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Stereotypes of African American Female Athletes and Their Impact

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“Neither the NCAA nor others have found it necessary to address the inequity that exists between European American and African American female athletes concerning stereotypes.”

There has recently been a resurgence in the media of issues addressing sexism, the lack of equity, and racism. The NCAA also has chosen, once again, to address the issue of gender equity in athletics. However, neither the NCAA nor others have found it necessary to address the inequity that exists between European American and African American female athletes concerning stereotypes. This topic is extremely relevant because it is the result of both racism and sexism. The climate created by perceptions directly affect both athletes and non-athletes. This presentation will address the impact of stereotypes on African American female athletes and their impact.

It is theorized, by this panel, that specific perceptions or stereotypes contribute to the inequity among female athletes. A survey was utilized to support or disprove the theory that African American female athletes are influenced (on and off the playing field) by nine specific (primary) stereotypes.

The survey consisted of 50 participants who responded to a series of questions concerning their personal views and the perceived views of others with reference to African American female athletes. The participants met two self-reported criteria: (1) member of the African American ethnic group and (2) female. It should be noted that African American female non-athletes were also included in the survey. Only African American females were used in an effort to control for the real or perceived gender or ethnic bias. Other factors such as sport of participation (if relevant), levels of education, age group, geographic location, place of birth, and occupation were recorded. Each participant completed a written survey. The nine primary stereotypes cited as influential facets were (1) aggressive behavior, (2) sexual orientation, (3) independent demeanor, (4) level of intelligence, (5) physical appearance, (6) domineering persona, (7) career aspirations, (8) communication skills, and (9) work ethic.

The session will focus on the survey results and their impact on the training and education of athletes and non-athletes of all ethnic groups and genders. An open forum among members of the audience will enhance the discussion and assist in developing a model pertinent to educators in all areas.

PRESENTERS

Monique Bernoudy is Director of Minority Relations at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business. She attended the University of Michigan, Spelman College, and Northern Illinois University. She holds a B.A. in psychology from Spelman College and an M.S. in adult continuing education from Northern Illinois University. She has worked for 13 years in higher education in a number of roles and has served various student populations.

Frankie Jackson is Head Women's Basketball Coach and Coordinator of Retention at the Bethel College, Mishawaka, Ind. She received her B.S. in health and physical education from Allen University and an M.Ed. in health education from Penn State. She has coached for the past 13 years on both the high school and collegiate level.

Nona E. Richardson is the senior woman administrator, Compliance Coordinator, and Head Women's Volleyball Coach at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind. She attended Michigan State University, where she participated in varsity volleyball and received a B.S. degree in physical education. She has been involved in the field of athletics for the past 15 years.