing one's racial identity. Four of the five women that spoke about toning down aspects of their identity did so to avoid negative reactions from others.

What is it like being a Black female athlete? One of the most important takeaways from the interviewees' responses about their experiences as BFAs was the emphasis on media representation and having BFA role models, especially for those participating in sports where Black women are underrepresented. While several prominent professional BFAs were named throughout interviews as women that these college athletes looked up to, there remain those like I9, who feel that the sports they participate in are exclusionary spaces not intended for them. Her thoughts on being a Black female bowler were consistent with Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman's (2016) finding that Black women at PWIs had "expectations self-imposed in response to their perceptions of how the White community viewed them" (p. 660). Although I9 does not attend a PWI, she did speak to feeling that she had to perform at all times, regardless if she was competing or not, because "you never know who's watching." This view formed after attending several non-conference bowling meets where competitors and spectators were predominantly White.

Regarding one BFA's observation that sports with high percentages of Black women were discussed the most negatively, Krane (2001) provides context that may help explain why this is. Believing softball players to have similar physical builds to basketball players, the BFA could not understand why those athletes did not receive as much criticism as the Black female basketball players did. Softball, Krane notes, is a sport tailored specifically for girls and women, "ensuring they could not be considered masculine" (p. 117). In other words, even if female

softball and basketball players have similar physiques, the basketball players would be deemed masculine because basketball is considered a masculine sport, resulting in more negative reaction from others. While this is a plausible explanation, more research is needed to further identify how race and ethnicity impact perceptions of female athletes in various sports.

What is it like being a Black woman? The BFAs interviewed were candid in their responses regarding their experiences with, and perceptions of, being Black women in this country. While all of these women acknowledged the challenges that Black women faced collectively, those attending PWIs spoke to themes also present in Hannon et al.'s (2016) study on Black women at PWIs. The notion of working twice as hard to get half as far is one echoed throughout Black households across the United States. From former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama's commencement speech at Tuskegee University (Obama, 2015) to Olivia Pope's all-powerful and all-knowing father, Rowan, (Rhimes, 2013), the concept of Black people having to work harder to earn less than White people has been expressed elsewhere, but its overwhelming presence in responses from Black women at PWIs is notable, and worthy of being further researched. Hannon et al. also found that Black women at these institutions "recognized the importance of interacting and connecting to African Americans because of their shared experiences" and "took [steps] to create an inclusive, welcoming environment" (p. 659). The BFAs attending PWIs used almost these exact words when describing their experiences at their institutions and their methods of surviving.

While Black women have been found statistically more prone to emotional isolation, struggles with racial identity, low self-esteem, depression, and the use of internalization as a means of coping with oppression (Carr, Szymanski, Taha, West, & Kaslow, 2014; Frame, Williams, & Green, 1999), these BFAs discussed feeling empowered as Black women. They

acknowledged the challenges and obstacles that they faced, one of which was being stereotyped and rejected by others, including Black men, who expressed preference for lighter skinned and White women, a finding supported by other researchers (Patton, 2006). Even considering this, these women felt pride in their ability to overcome adversity, and develop mental strength and resilience. Similar sentiments were made by participants in other studies exploring femininity among female college athletes (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane et al., 2004), but almost all of those women identified as White and credited the development of these qualities to their being athletes, not to their race. Krane et al. observed that "[t]hese feelings of empowerment generalized beyond the sport context and helped the women to feel self-sufficient" (p. 325). For BFAs, however, the feelings of empowerment and self-sufficiency were cultivated outside of the sporting context, becoming beneficial in all of their endeavors, including athletic pursuits. Given the findings by Seaton and Neblett, Rivas-Drake, and Umaña-Taylor that high racial identity centrality and high private regard are among the factors "that buffer the negative effect of racial discrimination on depressive symptoms" and possibly make it "less likely [that Black women] internalize the negative messages about being a [Black] woman that are often conveyed" (as cited in Szymanski & Lewis, 2016, p. 232), high racial identity centrality and private regard are likely at play in these BFAs' ability to reframe their experiences as positive and beneficial. The former is the degree to which the intersection of one's race and gender form an important part of one's self-concept, and the latter are positive feelings about Black people and about being a Black person (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016).

Implications for practitioners. A strong therapeutic or work relationship between a client and their therapist, counseling psychologist, or sport psychologist requires empathy on the part of the practitioner. Empathy, the ability to place oneself in the client's world, to feel or think

from the client's perspective, or to be attuned to the client, helps the client feel understood (Sue & Sue, 2013); without this, the working or therapeutic relationship suffers. Given this, working with Black women necessitates an understanding of how race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, interact, how they have historically been used to oppress this group, and how this all has influenced these women's perceptions of reality. This study aimed to present both macro and micro perspectives on the sociopolitical forces at play for Black female athletes. To combat the silencing that has traditionally rendered Black women invisible in the sporting literature, this platform was intentionally used to amplify the voices and experiences of Black female athletes, hopefully providing insight to others on how these women's various identities continue to impact them within athletic contexts. Ideally, this information will aid researchers and practitioners alike in developing and demonstrating both emotional and cognitive empathy towards Black female athletes, and raise awareness of the importance of intentionality in work with and about Black women.

Implications for researchers. There were very few responses from the pool of potential BFAs. There are several explanations that may account for this. First, this study addresses fairly sensitive issues for BFAs. Second, as was listed in the limitations section, there is a culture of healthy paranoia that Black people possess. BFAs may not have trusted how the information they shared would be used. Lastly, although coaches were contacted and asked to forward the study to their female athletes, not all likely elected to share the study. While the historical oppression and exploitation of Black women is difficult to bypass, one possibility for bypassing coaches is contacting BFAs who recently graduated from college.

As has been echoed throughout this research, through no fault of their own, Black women have been silenced and rendered invisible throughout the sporting literature. Moving forward, it

is important that research on Black women within sporting contexts is conducted with the intention of allowing multiple truths to be shared. This begins by acknowledging Black women as a diverse, non-heterogeneous collective, and researching them as such. Inclusion of, and research on, non-African American Black women is essential in presenting "the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). Not all Black female athletes have grown up in the United States, and for those who have, not all have grown up in African American households. The effect of culture and ethnicity must be further researched, specifically when focusing on femininity, because athletes "of various ethnicities … may not desire the same image that consumes the media, and are often ignored in comparison to the 'dominant' group of women who represent hegemonic femininity" (Paloian, 2012, para. 19). In fact, evidenced by responses from interviews in this current study, some female athletes may not desire any physical image; the differences among desires of femininity, however, will remain unknown unless further explored. Related to the acknowledgment of Black women within sporting contexts as a diverse group is the language used in discussing this group. Previously mentioned, not all Black women are African American. While this study has intentionally used the term "Black" as a racial identifier for all participants in this study, many studies on Black women have used the term "African American" interchangeably with "Black." The former speaks to a specific ethnicity and ethnic experience, denying the acknowledgment of others within the African Diaspora, presenting a universal experience for all Black people when that is in fact not the case. Along these lines, future research should explore what being a Black woman and a Black female athlete means to all Black women.

The perceived differences between HBCUs and PWIs were discussed by BFAs in this study. After mentioning PWIs several times, one BFA attending an HBCU was asked if she felt

that there was a difference between the two in expectation regarding how one presented herself, she responded:

> Yeah, it's definitely different because I know … other HBCUs … still have that thing where they want our Black people to look presentable and not be what society thinks we are, so I feel like my friends back at PWIs, they are like, 'Oh, we wear sweats all the time,' and it's like, I wish I could do that at the same time I do like being able to look good and feel good.

When sharing their experiences with femininity and microaggressions, the three BFAs attending PWIs commented on how attending those institutions was an additional factor that they had to consider. The three BFAs attending HBCUs mentioned feeling that there were fewer expectations for those at PWIs regarding femininity. The differences and similarities for BFAs attending these institutions is another area of research that could provide substantial information in understanding the experiences of BFAs.

To best understand the experiences of Black women, they must be viewed holistically, not fragmented along the lines of their various identities. In the same way, an intersectional approach must be applied to understanding the oppression and discrimination to which Black women are subjected. Some microaggressions are not strictly racial or gendered; some microaggressions occur due to their simultaneous Blackness and femaleness. These microaggressions that occur due to multiple identities are what Nadal et al. (2015) refer to as intersectional microaggressions. They, along with their impact on Black women's mental health, should be further examined as such examination "is necessary to uncover individuals' complex and comprehensive lived experiences" (p. 158). In the same vein, and in accordance with Miller and Kaiser (2001), more research on the coping strategies employed by Black women in

response to discriminatory experiences and instances of intersectional microaggressions is needed.

Lastly, research is needed exploring the sport-specific experiences of Black women surrounding questions of whether being an athlete buffers experiences of certain microaggressions would provide worthwhile insight into, and analysis of, the experiences of Black female athletes in sports in which Black women have traditionally been overrepresented (i.e., basketball and track & field), but also, and very importantly, sports in which Black women have historically been underrepresented, as with one BFA in this study who is a bowler. Further examination of these questions would facilitate a better understanding of which experiences are relatively universal for Black women, and which are unique and dependent on variables such as if she is an athlete or which sport she participates in.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which Black female college athletes (BFAs) have come to conceptualize what femininity is and how it uniquely affects them based on how they self-identify. Results for the the Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short (BSRI), the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) were presented, followed by findings from interviews conducted with study participants, as well as discussion of what to make of these findings.

Summary

The Bem Sex Role Inventory-Short (BSRI-S), Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) were administered to Division-I Black female athletes (BFAs) via an online survey. BFAs were more masculine than Bem's (1981) normative, female, and male samples, and less feminine than the normative and feminine samples. On the masculinity scale, BFAs scored the highest on the following characteristics: "independent" ($\bar{x}$ =6.18), "have leadership abilities" ($\bar{x}$ =5.86), "strong personality" ($\bar{x}$ =5.82), "defend my own beliefs" ($\bar{x}$ =5.55), "willing to take a stand" ($\bar{x}$ =5.5), and "assertive" ($\bar{x}$ =5.18). On the femininity scale, they scored highest on: "understanding" ($\bar{x}$ =5.86), "compassionate" ($\bar{x}$ =5.77), "loves children" ($\bar{x}$ =5.55), and "sensitive to the needs of others" ($\bar{x}$ =5.32). Scoring of the REMS indicate that BFAs reported mostly experiencing microaggression in Subscale 3: Microinvalidations and Subscale 1: Assumptions of Inferiority, followed by Subscale 2: Second-Class Citizens and Assumptions of Criminality, Subscale 4: Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity, and Subscale 6: Workplace and School Microaggressions. Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions ($\bar{x}$ = 0.358, s = 0.26), was scored inversely, meaning that the closer to zero the mean was, the more environmental microaggressions the BFAs experienced.

Three profiles emerged in analyzing the BRIAS results. Profile one included BFAs with a relatively even distribution of scores across all five schemas, indicating no particular dominant or recessive statuses. In the second profile were BFAs with two or three dominant statuses, and the third profile included BFAs with one dominant status and four recessive statuses. The following were intended to be further explored: femininity/masculinity by level of Black identity development (BSRI-S x BRIAS), femininity/masculinity by sport participated in (BSRI-S x Sport), femininity/masculinity by ethnicity of participants (BSRI-S x Ethnicity), and microaggressions experienced by sport participated in (REMS x Sport). Low response rates, however, stymied that intention.

Analyzing the qualitative data, all BFAs interviewed defined femininity as behavioral, rejecting a physical standard, as is present in hegemonic femininity. As opposed to the female athletes in research by Kauer and Krane (2006) and Krane et al. (2004), all of the women in this study spoke to feeling feminine and feeling that their athletic participation did not conflict or negatively impact their femininity in any way; they did, however, acknowledge family, peers, and other external sources having difficulty conceptualizing them being athletes and feminine. These BFAs spoke at length about experiencing microaggressions, for some, on a daily basis. Whether it was the assumption of unintelligence, being asked to speak as a representative for their race, experiencing gendered or environmental microaggressions, or microaggressions from members of their own race, BFAs discussed using primarily avoidant coping methods, in large part because of how often these microaggressions occurred, believing it best to selectively engage with microaggressors. Various methods of navigating their identities depending on the context were also discussed. Overall, these women provided candid responses to questions surrounding being Black female athletes and Black women. Faced with oppression unique to

them due to their racial and gender identities, as well as sexuality or socioeconomic class, these Black female athletes used their negative experiences combatting stereotypes, gendered racism, or other obstacles as motivation to work harder. Ultimately, there was an emphasis on two things, the first being the importance of supporting other Black women. The second was the pride they derived from being Black women. Despite all of its hardships, each of these Black female athletes was grateful for how resilient, strong, disciplined, and empowered being Black women in this country made them.

Conclusion

Employing a Black feminist standpoint theoretical perspective, this study aimed to shed light on how race, gender, class, and sexuality influence the experiences of Black female athletes by providing a space in which these women could, in their own words, discuss "the social positions they have and the kinds of experiences fostered within those social positions" (Wood, 1994, p. 51). As such, direct quotes from Black female athletes were included whenever possible, as often as possible. Faced with an oppression unique to only them given their racial and gender identity, a great disservice has been done to Black female athletes within the sporting literature as they have historically been silenced and rendered invisible, either in failure to include them in research, or in fragmenting their identities along racial or gender lines, thus presenting incomplete and inaccurate representations of their experiences. Focusing on Black female athletes and femininity, not asking these women "to pass the entirety of [themselves] through a hole that would accept only part" (Smith, 2012, p. 251) was this study's only priority. In qualitative interviews, BFAs provided several definitions for femininity, an encouraging finding given how broad of a concept femininity is when analyzed through a Black feminist lens. Methods of negotiating their racial, gender, and athletic identities were also varied, especially

when considering additional factors, such as class and sexuality. Despite each BFA possessing her own manner of interacting with her world, all addressed the challenges they felt were universal to BFAs and Black women in the United States, including systemic racism and sexism, increased athletic expectations from coaches and peers, and contending with negative stereotypes and portrayals of Black women and BFAs in media. Their ability to survive and succeed despite these conditions, however, left the BFAs feeling resilient and empowered.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct this research with a larger sample size, which may provide additional important information.
2. Examine further the diversity in this population, especially along ethnicity, allowing for further cross-cultural exploration of the experiences of biracial and multiracial BFAs, as well as BFAs of other Black ethnicities.
3. Further examine potential differences in experiences of BFAs at HBCUs, urban PWIs, and non-urban PWIs.
4. Explore intersectional microaggressions experienced by BFAs.
5. Explore experiences of BFAs in sports where BFAs are underrepresented and overrepresented.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal

- How old are you?
- What year in school are you?
- Which ethnicity/ethnicities do you identify with/as?
- Which sport(s) do you participate in?
    - Which position(s) do you play?
- Over your athletic career, have you ever felt that you had to hide or tone down any aspect of your identity?
    - If so, how?
- Over your athletic career, have you ever felt that you had to emphasize any aspect of your identity?
    - If so, how?
- What is it like being a Black female athlete?
- What is it like being a Black woman?

Athletic Beginnings

- How and when did you begin participating in sports?
- Was your participation in sports supported by your family? Your peers?
- How, if at all, did gender impact which sports you did or did not play?
    - "" impact which teams you did or did not play with?
- How, if at all, did race/ethnicity impact which sports you did or did not play?
    - "" impact which teams you did or did not play with?
- Why did you choose your sport?

Coaches

- Is your current head coach a person of color?
    - What type of impact, if any, has that had on you?
- Are any of your assistant coaches and/or graduate assistants people of color?
    - What type of impact, if any, has that had on you?
- Throughout your athletic career, have any of your coaches been people of color?
    - Did that affect how you responded to them? If so, please explain.
    - If not, please explain.
- Of all your coaches throughout your athletic career, which one(s) have you responded the most positively to and why?

Teammates

- How has the racial/ethnic composition of your team affected you and/or your play, if at all?

Expectations

- Do you feel as if people expect more/less from you in your sport because of your race/ethnicity? Please explain.

Femininity/Culture

- What is your definition of femininity?
    - Has participating in sports ever conflicted with that definition? Please explain.
        - If so, how did you deal with that conflict?
- Has your participation in sports ever conflicted with the gender role expectations that your family have for you?
- Has playing sports ever made you feel more/less feminine? Please explain.
- Is it difficult balancing femininity and athletic identity? Please explain.
- Are there any strategies that you have used to appear more feminine in the sporting context?

Microaggressions

- Have you ever experienced microaggressions in your sport(s)? If so, would you be willing to share a few examples of times in which microaggressions were experienced?
- What strategies, if any, have you used in dealing with/responding to microaggressions?
- Do you feel microaggressions affect Blackness and femininity? Please explain.

APPENDIX B

REMS SCORE BY PARTICIPANT, ATHLETIC CONFERENCE, AND SPORT

Table B1

REMS Scores by Participant

Participant	REMS Total Score	Subscale 1	Subscale 2	Subscale 3	Subscale 4	Subscale 5	Subscale 6
#4	0.200	0.125	0	0.222	0.111	0.714	0
#7	0.444	0.750	0.286	0.556	0.222	0.571	0.200
#8	0.378	0	0.286	0.778	0.111	0.857	0.200
#9	0.267	0.125	0	0.889	0.333	0	0
#20	0.356	0.500	0.286	0.444	0.222	0.286	0.400
#22	0.422	0.875	0.714	0.111	0.333	0.429	0
#23	0.222	0.125	0.143	0.444	0.444	0	0
#31	0.222	0	1	0.222	0	0	0.200
#34	0.511	0.500	0.143	0.889	0.778	0.429	0
#37	0.533	0.125	0.571	1	0.444	0.714	0.200
#47	0.644	0.750	0.429	1	0.444	0.571	0.600
#49	0.333	0.750	0.286	0.444	0.222	0.143	0
#54	0.289	0.750	0	0.444	0	0.286	0.200
#56	0.089	0	0.143	0.111	0	0.286	0
#71	0.356	0.750	0.143	0.222	0.222	0.286	0.600
#73	0.178	0.250	0	0.444	0.222	0	0
#75	0.867	1	1	1	1	0.143	1
#78	0.067	0.125	0	0	0	0.286	0
#79	0.511	0.500	0.286	1	0.333	0.571	0.200
#81	0.867	1	1	0.778	0.889	0.571	1

Table B2

REMS Scores by Athletic Conference

Conference	REMS Total	Subscale 1	Subscale 2	Subscale 3	Subscale 4	Subscale 5	Subscale 6
American East	0.389	0.750	0.286	0.500	0.222	0.357	0.100
Atlantic 10	0.378	0	0.286	0.778	0.111	0.857	0.200
Atlantic Coast (ACC)	0.200	0.125	0	0.222	0.111	0.714	0
Independent	0.178	0.250	0	0.444	0.222	0	0
Ivy League	0.285	0.396	0.072	0.481	0.296	0.215	0.133
Metro Atlantic Athletic	0.793	0.917	0.810	0.926	0.778	0.428	0.867
Mid-Eastern Atlantic	0.281	0.042	0.571	0.444	0.148	0.333	0.133
Northeast	0.430	0.625	0.429	0.518	0.296	0.429	0.200

Table B3

REMS Scores by Sport

Sport	REMS Total	Subscale 1	Subscale 2	Subscale 3	Subscale 4	Subscale 5	Subscale 6
Basketball	0.867	1	1	0.778	0.889	0.571	1
Bowling	0.378	0.063	0.786	0.611	0.222	0.357	0.200
Cross Country	0.323	0.063	0.143	0.834	0.222	0.429	0.1
Rugby	0.356	0.750	0.143	0.222	0.222	0.286	0.600
Soccer	0.134	0.125	0.072	0.278	0.111	0.143	0
Track & Field, I	0.409	0.519	0.297	0.615	0.342	0.352	0.215
Track & Field, O	0.415	0.500	0.298	0.630	0.352	0.369	0.233
Volleyball	0.200	0.125	0	0.222	0.111	0.714	0