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Triple Threat: My Journey as a Black Lesbian Athlete in Search of Additional Black Lesbian Student-Athletes

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jillian Robin Ross entitled "Triple Threat: My Journey as a Black Lesbian Athlete in Search of Additional Black Lesbian Student-Athletes." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Sport Studies.

Leslee A. Fisher, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Joy T. DeSensi, Christine Holmlund

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Christine Holmlund

Accepted for the Council:

Anne Mayhew

Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records)

TRIPLE THREAT:
MY JOURNEY AS A BLACK LESBIAN ATHLETE IN SEARCH OF ADDITIONAL
BLACK LESBIAN STUDENT-ATHLETES

A Thesis Presented
for the
Master of Science Degree
The University of Tennessee

Jillian Robin Ross
May 2006

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DEDICATION

**...Along our path of life we get a series of detours...
...And we all get frustrated and impatient when we feel
we have to leave the path we've chosen!
...But what if the REAL path of life...
...is REALLY made up of all these detours
...And instead of learning the real lessons of life, we miss them because we were too
busy being frustrated and impatient!!!**

~Ziggy~

**I dedicate this to the four most important women in my life who helped me get
through the detours:
My Momma, Malibu, Steph,
and
the mom of all moms
Granny Fran**

Enjoy the detours...enjoy the journey!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals that I owe my gratitude to for the production and completion of this journey. First and foremost to my mom, who has always supported my love of learning. Even though you did not fully understand this research process, you always seemed to know the right thing to say. To my sister Mallory, who said it best: “I finally get my sister back!” To my wonderful partner Stephanie, who has witnessed the ups and downs of the journey, seen me at my worst, and still you stand by my side. To Granny Fran – the rock of our family – you have believed in my curiosity since our escapades at Crown Center. Your spirit runs through my veins, and I hope to be as wonderful of a woman as you when I grow up. These four amazing women are my rock – my soft place to land – without you the journey wouldn’t have been as memorable. I love you!

Ultimately, this project would not have been possible without the willingness and courage of the two women that stepped forward to volunteer their time and experience to share with me. You both opened my eyes beyond what I can convey in words. However, it is THEIR words that bring to life the reality that Black lesbian student-athletes do exist and we have something to say!

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of my committee members, Dr. Leslee Fisher, Dr. Chris Holmlund, and Dr. Joy DeSensi. You have all provided great ideas and suggestions that made this work stronger. To Dr. Leslee Fisher, we may have had our twists and turns, but I am internally grateful for your willingness to listen to my concerns in order to provide me with the support and encouragement I needed. To Dr.

Chris Holmlund, it was your two reading assignments that sparked something inside of me that lead to discovering an aspect of me that I had previously ignored – my blackness. For this I will always be indebted. In addition, I am thankful for the encouragement you have provided to dig deeper in not only myself but also the literature. To Dr. Joy DeSensi, you believed in the power of this research from the beginning, and as a mentor, colleague, and friend you have always provided a listening ear...thank you!

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Additionally, I would like to thank the members of my research group – Dr. Elizabeth Slator and Jason Grindstaff – you helped immensely. To Dr. Kerrie Kauer, who helped get to the bottom of my biases. To my two key contacts who restlessly continued to get the word out about my study. If it wasn't for you, I would still be searching...Last but certainly not least, I would like to not only acknowledge but thank the individuals who have loved, supported, and encouraged me at various points during

my journey of life – Humphrey Ross, Kathleen and Krishna Lee, “Lil” R.L., Margaret and Leslie Berger, and Sharon Shields – it was your love, support, and encouragement that helped me get to where I am today.

ABSTRACT

Black lesbian women experience a triple threat based on three components of their identity – race, gender, and sexual orientation – places them on the lower ranks of the totem pole of U.S. social hierarchy. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate three components of their identity – race, sexual orientation, and being a female NCAA Division I student-athlete – through semi-structured interviews in order to provide these student-athletes with a mechanism to have a voice and express their individual experiences. Since I experienced difficulty in obtaining participants that met the criteria, I have included myself as a co-participant in order to tell my journey of researching a population I identify with – one who has been forced to the margins of society along with the black community.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th century, Americans have participated in and reaped the benefits of a plethora of social movements. The 1900's saw the women's suffrage and the civil rights, feminist, and gay and lesbian rights movements. Despite the perceived progress from these movements, it is my belief that our country is still rife with racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. In fact, in the United States in 2005, it is important to note that conservatism with a reemphasis of family values through the religious teachings of Christianity and the doctrine of the Bible was and is the major hegemony at play. The point is that such conservatism places the white, heterosexual, Christian, financially secure man as the standard, similar to what Audre Lorde (1984) has termed the *mystical norm*.

It is my belief that many hold the widespread view that they are immune from these discriminatory practices. Unfortunately, this means that most Americans have bought into Audre Lorde's (1984) *mythical norm*. She notes that, in general, being white, thin, young, male, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure is the standard to which most of us are compared. This *mystical norm* allows for an invisible power structure that places priority on those who fit the norm and negatively labels those individuals who differ from the norm even slightly. Although Lorde's (184) concept is more than twenty years old, I feel it is still not only relevant but also significant as a means to which numerous individuals – men and women – are compared.

As I reflect on my life as a young, Black¹, lesbian, middle-class female athlete and feminist raised in a predominantly white environment, I have felt the sting of those negative labels quite often throughout my life. Furthermore, I have struggled to find my place in American society, and more recently have been in search of an epistemology that explains and speaks to the complexity of my existence. Growing up in a country where I was often ostracized for my skin color, the texture of my hair, and having two parents of varying racial descent – one black and the other white, I often questioned how I fit into the larger picture of white America. While constantly attempting to meet the standards of the *mystical norm* (Lorde, 1984), I found myself getting caught up in trying to be someone I was not. I am a confident woman, but as a little girl, I felt that it was more important to be a part of white society than try to understand my Black heritage.

However, after years of trying to have my values and ideals conform to the concepts and theories of a white, male, heterosexist society – as well as finding myself dissatisfied with a particular form of feminism, which has been defined by white, middle

¹ I have decided to capitalize Black woman/women, Black lesbian(s), and Black womanhood as an added form of empowerment, and will be doing so throughout the paper. This stance was influenced by Patricia Hill-Collins (2000). However, the language of race has been problematic for me during this journey. Even though I call myself a Black woman as do Collins, Smith, Lorde, and Clarke this may not be how other researchers, especially those in the field of psychology and counseling, refer to individuals like me (i.e., Greene, 1994; Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003). Thus, black is only capitalized as an adjective for women or when I refer to myself. In my mind it is necessary to make the distinction between Black and African American, so when referring to the family, community, and men in general I will use the word black – lower case “b.” But, in the case of discussing Fanon (1967) I will use African American in order to distinguish between the people of Antilles and America. Despite making this distinction up front, the language will change based upon how the co-participant defined her race. Plus, I want to note that I am aware that making this distinction goes against APA format.

class, heterosexual women – I have finally found an epistemological stance that is true to my existence: Black feminist standpoint theory. Collins (1997) defines Black feminist thought as “theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it” (p. 243). For me, this means going to the source – Black women – and using the words of their life experiences to understand the social inequalities and injustice they encounter based on the various components of identity that may influence their life.

More specifically, I was and am interested in examining an invisible population within the black community, Black lesbian athletes. As a Black lesbian athlete, I was a walk-on member of my undergraduate institution’s women’s track and field team for a semester, and then chose to focus on academics and release my athletic desires through other outlets such as continuing to work various jobs in the athletic department and lifting and conditioning on a daily basis. However, now as a graduate student and motivated by my partner constantly trying and playing non-traditional sports, I have learned to row and became a member of a club rowing team. Even though I am a student and an athlete, I don’t consider myself to be a student-athlete in the traditional sense as I define it (see *Definitions*), but I feel I am an athlete who is currently a student. Therefore, it was my desire to explore how NCAA Division I Black lesbian student-athletes negotiates the various components of their identity of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a student-athlete. I also wanted to examine the affects that institutions such as the family, community, religion, and sport had on their experiences, and how these experiences affected their negotiation of the varying components of their identity.

In order to understand the complexity of these various components of identity, it was necessary to draw on research and theory from multiple disciplines since this population has not been explored in depth. I identified six areas of focus for my review of literature, which is discussed in Chapter Two: (a) black identity, (b) Black women's identity throughout herstory, (c) Black lesbian identity, (d) Black women as athletes in women's sport, and (e) the heterosexism/ homonegativity in women's sport and physical activity, and (f) Black lesbian athletes. However, before reviewing the literature, I think it is necessary to tell you my journey of self-discovery that led me to research and interview two women student-athletes of African descent – one who identified as bisexual and the other who was attracted primarily – physically and emotionally – to women. The journey has had its ups and downs, but as long as individuals become aware of our silenced and invisible population – Black lesbian athletes – then I am one step closer to making a difference in the lives of ALL people, especially women and in particular, Black women.

In addition, since Black lesbian NCAA Division I student-athletes were unwilling to become participants in the study, I decided to include my own experiences for analysis and reflection in what is called a narrative of self or autoethnography. Ellis & Bochner (2003) fully captured the essence of autoethnography by defining it as:

...an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their

personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, auto- ethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms....In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language (p. 209).

So, let the journey begin...

The Journey Begins

Coming out to my mom. The journey began long before I entered the master's program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. If I am truly honest with myself and you, the journey began four and half years ago on the day I came out to my mother over the phone on a cool May evening after the end of my freshman year of undergrad. I hesitated to tell her the mixed emotions I had been feeling and continued to feel, but I knew in the deepest part of my soul that the feelings were not going away. The feelings engulfed me and there was no escaping them. However, I still wondered...could I really be attracted to other women? Will my mother disown me? Is the timing right or should I wait until I am completely sure?

Ultimately, in spite of the short amount of time I had been concealing my emotions and actions, I wanted...I needed to share them with my mom – my best friend – the whirlwind of emotions and fears I was experiencing so that she could be my rock as the whirlwind continued. The conversation went something like this:

Jillian: Hi, mom! What's going on?

Mom: Nothing, what are you doing?

Jillian: I was just calling to talk. I'm feeling really lonely and I miss you guys [her and my sister].

Mom: Well, what's going on?

Jillian: I have something I need to tell you, but do you want me to tell you now or when I come home in a couple weeks for your birthday?

Mom: A couple of weeks aren't going to make a difference. Tell me now.

Jillian: Well...well...I'm...I'm...

Mom: You're what? Just tell me...

Jillian: I'm...I'm...

(This back and forth occurred for what seemed like half an hour until finally my mom said...)

Mom: C'mon, Jillian. It can't be that serious.

Jillian: I'm...I'm...I'm gay.

Mom: I knew you had been acting weird lately. Not saying much when we talked...what's been going on?

Jillian: Well, I have feelings for #*&^², and it has become more than just friends.

Mom: I tried to tell you #*&^ was gay. Are you sure this is not a phase?

² I chose not to insert a pseudonym for the individual I am referencing – I felt it was important to note that understanding my sexuality was tied to another individual – as I

Jillian: No. Do you really think I would have had such a hard time trying to tell you?

Mom: How do you know?

Jillian: I'm pretty confident this is not a phase. My attraction towards #*&^ is not going away, and it all makes sense to me now why I have always felt uncomfortable on every level – emotionally and sexually – being with guys.

I could go on and on about the various twists and turns our conversation took that night, but by conversation's end I had realized my mom had no plans of disowning me. In fact, she told me still loved me, that I would always be her daughter, and that she was proud of me. Now don't get me wrong, I don't think she was completely happy with the situation, in fact I know now that all she wanted was to create an easier life for me and she felt that by claiming to be gay and acting upon it would lead towards a more difficult existence – similar to what she and my dad faced as an interracial couple in the late 1960's – in the often cruel and disheartening society, the United States. After hanging up with my mom, I let out a sigh of relief knowing I had done the right thing and then immediately started to cry uncontrollably. Although it is hard for me to go back to that exact moment, I know that all I really wanted that night was the comfort of my mom's embrace to physically feel her unconditional love. Instead, I was forced to find comfort in myself.

Aligning my actions with my gay identity. The comfort did not come the moment I hung up the phone from my mom. The comfort came slowly and over what I felt was a

don't want anyone to try to assume some significance to the name I picked nor was there

long, excruciating period of time. The aligning began shortly after coming out to my mom during that summer after my freshman year of undergrad when I chose not to go home and continued to live in Nashville, Tennessee. I was on my own to find a job and a place to live without the convenience of dormitory life or the pressure of school looming over my head. It was during this time period that I made some non-school acquaintances, who would accept, support, and not question my lifestyle. This time in my life allowed me to not only explore but also to get to know people very different from myself, which I feel allowed me to understand myself better. Now I must admit that this time was not all fun and games; I had a lot of moments of loneliness and nights where I felt all alone in the world. Some of these times were downright dreadful, but I held faith in my heart that I was given all this time for a reason so I tried to make the most of it. In between the pity parties, I found solace in becoming comfortable with being in my skin and having myself as a friend. I came to appreciate reading in my empty apartment with no one to bother me, the ability to do anything I wanted at my own whim, and knowing that I could always count on myself.

With the new found confidence I had built over the summer, I was ready to start the fall semester on a whole new foot. However, I made the mistake of rooming with the woman I had become more than friends with who now claimed that we needed to stay strictly friends. All I can really say about this moment in time that spanned nearly two years is that lust and the desire to be loved led me down some interesting and painful paths that didn't always bring out the best in me, but luckily I saw the light at the end of

any significance to the number or type of characters I used.

the tunnel and figured a way out of the drama filled life that sometimes comes with being a lesbian. This light – my defining experience – was moving to Washington, D.C. for the first semester of my senior year to complete a semester long internship. The internship was a lot of work, but it allowed me to be in an environment where on a daily basis I was learning from two amazing women and having the opportunity to be passionate about what was most important to me at that moment and time and continues to be one of my many passions – gender equity and Title IX.

This time away from everything familiar allowed me to draw on the strength I had obtained during that summer I spent alone in Nashville and instead of sitting alone I made the conscious decision to engage and immerse myself into the gay and lesbian culture. Engage and immerse was definitely what I did. The first Wednesday that I had class in the city – I actually lived about thirty minutes outside of D.C. in Reston, Virginia within blocks of where I interned – I had lunch with my four other classmates, said my goodbyes, and spent the day exploring Dupont Circle. I will never forget walking down Connecticut Avenue and passing Lambda Rising – a gay and lesbian bookstore. I initially passed it because I was too nervous to walk inside – I was afraid I would stick out like a foreigner in a distant land, but eventually I mustered up the nerve to walk in and look around. Sure there was a bookstore like this in Nashville, but I had never forced myself to enter a community I virtually knew nothing about. I walked around the store slowing finding peace that there were books, magazines, pride paraphernalia, and people that shared a common bond with me – attraction towards an individual of the same sex. I hesitated to pick anything up, but I definitely took it all in and felt I had taken a big step.

As I walked out of the bookstore, I eyed free newspapers that I thought might be my key to finding the local bars and clubs but I couldn't gather the courage to pick them up. I continued to walk down the street past the Human Rights Campaign building and quickly realized I didn't want to waste anytime, so I turned around and walked back to the bookstore grabbed the newspapers and asked the man behind the counter, "Where are the good places to go out?" He gave me a few places, I thanked him, and left to find the nearest coffee shop where I could sit down and explore my new treasures. I explored the treasures cover to cover, and ultimately found a bar that was having their monthly drag king show that night. Excited but scared at the same time, I headed towards the Metro and boarded the train back to Reston to recuperate before my first big night out on the town.

After what I remember to be an amazing nap, I nervously got ready and left for the unexpected in the big city. With directions in one hand and the steering wheel in the other, I was in search of my destination. After many one ways going the opposite way than I needed them to be going and of course a few of those dreaded circles you seem to go around two or three times before you figure out which street you really need to be going down, I finally found the bar/club and a parking space. I won't bore you with the details of the evening, but let's just say I felt like everyone in the bar/club was staring at me because I was by myself. However, with time I began to ignore the stares and began enjoying myself as I watched my first drag king show.

As time past, my fears subsided and allowed me to bring my guard down enough to start small talk with the women around me, and when the show ended these women

became instant dance partners. We danced for what seemed like hours, and then one of them asked me if I wanted to join them at another bar/club across town that was open until 5 a.m. I hesitated since I had to be at my internship in the morning, but I ignored my responsible side, which I rarely do and figured this was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. Let's just say I learned to go with the flow that night, and I am grateful I pushed myself to experience the unknown while still keeping my safety in mind. I ended the night with some new acquaintances, and it was the beginning of my self-discovery of finding my place in the gay and lesbian community, especially within the black gay and lesbian community.

My self-discovery that allowed me to align my actions with my sexual identity was a combination of the work I was able to do during the day and exploring the D.C. nightlife after dark. However, within a month of being in this magical city, the staff and organization I was interning for allowed me the opportunity to represent them as a student and future professional at a national student leadership conference. As it turns out, this weekend would change my life as I knew it.

The one. As you can imagine, I went to this camp outside of Birmingham, Alabama, with no expectations, especially not to find the love of my life. Nonetheless, that is when it hits you – love – when you least expect it. We made an instant connection, and when I was in her presence I felt and exuded a confidence in myself that I had never experienced. In hindsight, I found an individual who understood what it was like to be passionate about something, was confident in herself, and expected as much from others as she expected to give them.

During a seventh month period, we spent countless hours on the phone talking about anything and everything just to get to know more about one another. We saw one another three times over a seventh month period, but it was the endless time spent on the phone that allowed me the opportunity to get to know this wonderful individual. After our first visit since meeting at the leadership camp, I knew that she was the one, so I did everything I could to nurture our long distance relationship. However, there is nothing like physically being around the one you love, so after we both graduated from our respective universities, my partner moved to Nashville to be with me. Once we were in each other's presence came the reality of having to handle simple situations of public displays of affection and people staring at us as an interracial lesbian couple. This began the stage of acknowledging the stares and whispers, but realizing that the actions and beliefs of others could not dictate my love and affection towards my partner. If anything during this particular summer, I learned not to care what others thought of me or my partner. With the confidence that comes from being loved by someone you admire, it was time to pick up our life we had created in Nashville to move to the metropolis – I'm kidding – of Knoxville, Tennessee, so that I could begin the sport psychology master's program at the University of Tennessee.

Being in Knoxville has been an experience I will never forget. The stares my partner and I received in the first few weeks of living in the predominately white and middle- to upper-class section of town left me wondering if they were staring because I was Black or because I was with a woman – in particular a white woman. The biggest aspect of our relationship that affected how I portrayed my identity, which I quickly had

to overcome, were the situations when my partner and I didn't have the security of one another. I can honestly say I hate the feeling that someone has assumed me to be heterosexual, and I have to fret about betraying my partner while not wanting to make others uncomfortable. In the end, honesty with others and myself has out weighed whether they are comfortable with my sexuality. However, it was a woman's studies course during my first semester at the University of Tennessee that allowed me to not only explore my sexuality but also to try and make sense of my blackness.

The semester Black feminism entered my life. As I mentioned, during my first semester of my master's program I was in a woman's studies class that ended up finding me. This class had the kind of impact on me that I never expected. Within the first two weeks, I was being introduced to feminist theory through the readings of Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Joan Riviere, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig. Yet, it was the readings assigned for class on August 31, 2004 that would inspire me. In a journal titled, "A Seed is Planted...", I stated

I am inspired! I know that I am onto something by way of my sixth sense and that excited yet nervous feeling in the pit of my stomach. I have to slow down for a minute, and remind myself what the heck I am talking about. Well, I just left my women's studies class and I am fired up. I am fired up that I was the only one speaking up about today's readings in class:

- "A Black Feminist Statement" – Combahee River Collection (1997)
- "Defining Black Feminist Thought" – Patricia Hill Collins (1997)

I am fired up because it seems like the minute anything relating to black people is addressed in a majority white audience nobody has anything to say. Come on,

these women are not speaking in a foreign language. Yes, their experience is different than that of Southern white females and males, but not so far fetched that so few comments on the readings can be made or all the attention is turned to the only African American³ present in the room⁴. Not to mention, I know I threw the class for a loop when I outed myself while expressing my sentiments on “A Black Feminist Statement.” Regardless, I am determined not to let their lack of enthusiasm bring me down. All I know is that I want to get my hands on more information and readings on Black feminism. So, I am off to the library and Amazon.com to see what I can do about this...

After my search at the library, at Barnes & Noble, on the internet, and contacting a couple of my mentors, I did what I would do when excited about any new venture; buy all the necessary supplies, in this case, books. So, the very next day I went to Amazon.com and ordered the following books:

- *Ain't I A Woman: Black women and feminism – bell hooks (1981)*
- *Women, Race, & Class – Angela Y. Davis (1981)*
- *Black Feminist Thought – Patricia Hill Collins (2000)*
- *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought – Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995)*

It is important to note that my search for Black feminist books was not an easy venture; my biggest frustration was when I went to Barnes & Noble and there was not one book on Black feminism. Later it occurred to me that this was not coincidental; it seems that in our society those in power don't think many people will be in search of such books, so why waste space when we can provide a

³ At the time that I wrote this journal entry, I still identified as African American.

⁴ Another Black woman who was a member of the class was not in class on this day, and later told me that her absence was due to the fact of not wanting represent our entire race.

history for them, either one of white feminism and/or the black man's civil rights movement. Nonetheless, it was the all-encompassing Internet that saved the day.

My enthusiasm continued as I began to receive all these books that seemed to speak to me. However, I had no idea where to start first. The trick became balancing the books I really wanted to read with the articles and chapters I had to read to stay on track in my classes. Nonetheless, experience and expose is always the best teacher, and there were three experiences I had during this semester that have had a lasting affect on me and how I now see the various components of my identity. I think my journal entries fully capture the experiences, and what follows are those three entries:

Standing on My Sisters' Shoulders

September 28, 2004

*"This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Oh, this little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine..."*

- One of many Freedom Songs

Typically, for many, this song is associated with church and the light of God. Yet, in the context of this film "this little light of mine..." speaks of the determination of the many men and women who fought for freedom during the Civil Rights movement. More specifically, the film depicts the struggles associated with African Americans attempting to become citizens of the state of Mississippi and America by obtaining their right to vote. Even though legally they had the right to register to vote in the early 1950's, their white counterparts did everything they could to stop African-Americans from registering to vote (i.e. use of a literacy test, having to pay property tax, or as extreme as death). Because there was such great risk involved in being part of the movement, Black women moved to the forefront as

leaders and spokeswomen. It was less risky for a Black woman to be in a high profile leadership position during the movement since she had less to lose than her economically endangered male counterpart. Ultimately, the springboard to the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi was the beating, castration, and death of a little boy – Emmett Teal – by two white men based on the simple fact they thought he touched a white girl’s hand.

At this point in the movie, it became very apparent to me that the attention was focused on what was done by these strong, courageous Black women to make changes specifically in Mississippi that resulted in changing America as well. One group that exemplified this was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was a group of African Americans co-founded by three women – Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray Adams, and Annie Devine – who sought to not only to implement the desegregation laws into Mississippi legislation, but also to expand the democratic delegation of Mississippi as well as to increase the number of African American voters. This organization along with many like minded organizations – NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC – spearheaded a movement that resulted in change. The effect that this group had can be better understood in Betty Pearson’s – Mississippi Advisor to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission – comment as an insider during the movement, “Black women had the opportunity to change the world unlike me as a white woman.” Although these women fought long and hard along with the many individuals – black and white and less well-known – who gave their lives, the end result almost half a century later was that Mississippi had more black elected officials than any other state in the union.

I can truly say that this movie touched my soul and brought me to tears. I can't really explain where all my emotions came from, but I know that it was tied directly to two things. For one, it baffles me that my generation, especially my African American counterparts, seem to lack the understanding of the struggles of the previous generations and everything they did to fight for what we now simply take for granted. In my opinion, by taking this right for granted we have become complacent and believe that the efforts of the previous generations will stay in place. The problem with this complacency is that nothing is guaranteed forever.

Since nothing is guaranteed – not even a Constitutional right – this movie has spurred in me a desire and interest to go back to my roots – to strong, courageous women in my family – to gain an understanding of what they went through not only during the Civil Rights movement but throughout their life. By gaining this wisdom, I plan on standing on the shoulders of the previous generations of my sisters to move forward and make change for my generation and the generations to follow.

Canadian Student Leadership Conference

Sept. 29 - Oct. 3, 2004

On September 29, I had the fabulous opportunity to leave the country for the first time and attend the first annual Canadian Student Leadership Conference in Toronto, Canada. I was afforded this opportunity based on the work I had done for and with the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS) in the Fall of 2003. Although I knew this experience would be eye-opening, I still expected the individuals to have integrity as well as having it be interwoven into the entire experience, especially since this was a leadership

conference. However, the experience I had there will be one whose impact will be felt truly for the rest of my life.

To make a long story short, there were about eighty students from all over Canada and the United States attending this conference, so we were put into groups to make the weekend flow better. By being in a group, it meant doing various activities and events together throughout the weekend with one being to act out a three minute skit that encompassed the spirit of the sponsoring organization as well as leadership skills and qualities. However, one team misinterpreted this activity and took it way too far...one team put on a terribly inappropriate skit mocking the unrealistic images the media perpetuate such as "fat girls," flat-chested girls, penis size, being retarded, and homosexual behavior/gender identity. As I sat watching this, I experienced a range of emotions from disgust to anger. As I sat there, I had this voice in my head telling me that it wasn't enough to just internally "not approve" of this behavior – I needed to stand up and say something. The most disturbing aspect of this situation was how the leaders of the conference reacted. More specifically, there were four professors of education sitting in a panel "rating" the skits, and their clapping and cheering was an obvious display of their approval. Why was this disturbing?

These professors and leaders in the field held the power to step in, stand up and say that this was intolerable behavior but they chose not to. They used their "power" to send approval to eighty people, who were ironically all students who plan to continue in teaching or another helping profession where this is unacceptable behavior. As the minutes passed, I also knew my moment to do something was also passing by. So there I was at this conference not only

representing myself and my school but also the organization that had sent me, NAGWS. I said good-bye to the future contacts and reference letters, as I thought they had nothing to offer me but to learn from their mistakes. So, I took a deep breath to gather my composure, and approached the director of the entire conference, who happened to be a woman. I explained to her that as a representative of NAGWS as well as someone who sits on the board I knew every one of my fellow board members would have been disappointed had I not spoken up and said something. I explained how I felt it was totally inappropriate how the group dealt with the issues they brought up and they only perpetuated the stereotypes we as helping professionals are trying to not only avoid but make better, and that I would go back and tell the "powers that be" of what had happened and how nothing was done. She and later the others, who were men, apologized and made excuses, "as it was all in good fun!" I found it difficult to believe that they didn't understand how powerful their behavior was in the situation. For the days that remained, I along with the others that stood up with me were avoided and smiled at from only a distance. Nonetheless, I held my head up high and knew I had done the right thing!

One positive result of that experience in Canada was that it made me realize that the same issues that are prevalent and I think are worth fighting for in the United States occur in other countries as well. I knew this to be the case based on previous readings, but it was not until this experience that the harsh reality set in and made me realize that I need to expand my efforts internationally. This conscious decision to be part of the solution has resulted in me getting involved in an international women's sport organization, and wanting

to make a difference in my new backyard, Knoxville, Tennessee. So, my partner and I are thinking about starting a women, sport, and social justice group that educates and promotes advocacy to men and women, undergraduates, graduates, faculty and staff as well as athletes and non-athletes on issues related to women in sport here in Knoxville, the United States, and internationally.

A Rally 2 Protect Marriage – Washington, D.C.

October 15, 2004

My partner and I decided to take the day to explore the many museums of the Smithsonian and simply to enjoy the great things that D.C. has to offer. Minding our own business, we got off the train and I noticed a woman, who was Asian American, with a t-shirt that read: MARRIAGE = 1 MAN + 1 WOMAN. Disturbed by the shirt, I pointed it out to my partner. Before we could express ourselves to one another, my partner noticed many more individuals, men, women, and children of all ethnicities, with the same shirt. All I could think was “What the fuck have we gotten ourselves into?!” Once we walked out of the Metro station hand in hand, we saw hundreds of heterosexual couples and families on the National Mall. Within minutes of taking everything in, the African American man on stage began to lead the crowd into song. Not just any songs, but church/Jesus songs. I could go on and on about the craziness of this day (i.e. a brochure getting out the message that homosexuality is a disease infesting the nuclear family of America, the woman that stopped my partner and I, or the conversation my partner had with a woman on the Metro), but what I think was most important to talk about was how it made me feel. So, here I go:

- *I was speechless and shocked, and now when I think back on the experience a part of me is pissed off. Why was I holding back? It is not like I had anything to lose, but there was something in me that was*

scared to speak. *I was shocked my how outspoken my partner was and how she did not hesitate to have her voice be heard when all I could do was be silent and hold her hand as we walked along. However, her actions in turn made me proud to call her my life partner!*

- *During our ride back to the hotel, my partner noticed that individuals who had been at the marriage rally were surrounding us on the train. Not knowing her intentions, my partner began a conversation with the only woman of the group. She began the conversation by asking if she had attended the marriage rally. The woman's reply was yes and immediately defended her stance of protecting the sanctity of marriage by starting her statement with "WE BELIEVE..." Not knowing who "WE" was I simply asked. I was informed that "we" equated to all Christians who believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. It saddens me that this woman could not speak for herself and that she generalized her belief to that of all Christians. However, it was encouraging that a woman sitting behind my partner patted her on the back for speaking up and said, "I am a Christian and I don't believe in what she is saying...it is no one's business whom you love."*
- *In my mind, the things being said at the rally and by the woman on the train were so hypocritical. "We love homosexuals, but we don't recognize their love." How can one person or even a group a people say that one kind of love is better than another? These individuals truly believed that being homosexual is a choice. Why would I choose a lifestyle that has and at times continues to cause me so much hurt and aching in my heart? The answer is simple...I would not!!! With the*

other strikes I have against me, being an African American woman produced from biracial parents and then in turn entering an interracial relationship myself, there is no way I would chose to add another strike. I love my partner more than I ever thought was possible, and no relationship with a man could possibly produce that kind of love. I was raised with the value that you should make choices and decisions that will make you happy no matter what others think, so this is how I feel about the issue...I would not be happy being with a man (I tried), I would be living a lie. Plain and simple!

- *Earlier this evening, I tried to express the day's events with my mom only for her to change the subject. When I confronted her about it she responded by saying, "Do we always have to debate your sexuality?" Absolutely disgusted, I let her finish what she had to say and hung up. I was so hurt, which showed through the constant flow of tears, because she was the only person I wanted to talk to all day. A few minutes later, I got my thoughts together and called her back to express my sentiments along with attempting to tell her about the crazy day. Even though she listened to what I had to say, for the first time in my life I felt that she didn't really hear what I had to say. This in turn made me even more upset because of the realization that this might be a battle that I would have to fight alone without the unconditional support of my mother.*

Looking back on yesterday, I am definitely aware of the fact that there are hundreds even thousands of individuals that express the same attitudes of those at the rally. Nevertheless, when you are unexpectedly faced, literally, with

this harsh reality it throws you for a loop, which I think explains the silence I had in those moments. Yet, no matter how many times the ideas go around and around in my mind it just baffles me that there are that many people that deny the love my partner and I share, especially when I could care less about theirs. So with that, I will use the love God has given me and pray for these individuals to understand that love is simply love.

As I alluded to in the first entry of the three, I used the readings and especially the film to inspire me to explore a side of me that had been safe for me to ignore up until that point in my life – my blackness. This exploration led me to interview my granny who is Black and my mom who is white – two of the four women I dedicated this work to – in order to gain a understanding of where I came from and how the experience of race had affected their life. I can honestly say it was eye-opening and an amazing experience to hear how two women so close to me could tell me so much that I just did not know. I think about the culmination of the experiences and the readings from that semester, and I am reminded of the following journal entry that I feel brings the message home of how one particular reading influenced the way I saw my identity.

Thanks Goes Out 2 Judith Butler

November 23, 2004

I would like to thank Judith Butler for turning my world upside down! I use to think there were two Jillians. The one, I see in the mirror everyday as an all-encompassing individual with many intersecting parts and identities. While the other Jillian is how the world sees me – no matter how hard I try – as a black, lesbian, feminist in an interracial relationship. However, Judith Butler (1991) has taught me that, “To claim that there is no performer prior to the performed, that the performance is performative, that the performance constitutes the

appearance of 'subject' as its effect is difficult to accept" (p. 315). So, basically, all our identities are representations that are always more than one thing and is not always up to us since it is historical – there is prior history – before we enter the scene. However, there is some agency involved in that we elect to perform, act, speak, dress, etc., the way we do. Or do we? She was right in saying it is "difficult to accept," this idea of representation and performance.

Maybe it is as simple as choosing how I will represent and/or present myself, but even that is problematic because then there are multiple identities of me floating around based on how or who has perceived me. Can I have one true identity or are they all intersecting? Aha, I think that is why Black feminism makes so much sense to me because it addresses how all my identities and representations are interwoven, and cannot be separated without affecting the other. Thus, I am made up of multiple selves that are constantly changing.

P.S. I will never look or speak of identity the same way, so thanks!

As I read over this particular entry and all the entries for that matter, I am reminded of the progress I have made since then. In my mind, three things changed for me during that particular semester: (a) I came to terms with identifying myself as a lesbian; (b) I began to see myself as a Black woman versus an African American woman; and (c) I realized that identity is not a fixed thing and that all components of our identity can be seen as a performance – gender, race, and sexuality. For me, the first two changes were important to me because it allowed me to find a label that I was comfortable with instead of having a label affixed to me. Me identifying as lesbian came after reading and understanding the gay and lesbian history and wanting to take pride in not only my sexuality but also my womanhood. In regards to my race, I had never truly felt

comfortable with African American since I can't trace that side of my family back to Africa. However, I know that I am Black – not literally – and that I am American, so as I see it I am a Black American.

Happy to be nappy (hooks, 1999). Consistent with changes I was making to my psyche, I had made the decision to begin growing my hair out to its natural state. For those of you unfamiliar with black hair, the majority of Black woman have succumbed to the pressure of society to emulate white women's straight hair. In order to obtain this straight hair, I have had to put a relaxer – a cream based chemical that straightens the hair – on my hair since the age of ten. After thirteen years of putting numerous hours and money into my hair as well as confining to the hegemonic ideals of beauty, I felt that growing my hair out to its natural state relieved of chemicals allowed me to create an appearance that was consistent with my beliefs and inner self. So, at the beginning of January 2005, I cut off all my hair that had been straightened by chemicals, leaving a mini afro. Not wanting this to be my permanent hairstyle, I had to let my hair grow longer before I could start deadlocks. This process began in February 2005, after I attended a symposium that would light a fire inside of me.

An idea is born. Following the semester of learning about Black feminism, I began racking my brain to figure out a way I could extend the knowledge I had learned and the work that I had done into a thesis topic. Ideas came and went, but nothing truly excited me enough that I willing to put my blood, sweat, and tears into it. However, on the second weekend of February, I had the wonderful opportunity to not only to attend but also to present at the Women and Sport Symposium in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Imagine my excitement when I found out I would be spending the weekend with all the big names in women's sport and Title IX advocacy work. Although there is so much I wish I could share, I will focus on the two sessions that influenced me and provided new perspective.

On day two of the symposium, my eyes were open to a world I had never considered before, the implications of Title IX on Black women in sport. The first presentation by Lakaya Renfrow (2005) entitled "Title IX and Gender Equity in College Sports: An Analysis of Two National Data Based Reports" was based on the work she had done with Yevonne R. Smith as a senior thesis at Michigan State University. In her study, she compared the 1999-2000 NCAA Gender Equity Report's participation rate for Black women with her own data from a survey she sent out to various female student-athletes in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC), which contains all historical black colleges and universities, on their experience. Although I could go into more detail, I don't think it is important to make my point that I had been so privileged to think of Title IX as it related to my own experience or the experience of others around me, which typically had been Caucasian girls and women, that all this time I had failed to think of the impact it had had on other Black girls and women like myself. Part of me felt ashamed of my neglect, but in the end I was confident that this realization would affect not only the acknowledgement of my Black identity but also future research and professional work.

Then on Saturday, I had another wonderful opportunity to attend Dr. Heather Sykes (2005) session entitled, "Wearing the Secret Out': A Dramatic Performance about

Homophobia and Homophobiaeroticism in Physical Education.” The video was a performed ethnography based on life history interviews with eight physical educators teaching in elementary, secondary, and higher education throughout the United States and Canada. Although the video was quite moving, what had the most impact on this experience was the discussion that took place afterwards. It was great to look around the room and see women, young and older, comfortable enough to talk about their experience in sport and physical education as lesbians. Even though not everyone in the room was lesbian, it was obvious this was a safe place to discuss one’s experience.

Ultimately, I was moved by the courage of my partner to come out and ask everyone, what advice would they provide her about coming out in the workplace and finding a job that is a safe environment to be herself? It made me not only proud to be her partner, but also confident in the decisions I have made to be an out Black lesbian involved in sports. The day concluded with me attending my first Vagina Monologues, which I think is important to mention because it reconfirmed the confidence I have in myself as not only a woman but also as a woman who is attracted to women.

The weekend overall, provided an empowering event that helped me realize that I was definitely doing the right things in my life and that my passion for Title IX and girls and women in sport was stronger than ever. While I only emphasized the sessions in the symposium that were reflections of my race and sexuality, these are the sessions that had the most impact on me and stand out in my mind. Overall, I am grateful for this experience because it prompted me to think about how lesbian women of color are not

discussed or even thought to exist, which led me to want to investigate Black lesbians in the context of sport for my master's thesis.

Where do I go from here? When I returned from the Title IX symposium, it was imperative that I develop a plan of action, so I decided to use the independent study I was currently enrolled in to formalize my research question and then to collect as much literature as possible. However, I did not have my research question in mind when I began my search for literature; instead, I figured I would first search for any literature on Black lesbian athletes. To my surprise, I only found one article on this particular population, which was written by Boykin (2003) and titled, "Black gay athletes: Homosexuality and homoeroticism in black sports." Intrigued by Boykin's (2003) article, I went in search of other materials that he might have written. To my disappointment, this was the only article that he had written on black gay and lesbian athletes. However, imagine my excitement when I found an entire book he had written about being black and gay in America. I immediately went to my favorite website, Amazon.com, ordered the book and continued my search for other literature. It was at this point when I realized that I would have to look at varying disciplines to get to the root of the experience of Black lesbian athletes.

While I anxiously waited for my book to arrive, I gathered literature on Black feminist thought, homophobia and queer theory, black homophobia, Black lesbians, and homophobia and heterosexism in women's sports. In my opinion, this was the easiest aspect of the research process and at times I felt myself getting totally caught up in trying to find every piece of literature that I could get my hands. However, the arrival of

Boykin's (1996) book saved the day from my continuous searching. Once I began to read his book I couldn't put it down until I finished it two days later. As I read the book, it became quite apparent to me that there is a negotiation that takes place when you are black and gay, and the negotiation process can further be confounded when you are a woman. Based on Boykin's (1996) focus on Black gay men and my new found awareness of having to negotiate the multiple components of one's identity as a Black lesbian, I sought out to see if having to negotiate one's identity was consistent in the homophobia and heterosexism in women's sport literature.

In order to reach this conclusion, I read Griffin's (1998) book *Strong Women, Deep Closets*. As I was reading Griffin (1998) it became glaringly apparent that for lesbian athletes that the negotiation of identity is about being a woman and being a lesbian in the context of sport. To my disappointment, there was only one mention through a "profile of courage" (p. 165) of a Black lesbian athlete. I had figured it out; there was a gap in the sport and sport psychology literature. I began pondering how I could turn what I had figured out and instinctually known into a research question. This was what I came up with: How do Black lesbian athletes negotiate the various components of their identity of race, gender, sexuality, and being a student-athlete in the context of sport?

While I present a thorough review of literature related to this topic in Chapter Two, I conclude this chapter with a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, limitations and delimitations, and definitions used throughout the project.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States in the year 2005, many collegiate student-athletes realize that the only thing that matters is whether they can perform athletically and whether their performance leads to a “W.” The other components of their identity of being Black, lesbian, and female for example are not topics of discussion. Since many fellow student-athletes, coaches, and administrators only focus on performance, student-athletes’ visible – race and gender – as well as invisible – sexual orientation – components of their identity both become invisible in the context of sport. Furthermore, consistent with Misa (2001), it appears that queer students of color negotiate identity and that negotiated identity is not a fixed thing; it is constantly changing. However, there is no literature addressing Misa’s (2001) study nor how Black lesbian athletes negotiate the varying components of their identity in the general sense. The few researchers who do mention lesbian athletes of color limit these references to a few paragraphs (Griffin, 1998; Boykin 2003) or simply describe their sample of participants and not necessarily their experiences of negotiating their identity (Krane, 1997; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002; Reimer, 1997). Therefore, a problem exists in that this population has a right to be heard but has not had the opportunity to do so in the general sport literature nor specifically in sport psychology literature.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the racist limitations of mainstream feminism and the sexist, homophobic, and heterosexist nature of sport, the purpose of this study was to examine how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate the various components of their identity of

race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a student-athlete at a NCAA Division I institution – that was the way this study was supposed to proceed. However, over the course of data collection, it became clear that many black lesbian student-athletes – while identified by key contacts or via postings – were not willing to make time for an interview. So, I decided to tell my journey of trying to research a population that has been forced to the margins of society as well as the black community. As previously mentioned, I am a Black lesbian athlete who has been exposed to the environment of NCAA Division I athletics. Thus, it is my hope that results from the analysis of two interviews as well as my experience of the interview process will help to provide these student-athletes with a mechanism for representation and voice that will allow them not only to express their individual experiences, but also to create visibility regarding their multi-layered identity.

Significance

This is a significant piece of work and addition to the sport studies/sport psychology literature for the following reasons:

- (a) it is interdisciplinary in nature;
- (b) to date, not only has no one examined the population of Black lesbian student-students but also the negotiation of their identity components of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being NCAA Division I student-athlete;
- (c) I merge the methodology of autoethnography and semi-structured interviews; and most importantly,

(d) it is creating awareness and decreasing the invisibility of Black lesbian student-athletes in sport as well as the black community.

Although there is bound to be other reasons why this work is significant, these are the four reasons I see as being vital.

Limitation

This study was limited by the purposeful sample of two current Black lesbian NCAA Division I student-athletes along with my own experience of trying to get Black lesbian student-athletes to talk to me. Therefore, the data is not to be generalizable to other current NCAA Division I Black lesbian student-athletes, Black lesbian student-athletes within other NCAA divisions, or Black lesbian athlete graduate students. Instead, the data – the thoughts, feeling, experiences, and themes – should be seen as representative of each woman’s story.

Delimitation

This study was delimited by the fact that it focused on two Black lesbian student-athletes who currently participate in an NCAA Division I sport and one Black lesbian athlete graduate student in the Southeastern region of the United States in 2005.

Definitions

In this section, I have defined the terms used within the context of this study. However, it is possible that variations of these terms do exist in other contexts:

Athlete: An individual who plays or participates in a particular sport or sports on a consistent basis.

Black: Anyone who self-identifies “of or belonging to a racial group having brown to black skin, especially one of African” descent including those who are bi- or multiracial (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Black feminist thought: In her 1997 article, *Defining Black Feminist Thought*, Collins after much consideration defines Black feminist thought as:

Consist [ing] of theories or specialized thought produced by African-American women intellectuals designed to express a Black women’s standpoint. The dimensions of this standpoint include the presence of characteristic core themes [such as the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent, a legacy of struggle, self-defined images, Black women’s activism, and sexual politics], the diversity of Black women’s experiences in encountering these core themes, the varying expressions of Black women’s Afrocentric feminist consciousness regarding the core themes and their experiences with them and the interdependence of Black women’s experiences, consciousness, and actions (p. 252).

Gender: An organizing principle of sport that makes sense of sport based on what is socially suitable and acceptable for males and females (Krane, 2001). In American society, gender is socially constructed.

Hegemony: Based on hegemony’s rich ambiguity, many scholars do not exactly agree on the definition of hegemony (Kiros, 1985). However, an instrumentalistic conception of hegemony, which is “a particular idea as a means to attain a particular end” (p. 100),

can be defined as “a particular type of leadership that is not based on the use of violence or coercion, but on the systematic spread of the word view of the ‘ruling class’” (p. 100). According to this concept, Gramsci diffuses a set of ideas into what he called political society and civil society, which is a means by which members of these societies are subtly taught to think and behave in certain ways (Kiros, 1985).

Heterosexism: “A system of dominance in which heterosexuality is privileged as the only normal and acceptable form of sexual expression” (Griffin, 1998, p. xv).

Homonegativity: “The logical consequences of living in a culture that severely stigmatizes anyone who steps out of traditional boundaries of gender and sexual oppression” (Griffin, 1998, p. xv) or simply put, “discrimination against lesbians” or gay men (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980 as cited in Krane 1997, p. 145).

Homophobia: The “irrational fear or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people” (Griffin, 1998, p. xv).

Lesbian: A woman whose primary psychological, emotional, and sexual attraction is to women (Greene, 1994; Matlin, 2004).

Matrix of Domination: “The overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and (2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal” (Collins, 2000, p. 299).

Out: Acknowledgment to one’s self and others that one is a lesbian in either in a private or public matter.

Racism: “A system of unequal power privilege where humans are divided into groups or ‘races’ with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification” (Collins, 2000). In America, this superior race is still white in 2005 with everyone else being judged upon it.

Sexism: “The subordination of women’s social, cultural, political, and educational rights as human beings, and the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men based on gender” (Manning Marable as cited in hooks, 1993, p. 38). This subordination continues to occur in American culture, yet in more subtle ways with males seeing themselves as the superior sex and attempting to dominate females.

Student-Athlete: A student that was recruited or walked onto an intercollegiate athletics team in order to participate in a particular sport.

Current State of the U.S.

In the United States in 2005, I feel it is important to know how the current state of the union affects the hegemony that takes place within this country. The current state is one of conservatism with a reemphasis of family values through the religious teachings of Christianity and the doctrine of the Bible. This could be seen in the fall of 2004 when Mayday for Marriage with the help of Focus on Family and the Family Research Council organized a day – the marriage rally I stumbled upon – on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to send a message to legislators about the need to protect marriage as well as energize the millions of socially conservative voters that George W. Bush needed to win the November election. Although this is just one example, the point is the conservatism of the U.S. places the white, heterosexual,

Christian, financially secure man as the standard just as Audre Lorde (1984) has termed as the *mystical norm*.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiated the various components of their identity of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a NCAA Division I student-athlete. I wanted to examine how these components of their identity were affected by the institutions of family, community, religion, and sport as well as how they were integrated within each co-participant. The five areas of literature review I discuss speak directly to the purpose of this study. However, in order to do so, it was necessary to pull from varying disciplines to gain a clearer understanding of the Black lesbian student-athlete since – to date – no study has focused on this specific population. These five areas include: (a) black identity, (b) Black women’s identity throughout herstory, (c) Black lesbian identity, (d) Black women as athletes in women’s sport, and (e) heterosexism/homonegativity in women’s sports and physical activity. In addition, since it was so difficult to gain co-participants for this study, I insert my own voice throughout the thesis regarding the experience of trying to get Black lesbian student-athletes to participate in this study. The chapter concludes by exploring what little is known about Black lesbians in sport.

Black Identity

W.E.B. Du Bois’s (1969) classic tome, *The Soul of Black Folks*, offers a strong foundation upon which to begin a discussion about black identity. This text originally appeared in 1903. In it, Du Bois (1969) discusses the idea of “double-consciousness” (p.

45) to describe what it means to be black and living in America. More specifically, he states:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 45).

It is my belief that Du Bois's (1969) explanation of this concept makes sense on the surface level, but I think it can be extended further by the fact that it is not simply about being an American; it is the fact that being an American is based on whiteness being superior with any other variation seen in the context of being an Other. Conversely, West (2001) discusses Malcolm X's critique of Du Bois's (1969) "double-consciousness" (p. 45) by stating,

For Malcolm X this 'double-consciousness' pertains more to those black people who live 'betwixt and between' the black and white worlds....Hence, they crave peer acceptance in both, receive genuine

approval from neither, yet persist in viewing themselves through the lenses of the dominant white society (p. 139).

Initially, when I read this statement I was infuriated because I felt like Malcolm was speaking directly to me and saying that living and interacting within the black and white communities is a means of searching for continuous acceptance from white America. However, after calming down and thinking through the statement, I honestly feel that as a Black woman of interracial descent that “double-consciousness” (Du Bois, 1969, p. 45) speaks to my existence on the basic level of my race and nationality. I can honestly say that I feel we ALL – black, brown, and white – live between worlds but not as Malcolm X infers in his statement; instead, my reality is as a Black lesbian who lives in a matrix of domination in the Southeastern region of the United States.

Even though Du Bois is the individual who is most widely recognized for explaining the concept of “double-consciousness,” (Du Bois, 1969, p. 45) it was Frantz Fanon (1967) who defined the concept of a “double process” (p. 11) as a black man born in Martinique, France in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Although Fanon wrote this book “to discover the various attitudes that the Negro [of France] adopts in contact with white civilization” through the lens of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the powerful words and themes of this book can be applied to the black identity of both American men and women. As a matter of fact, blacks in the 1960’s and early 1970’s Black Nationalism movement in the United States used Fanon’s powerful words and themes from this book along with the work of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party.

In the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) defines the black problem as “White men consider themselves superior to black men...black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (p. 10). He goes on to say this inferiority complex is a result of a double process of economics and “epidermalization,” (p. 11) or the internalization of inferiority (Fanon, 1967). An example that explains “epidermalization” (p. 11) is that one cannot change the color of her/his skin like one can hide being a lesbian. As such, one is constantly reminded s/he is black when s/he takes a look at her/his skin, which I feel is an everyday reality that one is constantly reminded about. Although Fanon’s focus was on race through the use of “epidermalization,” (p. 11) he does touch on economics and class in the context of the colonizer and the colonized as well as by saying “inferiority is felt economically” (p. 43). Thus, Fanon (1967) concludes the introduction by saying that “what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact” (p. 14). Not only must a black male or female worry about the color of his/her skin, but also the reality that his/her soul is “viewed as a product of human conception or agency rather than an inherent element” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

In Chapter Five in “The Fact of Blackness,” Fanon (1967) states, “I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform,” the white mask (p. 114). In this statement, Fanon (1967) is illustrating the complexities that come with being black in America then and in present day, yet as I have read over this statement many times I have asked myself whether this statement contradicts his earlier concept of “epidermalization” (p. 11). Is it possible to have a uniform when you cannot change the color of your skin? It seems that

the answer is twofold. On the one hand, every day hundreds of thousands of minorities, especially Black women, go out into the world wearing their white uniform in order to prove their value to the white man. However, when they return home to their family and friends they can remove the uniform, so to speak, while their skin goes unchanged. An example of this is language. Many blacks adopt a more proper vernacular when immersed in white society, but opt for a more loose style of slang when they get back into their safe zone with the fellow members of their minority group. Personally, I have never felt the need to do this since I feel comfortable being myself in most contexts, and when I remind myself that no one's opinion of me is going to change who I am.

On the other hand, the uniform or mask can be one's actual skin. For example, I have personally felt trapped into speaking as *the* Black woman in the many classrooms of which I have been a part. However, the reality is that outside of this environment, I cannot define myself from one single aspect, in this case my skin color. Therefore, it is also possible to wear a uniform based on one's skin color that one may not be able to relate to wholeheartedly.

The works of Du Bois (1969) and Fanon (1967) have historically been used by scholars to explain how traditionally blacks have negotiated the identity of being black in America. However, a limitation to their work was the lack of attention given to Black women. In fact, I was shocked when I read Davis (1981) and she stated that Du Bois, "emerged as the leading male advocate of women suffrage in the twentieth century" (p. 145), which in my opinion makes it even worse that he fails to fully acknowledge the experience of Black women during his time period. On the other hand, Fanon (1967)

does devote an entire chapter to women in Chapter Three, “The Woman of Color and the White Man.” However, he claimed that it was the goal of woman of color, which he used to refer to Black women, to marry white men in order to eliminate their inferiority complex and to turn white. I found this claim to be preposterous since this may be the case for some women of color but certainly not all. Additionally, I find this comment heterosexist and from the deepest place in my heart I feel it is not about turning white, it is about love, which seems to be reflective of my generation.

On a personal level, I struggle with these claims since I am in a committed relationship with a white woman. However, thanks to bell hooks (1992) book chapter, “Loving Blackness as Political Resistance,” I felt she addressed an aspect of my life that I had thus far not known how to explain – how my mom and partner could be so loving and accepting to love an individual of another race and not feel like they were being traitors to their own race? And how I could with my increasing awareness of race and race relations not feel like I didn’t love my blackness or blackness in general by being with a white woman? hooks (1992) cleared up my concerns in one simple sentence by stating, “Luckily, there are individual non-black people who have divested of their racism in ways that enable them to establish bonds of intimacy based on their ability to love blackness without assuming the role of cultural tourists” (p. 17). This quote has helped me realize that it is possible for both sides – black and white – to divest themselves of their racism, which I think is a clear explanation of how my mom and partner as well as myself are able to love another of the opposite race. Ultimately, this statement by hooks (1992) has put me on a path towards finding peace with this dimension of my identity.

Within the statement referenced by Fanon (1967) above, Fanon uses “women of color” to refer to Black women, black, and blackness and he also uses “he” to refer to “she” many times throughout the chapter. Despite Fanon’s consideration of the woman of color, it is only in relation to the white man and becoming his “white” counterpart. With this being the case, there is a need to understand the identity of Black women through the words of Black women.

Black Women’s Identity throughout Herstory

Even though Du Bois (1969) and Fanon (1967) do a great job of explaining how black men have historically negotiated their identity of being black in America, for the purpose of this study, I feel it is important to also have a historical understanding of the hegemonic standards and images that have affected Black women’s identity from slavery up until 2005. This will be possible with the help of Collins (2000), Davis (1981), hooks (1989, 1985, 1981), and Springer (2005) as Black women writers writing and telling the stories of Black women.

Standards of new womanhood (Davis, 1981). In the opening chapter of Davis’ (1981) book, *Women, race, & class*, she discusses how the “special situation of the *female* slave remain[s] unpenetrated” (p. 3) by scholars who examine the ‘peculiar institution’ (p. 3) of slavery. Despite the neglect of other scholars, Davis (1981) devotes an entire chapter to examining how black women during slavery had to deal with the power structure of subordination and controlling images, which lead to these black women developing strategies of resistance and ultimately new standards for Black womanhood. However, the new standards of Black womanhood were seen as deviant to

the evolving nineteenth century ideology of femininity that was based on the “cult of true womanhood,” (Collins, 2000, p. 72) in which a “true” woman possessed the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Collins, 2000). This ideology of femininity was accompanied by the traditional family ideal, which was “defined as a natural or biological arrangement based on heterosexual attraction...a state-sanctioned, heterosexual marriage that confers legitimacy not only on the family structure itself but on children born in this family” (p. 47).

As slaves, Black women had to deal with three controlling images that were prominent during their time. First and foremost, Black women were seen as genderless until they could be exploited as women. As Davis (1981) states,

...when it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles (p. 6).

As I typed the words on the page for the previous quote I am sickened – consistent with what I felt when I first read it – by the control these white men had over Black women and the multiple ways they were exploited. More specifically, when these women were exploited, punished, and repressed as women it meant that Black slave women were vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion with rape being the most prominent form. “Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women as workers” (p. 7). Even though slaveholders used rape to evoke terror not only to diminish the Black slave woman’s will

to resist, but also to keep the slave woman in her place, most women resisted these advances and fought back. Speaking to how Black women have been silenced throughout history, I had no idea until reading Davis (1981) that slave women fought back. However, resisting and fighting back lead to other forms of abuse such as flogging or mutilation.

Another form of sexual coercion used was to take advantage of Black women's reproductive capacity to replenish and increase the slave population for the slaveholder. This leads to the second controlling image of Black slave women, the image of the "breeder" (p. 7). The "breeders" (p. 7) were

...animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers. In the eyes of the slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force (p. 7).

This is an image we are familiar with but chose to ignore. I know being reminded of the cruelty these women face infuriates me, but also prompts me to create awareness of the true circumstances these women faced. Despite these first two controlling images, "the slave woman was [aware that she was] first a full-time worker for her owner, and only incidentally a wife, mother and homemaker" (p. 5). For this reason, the Black slave woman made great strides attempting to create a sense of normalcy within her community of fellow slaves. Therefore, Black women and men slaves had an equal division of labor within their family arrangements, which seems were based on there being no "weaker sex" (p. 8) among slaves.

Davis (1981) paints a picture of the egalitarian social relations among Black women and men in the following statement:

[The] sexual division of domestic labor does not appear to have been hierarchical: men's tasks were certainly not superior to and were hardly inferior to the work performed by women. They were both equally necessary. Moreover, from all indications, the division of labor between the sexes was not always so rigorous, for men would sometimes work in the cabin and women might tend the garden and perhaps even join the hunt (p. 18).

Although the above passage indeed debunks the myth of the matriarch – the third controlling image – I examine this image and myth in great detail in the next sub-section. However, the experiences of Black women during slavery forced them “to develop certain personality traits which set them apart from most white women” (p. 27) instead of defining themselves based on:

...the accumulated experiences of all those women who toiled under the lash for their masters, worked for and protected their families, fought against slavery, and who were beaten and raped, but never subdued.

[Instead] it was those women who passed on to their nominally free female descendants a legacy of hard work, perseverance and self-reliance, a legacy of tenacity, resistance and insistence on sexual equality (p. 29).

In essence, this created standards for a new womanhood. It is my belief that these new standards of womanhood are based on the drive, determination, and legacy that Black women have passed on to their daughters and granddaughters that set them apart.

The myth of matriarchy: Women working outside of the home. Before I can delve into the myth of matriarchy, I feel it is important to examine the circumstances that lead to the assumption of such a family structure. Davis (1981) discusses how the state legislators of the slavery South followed the principle of “*partus sequitur ventrem*” (p. 12), in which the child follows the condition of the mother. This principle was based on the assumption that slave children were fatherless since the birth records did not list a father, yet the fact remains that many times the slaveholders were the fathers (Davis, 1981). Thus, “most historical and sociological examinations of the Black family during slavery have simply assumed that the masters’ refusal to acknowledge fatherhood among their slaves was directly translated into a matriarchal family arrangement of the slaves’ own making,” (p. 12-13). After reading Davis (1981), it makes sense how the myth of matriarchy was created in order to keep black men subordinate to white men and create the appearance that Black women held the power.

With the assumption of the matriarchal family arrangement being the family structure of choice, Daniel Moynihan conducted the 1965 U.S. government study of “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” also popularly known as the Moynihan Report. The report “directly linked the contemporary social and economic problems of the [b]lack community to a putatively matriarchal family structure” (p. 143) by arguing that “the state of the black community was ‘pathological’” (Springer, 2005, p. 37) while

also “making it appear that [B]lack women were already liberated” (p. 38). This is consistent with what Smith (2000) terms “Myth No. 1: The Black woman is already liberated” (p. xxviii). In order to debunk the myth Smith (2000) states, “...our women in black had freedom contemptuously thrust upon them.’ Of all the people here, women of color generally have the fewest choices about the circumstances of their lives. An ability to cope under the worst conditions is not liberation” (p. xxviii).

In the mind of Moynihan, he viewed blacks’ oppression to be deeper than the racial discrimination that produced poor housing, unemployment, inadequate education, and substandard healthcare; he felt the oppression was tied to a lack of male authority dating back to slavery, which “had effectively destroyed the black family” (Davis, 1981, p. 13). In addition, “Moynihan alleged that [B]lack women were matriarchs because they ‘fail[ed] to fulfill their traditional ‘womanly’ duties’ and were guilty of emasculating black men” (Springer, 2005, p. 38). What I think makes this claim so ridiculous is that the white male slaveholders were not worried about Black women fulfilling their womanly duties since Black slave women were seen as genderless laborers until it came time to exploit them as women through rape and endless childbearing. It is this theory of black matriarchy that serves as evidence to the collusion Black women faced with the white power structure (Springer, 2005) as slave laborers and continued to face as paid workers.

Collins (2000) discussed how a Black feminist analysis of Black women’s work emphasizes two themes. I examine both of these themes by using Collins (2000) while also incorporating the work of Davis (1981) and Springer (2005). The first theme Collins

(2000) speaks about is “how Black women’s paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender” (p. 45). However, before discussing Collins’ (2000) first theme, I feel it is important to keep in mind the previous discussion of two concepts: (a) the cult of true womanhood and (b) the traditional family ideal. I am reintroducing these two concepts because they were and continue to be the hegemonic standard by which women and families, respectively, are judged upon. Furthermore, Collins (2000) mentions how two components of the traditional family are especially problematic for Black women. First of all, there is an assumed:

...split between the ‘public’ sphere of paid employment and the ‘private’ sphere of unpaid family responsibilities has never worked for U.S. Black women [since] under slavery, U.S. Black women worked without pay in the alleged public sphere of Southern agriculture and had their family privacy routinely violated (p. 47).

Secondly, the binary of public/private separating paid labor from the family household is fundamental to explaining U.S. gender ideology (Collins, 2000). More specific to black families, this would mean “Black women become less ‘feminine,’ because they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men, and their work takes them away from their children” (p. 47). Although this allowed Black women to appear liberated, Black women were accused of having deficient ideas of gender (Collins, 2000).

Both of these aspects of the problematic traditional family ideal helps in the explanation of Collins (2000) first theme of Black women’s work, “how Black women’s paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender” (p. 45).

Moreover, this theme can be explained through a discussion of the “gendered positions in the sex-segregated job market” (Springer, 2005, p. 38) for Black women since they faced slavery as well as the discrimination in these environments and they were expected to replicate the controlling images they faced. As mentioned earlier, during slavery, Black women were seen as “genderless” (Davis, 1981, p. 5) as laborers, but could be exploited as women by being “breeders” (p. 7) as well. For these women, they were oppressed first and foremost based on their race, which lead to oppression based on their gender within an institution that enforced white male supremacy.

“Upon emancipation, Blacks became wage laborers and were thrust into these exchange relationships in which individual gain was placed ahead of collective good” (Collins, 2000, p. 52). However, black civil society chose to maintain the notion of interpersonal relations forged during slavery such as treating community as family and equating family with extended family, which created black solidarity in a climate of state-sanctioned racial violence and worked to suppress bona fide differences among U.S. blacks (Collins, 2000). More specific to Black women workers, they were confined to two major occupations: (a) field labor and (b) domestic work. For those women living in the South after emancipation, field work was little change from the work they had done while being enslaved except they earned a wage, which they still did not get to benefit from since “the male head of the extended family unit receiv[ed] any wage earned by the family unit” (p. 53). On the other hand, those women who were not compelled to work in the field became domestic servants, which like their sisters working in the field “bore the similar stamp of slavery” (Davis, 1981, p. 90). Furthermore,

Black women worked as cooks, nursemaids, chambermaids and all-purpose domestics, white women in the South unanimously rejected this line of work. Outside the South, white women who worked as domestics were generally European immigrants who, like their ex-slave sisters, were compelled to take whatever employment they could find (p. 90).

Thus, in the South, domestic work was synonymous with Black girls and women, which paid low wages and exposed them to the constant threat of not only sexual harassment but also abuse (Davis, 1981; Collins, 2000).

Based on the poor working conditions, low wages, and the threat of sexual harassment and abuse, many “Black women wanted to withdraw from the labor force, not to mimic middle-class [w]hite women’s domesticity but, rather, to strengthen the political and economic position of their families” (Collins, 2000, p. 54). However, based on the “limited opportunities available to [black] men made it virtually impossible for the majority of [b]lack families to survive on [the b]lack male wages alone” (p. 54). Far too many Black women could not make this choice to stay at home and continued to work for pay (Collins, 2000). This remained the standard until the 1910’s, which marked the first great migration of blacks from the countryside of the South to the big cities in the North and continued until after World War II. This migration stimulated a shift in Black women’s labor market activities in that many of these women were no longer forced to be live-in domestics like in the South instead being a domestic in the North meant day work (Collins, 2000). This, in turn, finally helped to create a private sphere for the black family that could include a mother figure. However, since black men often found high

wages through temporary work and Black women obtained lower wages through secure jobs, it was often the case that Black women financially supported their families. Thus, this situation exemplified the affect of gender within the labor market in which gender differences created distinct patterns of economic vulnerability (Collins, 2000).

The final aspect that explains “how Black women’s paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender” (p. 45) as well as sexuality was through the controlling image of the mammy. The mammy was the faithful, trustworthy, grateful, and obedient domestic servant (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981). When I am think about the image of the mammy I am of reminded of the smiling Black woman on the Aunt Jemima pancake syrup bottle or Hattie McDaniels who played the mammy in the 1939 film, *Gone With the Wind*. Although these are just two examples, this standard of a “good Black woman” (Collins, 2000, p. 72) was used as a “normative yardstick” (p. 72) upon which all Black women's behavior was evaluated. Collins (2000) states the symbolism of the mammy best as, “By loving, nurturing, and caring for her [w]hite children and ‘family’ better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite [w]hite male power” (p. 72). Furthermore, the image of the mammy also worked to control racial, gender, sexual, and class oppression.

In regards to racial oppression, the aim of the mammy was to influence Black maternal behavior, which in turn could potentially lead to Black women perpetuating racial oppression among their children and families (Collins, 2000). This occurs, “By teaching [b]lack children their assigned place in [w]hite power structures,” which can

lead to Black women internalizing the mammy image; thus, perpetuating racial oppression (p. 73). However, in relation to gender and sexual oppression, the mammy was seen as a physical, asexual woman who is “a surrogate mother in blackface whose historical devotion to the [w]hite family is now giving way to new expectations” (p. 74) with the expectation being commitment to their jobs. Within the context of class, Collins (2000) believes “the mammy image was designed to mask [the] economic exploitation of social class” (p. 74). Although this image has become more muted, Black women in 2005 may still feel the need to have to play the mammy role in paid work settings even though they teach their own children the complete opposite at home (Collins, 2000). Whatever, the case may be, the above is an explanation of the affect the mammy image has on race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Collins’ (2000) second theme of Black women’s work, which she feels is less developed yet equally important is “how Black women’s unpaid family labor is simultaneously confining and empowering for Black women” (p. 46). Up until this point, there has been an emphasis in researching U.S. Black women’s paid work experience without examining how their unpaid work contributes to their family’s well-being and can in turn be a site of resistance to oppression than as site of exploitation from men. Although we are still attempting to understand the overall experience of U.S. Black women’s paid and unpaid work, we are aware of the occupational niches, the discrimination faced in these environments, and the controlling images these Black women have faced since slavery and continue to face in the present day.

Stepping outside of the shadow of the black man. Despite the fact Black women's participation has been portrayed during the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements as ambivalent and in some cases nonexistent, the truth is that many women were not only fighting alongside black men, but leading in the fight to end racial oppression. The leadership skills these women would acquire helped them step outside the shadow of black men and move to the forefront of creating their own movement, the Black Feminist movement. However, in order to understand how these Black women stepped outside the shadow of black men, it is important to examine Black women's roles in both the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements, respectively.

Within the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, Black women challenged "the movement leadership's chauvinism" (Springer, 2005, p. 21). More specifically, "[B]lack women resisted the demands that they conform to normative ideals of womanhood, or ladylike behavior – ideas initially constructed with [B]lack women as the opposite of ladylike in the first place" (p. 21). When I read this statement I am reminded of Collins' (2000) concept of the matrix of domination, which explains how institutions and industries set Black women as the deviate. Yet, still expect Black women to adhere to white woman standards, which ultimately tickles down to the individual level. Additionally, "an implicit, sometimes explicit, goal of the movement was the reassertion of the male breadwinner as head of household," (p. 23) which in essence allowed black men to rise above Black women in order to break the myth of matriarchy and establish patriarchy within the black community. This goal combined with sexism and authoritarianism were factors that contributed and prevented Black women from having

public leadership roles within the Civil Rights movement. Nonetheless, Black women did not allow these factors to deter them from going forward, which as a Black woman makes me proud.

Although we are all familiar with Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer as public Black women leaders during the Civil Rights movement, there are many other examples of Black women leaders without the same public presence. One of these women was JoAnn Gibson Robinson, who as a leader in the Women's Political Council (WPC) "began mobilizing Montgomery's black population and preparing for a boycott long before December 1955, when Rosa Parks made her stand by refusing to yield her seat on the city's segregated buses" (p. 22). Another example is "Ella Baker, as coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), worked behind the scenes with local constituents, while Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. represented the organization nationally," (p. 22) and was even officially excluded from the decision making process because of her gender. Even though these are just two examples, I have come to realize there are many similar untold stories of Black women who were involved in the Civil Rights movement. In essence, I think Springer (2005) summarized the experience best when she stated, "many women were respected as wise elders, but nonetheless they were still women whose gender prevented them from participating in the hierarchy of the civil rights organizations and the movement" (p. 23).

Although many women recognized the male chauvinism in the various civil rights organizations, they were reluctant to confront it because they did not want to create a divide within the struggle to end racial oppression (Springer, 2005). It is my belief that

these sentiments are still felt within the black community – to fight the battle to end racial oppression versus another aspect of your identity (i.e. gender or sexuality). However, as the movement shifted from one of civil rights to that of Black Nationalist, the demand of Black women was not only to support their black men, but also was nation building through a reemphasis of childbearing. Although, “Black nationalist women did not ignore sexism; however, they did shun gender separation” and by “remaining in mixed-sex organizations allowed [B]lack women to demonstrate that they were as capable and committed to revolution as black men” (p. 27). Despite disagreeing with this tactic of eliminating separation and/or conflict, I understand why some women felt the only way to gain opportunities and civil rights was to stand in solidarity with black men.

Frustrated with the sexism and emphasis on establishing patriarchy in the black community along with being excluded from the white feminist movement, Black women began gathering to discuss their experiences in consciousness-raising sessions. These sessions allowed Black women to realize that they were not alone “in seeing disparities between the rhetoric of the civil rights movement and the treatment of women within that same movement” (p. 45), and that the intersection of race, gender, and class was a reality. Even though these consciousness-raising sessions were the beginning stages of many things to come, for many groups of women it was the stepping stone to forming five key Black feminist organizations – Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA), National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), National Alliance of Black Feminism (NABF), Combahee River Collection, and Black Women Organized for Action (BWOA) – who “were composed of [B]lack women with similar ideas about ending racism and sexism,

but...also had different ideas about what it meant to identify as Black feminists” (p. 46). Although all five organizations emerged between 1968 and 1976, their decline corresponded with the election of President Carter, which created a state of conservatism in the United States and aided in the fall of all five organizations.

Other controlling images of Black women: An overview. Although the image of the “breeder” (Davis, 1981, p. 7) and mammy have been previously discussed, I felt it was important to address and acknowledge these images since as Black women we are still being stereotyped and controlled by these images. These two images are not the only ones that have been used to control Black women. Collins (2000) discusses four other controlling images: (a) the welfare mother; (b) the welfare queen; (c) the Black lady; and (d) the jezebel, whore, or hoochie. The first image, the welfare mother, can be described as a Black woman who is a bad mother while being portrayed as content with sitting around, collecting welfare, shunning work, and in turn passing her bad values to her offspring (Collins, 2000). Even though I never thought about it, this image is detrimental to not just Black women but to all blacks because then we can be “racially stereotyped as lazy by blaming Black welfare mothers for failing to pass on the work ethic” (p. 79). The welfare queen – the second controlling image – can be seen as the epitome of economic dependency and “constitutes a highly materialistic, domineering, and manless working-class Black woman...[who] is content to take the hard-earned money of tax-paying Americans and remain married to the state” (p. 80). The welfare queen image has been used as a sign and/or scapegoat to the deterioration of the state

(Collins, 2000), which explains the emphasis of Black women when welfare or welfare reform is mentioned in the media.

Conversely, the Black lady refers to a middle-class professional Black woman “who stayed in school, worked hard, and [has] achieved much” (p. 80-81). Yet, in doing so, she is said to have become less feminine by competing with men as well as too assertive, which explains why she can’t find a man to marry her (Collins, 2000). On a personal level, I can relate to this image and have often felt this has been people’s explanation for why I did not have a man when really it was not about my focus on school and achieving the next goal but instead the fact that I am attracted to women. Furthermore, Collins (2000) feels that when taken together, the welfare queen and the Black lady “constitute class-specific versions of a matriarchy thesis whose fundamental purpose is to discredit Black women’s full exercise of citizenship rights” (p. 81). I agree with Collins (2000) because and I think these two images place Black women in opposition of one another by making it an issue of class when really it is a tactic to make these women appear different – to the public and one another – so they are unable to relate.

The final controlling image – the jezebel, whore, or hoochie – has been central in restraining Black women’s sexuality since it “lie[s] at the heart of Black women’s oppression, [the] historical jezebels and [the] contemporary hoochies represent a deviant Black female sexuality” (p. 81). More specifically, the image of the jezebel originated under slavery and functioned to reduce all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women; whereas the hoochie can take on many different forms as a “plain

hoochie” (p. 82), a “club hoochie” (p. 82), a “gold-digging hoochie” (p. 82), and a “hoochie mama” (p. 83). Although each form carries its own distinction, they all assume normalize heterosexuality within the U.S. white, male society. Therefore, “in this context of a gender-specific, white, heterosexual normality, the jezebel or hoochie becomes a racialized, gendered symbol of deviant female sexuality” (Collins, 2000, p. 83). Again, Black women are set as the deviant, which does not surprise me, and instead of

...being the most sought after ‘object of sexual pleasure’ – as in the case of black men – white women tend to occupy this ‘upgraded,’ that is, degraded, position primarily because white beauty plays a weightier role in sexual desirability for women in racist patriarchal America (West, 2001, p. 130).

Although Collins (2000) discusses these four controlling images that Black women are affected by, it is the foundation of defining Black women as the Other that provides justification for race, gender, and class oppression. The foundation of the Other is based on binary, either/or thinking (e.g. black/white, man/woman, heterosexuality/homosexuality) in which domination always involves attempts to objectify the subordinate group. Personally, I find it hard to escape this binary thinking, but must remind myself this is what makes one extreme good and the other extreme bad. I think the challenge is seeing ourselves as subjects rather than objects as hooks (1989) summarizes best by saying,

As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject (p. 42).

I think what hooks (1989) so eloquently explains is how so many Black women have been treated by American society since slavery and continue to face as oppression and discrimination in 2005. The image of the "breeder" (Davis, 1981, p. 7), the mammy as well as the four other controlling images Collins (2000) mentions each work to perpetuate Black women as the Other.

An acute case of multiplicity. As I reviewed Black history, it became apparent that Black women have tried to find ways to make sense of the multiple components of their identity despite the controlling images put forth by the United States' white, male supremacist society. In terms of speaking to my existence as a Black lesbian, not only expands Du Bois' (1969) concept of a "double-consciousness" (p. 45) fit me, but also I think Curry-Johnson (1997) expands Du Bois' (1969) concept by explaining the negotiation of identity that takes place as an "acute case of multiplicity" (p. 52). In my opinion, I think her concept is a good place to begin explaining the complexity of Black women's existence in 2005. As she explains:

Each identity defines me; each is responsible for elements of my character; from each I derive some sustenance for my soul. But they do not peacefully coexist within me any more than the duality does in the lives of

black men. These elements are in constant conflict...For self-preservation's sake, I desperately try to blend them together harmoniously like one cooks a soup or weaves a tapestry. My efforts, however, sometimes seem to be in vain, because as it is in the world around me, there is always sediment left in the bottom of the pot or a loose thread dangling at the seam (p. 52).

Although there is no single explanation for the complexity of Black women's existence, the great thing is that women have the human agency to change the conditions that they feel are unjust, which was exemplified when Black women moved away from the civil rights movement and formed their own groups and organizations. However, in attempting to differentiate one identity from another, the history of Black women – dating back to post-emancipation from slavery – reminds us that we are neither recognized “as a group separate and distinct from black men or as a present part of the larger group ‘women’ in this culture” (hooks, 1981, p. 7). Not only must Black women fight for the various components of our identity, we are also limited to “competitive either/or thinking, the belief that the self is formed in opposition to another” (hooks, 1985, p. 29). This statement by hooks (1985) gives great insight into the binary classification system upon which our society is based (e.g. black/white, male/female, and heterosexual/homo- sexual). When an individual deviates from these neat boundaries, the fundamental social system of our country is threatened. This creates a need to explain through theory the intersection of not only identity but also the interlocking

systems of oppression, which I feel is best explained through Black feminist thought (see Chapter 3).

Black Lesbian Identity

Although there is significant and recent literature on African American⁵ lesbians, it is important to keep in mind that each woman's experience varies according to background, environment, and personality, which is also true of the women that are involved with this study. However, "all lesbian women of color share a common element in that they personally are confronted with living in a society that sustains racism, sexism, and heterosexism" (Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003, p. 113-14). As such, it is necessary to specifically identify the elements that are common to many Black lesbians.

Within society at large, Black lesbians are seen as masculinized or sexualized women that parallels the stereotypes of Black women in general (Greene, 1994). Greene (1994) even goes so far as to suggest that not only Black lesbians but also Black women in general are seen as "...defective females who want to be or act like men and are sexually promiscuous" (p. 398). These sentiments are echoed by Collins (1991, 2000) in her discussion of controlling images of Black women. As mentioned in the previous subsection, the image of the jezebel can be seen as one of a Black woman with an excessive sexual appetite; however, possessing such an appetite "masculinizes her because she desires sex just as a man does" (Collins, 2000, p. 83).

⁵ Literature on lesbians in the discipline of psychology and counseling (Greene, 1994; Bridges et al., 2003) make the distinction of African American, but from here forward I will refer to African American lesbians as Black lesbian(s) except where quoted.

Furthermore, the “jezebel can also be masculinized and once again deemed 'freaky' if she desires sex with other women (p. 83). Not only is the Black lesbian seen as masculinized in her deviant sexual practices, but she is also “linked to biological markers of race and looking ‘mannish’” (p. 146), which “calls into question [American] society's definition of women [and femininity] at its deepest level” (Collins, 1991, p. 194). By associating the jezebel image with the Black lesbian and vice versa, American society is juxtapositions the Black lesbian as the ultimate other. Since Black lesbians are not white, male or heterosexual and generally not affluent, Collins (1991) feels “they represent the antithesis of Audre Lorde’s ‘mystical norm’ and become the standard by which other groups measure their own so-called normality” (p. 194). West (2001) furthers the discussion by saying “the subculture of [B]lack lesbians is fluid and the boundaries are less policed precisely because [B]lack female sexuality in general is more devalued [in American society], hence more marginal in white and black America” (p. 129). Thus, in being deemed the ultimate Other, Black lesbians are pushed even further to the margins as deviant members of American society.

Despite the position of Black lesbians in American society, one would think that these women could find solace within their own community of either blacks or gay men and lesbians, but the harsh reality is that Black lesbians are still victims of stereotypes by both the black community as well as the gay and lesbian community. It is important to note at this point that the gay community has generally been associated with whites from either middle- or upper-class backgrounds who hold positions of power; in contrast, the lesbian community has largely been seen as working class, limiting the power they hold

within society. The reality is that both of these communities are affected by the fact that it is 2005 in the United States. However, in a few select cities like Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Chicago there are distinct black gay and lesbian communities that allow Black lesbians to find some kind of solace and support (Boykin, 1996; Griffin, 2000).

Greene (1994) feels that “racism and sexism come together in attempts to present African American women as the cause of failures in family functioning, suggesting that a lack of male dominance and female subordination has prevented African Americans from truly being emancipated” (p. 398). In addition, homosexuality in the black community is often viewed as the white disease (Clarke, 2000; Boykin, 1996). As such, many members of the black community feels it threatens both the stability and continuation of the black family and community (Boykin, 1996; Clarke, 2000; Conerly, 2000; Constantine-Simms, 2000; Griffin, 2000; hooks, 2000; Hutchinson, 2000). This belief extends from the fact that “homosexual unions do not, in and of themselves, produce offspring - as if one’s only function within a family, within a relationship, or in sex were to produce offspring” (Clarke, 2000, p. 193). In turn, being a Black lesbian is not only a deviation of white femininity, but also a rebellion from how blacks attempt to define women’s femininity based on white standards (Boykin, 1996; Bridges et al., 2003; Greene, 1994).

With this being the case, Black lesbians are forced to not only deal with racism and heterosexism in the general society but also in the black community. More specifically, hooks (2000) states that the black community “may be perceived as more homophobic than other communities because there is a tendency for individuals in black

communities to verbally express in an outspoken way anti-gay sentiments” (p. 69).

Although there is no way to determine if black communities are more or less homophobic as compared to others since little research has been done to examine this issue, it is well documented that religion is often the most frequently cited factor in black heterosexism and homonegativity (Boykin, 1996). As Griffin (2000) states, regardless of where one stands on the issue of homosexuality as it relates to Christianity and the Bible or “...in light of historical and contemporary discussions about whether homosexuality is ‘natural,’ it is important to understand that such religious rhetoric was also used to support the horrific institution of slavery” with appeals to its “naturalness” (p. 115).

However, some heterosexuals within the black community attempt to claim support and tolerance by allowing lesbians and gays to remain in churches, especially since many of these community churches benefit from the leadership and musical talents of lesbians and gays and removing them would be detrimental to the worship and life of the church (Boykin, 1996; Griffin, 2000). Despite the resistance of many black leaders and ministers to discuss the issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the black community, a few black organizations, leaders and prominent black religious leaders such as the NAACP, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Dr. Joseph Lowery, bell hooks, and most members of the Black Congressional Caucus have come out in favor of gay rights (Conerly, 2000; Boykin, 1996). Additionally, Reverend Al Sharpton recently was interviewed for the *Advocate* by Frankie Edozien (2005, October 11) where he came out in support of his lesbian sister as well as launching an initiative to fight homophobia and AIDS in the black community. Reverend Sharpton (2005) was recently at the University

of Tennessee, and I had the opportunity to ask him his thoughts on eliminating social apathy in the black community surrounding homophobia. He stated,

...whether or not one makes a personal choice or grows up a certain way or not, we can not fight against bias and practices....Let me tell you something, I think we are being hypocritical because as I grew up a boy preacher as a kid. There has always been homosexuality in the church. We know it and we need to quite acting like we don't know it....we need to except people the way they are even if you may disagree with them. Deal with them the way you would disagree with anyone else, but to have a social ordeal to discriminate and have a double standard against them and to rob them of their civil liberties and civil rights is not and should not be openly opposed and I will always say that (Sharpton, 2005).

In my opinion, what makes this quote so powerful is that these words are spoken by a preacher who in the past did not support gay and lesbian rights, which in my mind demonstrates that one can change their opinion especially when a love one comes out as gay or lesbian. This illustrates the influence that can emerge from coming out to family and friends.

Along with heterosexism, Black lesbians also face in-group racism. It is important to clarify that the black family and community have functioned as a haven for some Black lesbians, “a necessary and important protective barrier, a survival tool against and refuge from the racism of the dominant culture” (Greene, 1994, p. 398). Because of the strength of many black families and communities, lesbian members may

not be automatically rejected (Greene, 1994; Bridges et al., 2003). Instead, the issue of homosexuality is further confounded when the issue of interracial dating and relationships is added to the discussion. This explains some of the in-group racism within the black community. As hooks (2000) discusses, many black families who acknowledge a member's sexuality often find it less difficult to accept if that member is dating someone outside of the black race. As Boykin (1996) points out in the following quote:

Homosexual and interracial relationships raise many of the same concerns to black families, including continuation of the family, humiliation of the family, and commitment to the races....Black homosexuals dating each other raises concerns too, but at least suggests some appreciation of the beauty within the race; it does not seem as much an abandonment of blackness as does interracial dating (p. 22-23).

In addition, similar to white communities, one of two things might happen: (a) you are kept around to talk you out of being a lesbian (Greene, 1994) or (b) your sexual orientation is just not discussed and if it is discussed, your partner is reduced to a female friend or roommate (Bridges et al., 2003; Greene 1994). Regardless, both options put the Black lesbian in a compromising position of choosing one identity over the other. Greene (1994) states it best in saying, "tolerance is usually contingent on silence about one's lesbian orientation," leaving the Black lesbian to decide between rejection by one's family or silence (p. 399).

Nonetheless, the black community is just one environment where Black lesbians must negotiate the intertwined facets of their identity. Another is within the gay and lesbian community. In the U.S. in 2005, the gay and lesbian community is fraught with racism. As Boykin (1996) mentions in his book, *One More River to Cross*:

Much of the connection between gay and white results from gay racism toward nonwhites. This prejudice takes on many forms, but the most common complaints involve blacks and other nonwhites who feel they are excluded, exploited, or patronized by the dominant white gay community....The social exclusion of blacks is the most obvious and most common form of gay racism practiced by the white community (p. 214).

Other lesbians such as Clark (2000), Smith (1999) and Lorde (1982) share in Boykin's (1996) sentiments of experiencing this social exclusion from the white gay and lesbian community and its establishments.

One wonders how this social exclusion affects Black lesbians. Based on the research, the effect may be twofold. On the one hand, the Black lesbian must deal with going back and forth between the visibility of her black skin and gender and the invisibility of her sexuality. As Boykin (1996) points out, it is a matter of "black survival" (p. 20) in that a black homosexual must recognize that, "society will mistreat us [black people] if we acknowledge that we are both black and gay" (p. 20). In other words, there is great "danger of visibility" (p. 20) for openly Black lesbian and gay individuals. However, there is also great danger in remaining invisible. Smith (1999) speaks about the affects of it when she says, it is "...much easier for the black

community to oppose gay rights and to express homophobia without recognizing that these attacks and the lack of legal protections affects its own members” (p. 16), which seems like Reverend Sharpton did for so long. Similarly, Boykin (1996) describes the privilege of passing as heterosexual by saying, “...the invisibility of sexual orientation almost guarantees that lesbians and gays will be identified by their behavior rather than their appearance, thus reducing homosexuals to their behavior alone” (p. 43).

The behavior associated with homosexuality brings another element into the mix and is best described by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (as cited in Boykin, 1996) who states:

Most people think of racial identity as a matter of (racial) status, but respond to it as behavior. In contrast, most people think of sexual identity as a matter of (sexual) behavior, but they respond to it as a status....For both groups, there is a status and a behavior component to their identity (p. 39-40).

Black lesbians often have to choose between the various components of their identity.

As Bridges et al. (2003) state, “lesbian women of color often feel that they are required to identify either with their race or with their sexual orientation in order to fit into a culture” (p.115). Based on her life experience, Lorde (1984) suggests:

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity...I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of myself. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of

energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly...” (p. 120).

Though I am able to relate to Lorde (1984) and also feel I can reach my full potential when I call on every aspect of my identity, it seems that many Black lesbians are unable to integrate all the parts of who they are and forced through societal and communal pressure to choose sides as part of the fight against racism with black men, as a silent part of the fight against sexism with white women, or be closeted to everyone instead of exposing the heterosexism and racism that exists both within and outside of Black culture.

Black Women as Athletes in Women’s Sport

With blacks representing nearly twenty-four percent of all NCAA Division I institutions⁶ and a little more than fifty-two percent of NCAA Division I revenue sports⁷ (NCAA, 2004c)⁸, I think it is safe to say that sport is one arena where black individuals – male and female – have found success. More specifically, Black women represent almost fifteen percent of NCAA Division I female student-athletes – 10, 413 (NCAAc, 2004) out of 69, 768 (NCAAA, 2004). Despite the apparent current and historical success of Black women athletes in women's sport, it has not come without silence and invisibility, which is consistent with the circumstances these women have and continue to face in society. As Yevonne R. Smith (1992) states, “...women of color have been silenced by being suppressed, excluded, and misrepresented at every level of social interaction and have

⁶ This statistic includes historically black institutions.

⁷ Revenue sports are defined as football, men’s and women’s basketball.

⁸ The data is from the NCAA Graduation-Rates Reports and is based on scholarship

been placed at the margins by the dominant culture in society and in sport” (p. 229). This dominance in sport occurs through race, gender, class, and sexuality and can no longer be seen as variables but must be understood as power relationships (Smith, 1992) with white heterosexual males of middle- and upper-class status holding the power.

Unfortunately, as I have mentioned in the previous sections, white males have not been the only individuals to hold Black women back. However, “...despite obvious sexism in [the black community] during and after the civil rights movement, the African American community has been traditionally more equalitarian than the dominant culture, particularly concerning athletics for women” (Smith, 1992, p. 233). This can be attributed to values of femininity within the black community where ‘the women can be strong and achieving in sport and still not deny her womanness’ (Smith, 1992, p. 234). Regardless of the fact that these women are supported by their community, the harsh reality is that overt racism and hegemonic standards of femininity have impacted sport by perceiving these women as not real. Consistent with how Black lesbians are viewed within society at large, Black woman athletes are also seen as masculinized and/or sexualized women that correspond to the stereotypes of Black women in general. As Collins (2004) states,

The stereotype of women athletes as ‘manly’ and as being lesbians and for Black women as being more ‘masculine’ than [w]hite women converge to provide a very difficult interpretive context for Black female athletes. In essence, the same qualities that are uncritically celebrated for [b]lack male

student-athletes only.

athletes can become stumbling blocks for their Black female counterparts.

Corporate profits depend on representations and images, and those of Black female athletes must be carefully managed in order to win endorsements and guarantee profitability (p. 135-136).

However, as Collins (2004) discusses Black women athlete's muscular and athletic bodies as well as the assertiveness that is needed to win in sport represent new forms of femininity. I think the best example of such a new form of femininity is the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena. They are two young Black women athletes from a working class background playing the elite sport of tennis with muscular 6-foot-1 ½ inch frames and the ability to serve a tennis ball at 127 mph (Collins, 2004). In addition, these two sisters basically reject the norms of tennis with their form-fitting, flashy outfits and braided hair as examples. Nonetheless, the Williams sisters are just one example of a new form of femininity, and I truly believe it is up to Black woman athletes and Black women in general to redefine our femininity and the corresponding images we want to project within and outside of the matrix of domination.

Just as important as the perception and image of Black women athletes in women's sport is how blacks, males and females are socialized into sport. This socialization into to sport can be seen as an intersection of gender, race, and class. Despite the increase of well-educated black people in America, the data still shows that nearly forty percent – 1,923,000 out of 5,530,000 – of two-parent and single parent black families live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Simply put, this circumstance impacts the sporting experience for black youth. Even though some

families are able to afford expensive lessons and/or elite sporting experiences in sports such as tennis, golf, swimming, etc., the majority of families can't afford such luxuries (Smith, 1992). As Smith (1992) states, the reality is that:

Low socioeconomic conditions impact women of color disproportionately such that their children must participate in stereotypical, 'popular' sports such as basketball and track and field (sponsored by the schools, recreation departments, and other nonprofit agencies) or not participate at all in organized sport (p. 236).

Approximately thirty-one percent – 7,662 (NCAAc, 2004) out of 25, 019 (NCAAA, 2004) – of NCAA Division I black female student-athletes participate in basketball, indoor and/or outdoor track and field. Based on the overrepresentation of Black woman participating in these two sports, misperceptions suggest that these are the sports of choice (Smith, 1992). However, “It is evident that popularly selected agency-sponsored sports are chosen most often by ethnic females and may represent opportunity set, forced opportunity choices for participation, and socialization experiences in a limited array of available sports” (Smith, 1992, p. 236). Additionally, the socioeconomic conditions with black families, schools, and communities have contributed to a tradition of overrepresentation in basketball and track and field (Smith, 1992). Even though there is overrepresentation of Black woman athletes in these two sports, Smith (1992) has noted three factors that have been operative: (a) “...there has usually been a strong desire to participate in sports, skills, and confidence on the part of the athlete, plus an organized sport structure through which the athlete has been nurtured in the African American

community and more recently in the dominant culture;” (b) “...philanthropic people such as upper middle-class professionals and sport figures have contributed and supported the development of young, aspiring elite female athletes;” and (c) “...several HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] played major roles in providing for sport skill development in intercollegiate athletics and during summer sports programs even before the initiation of the NCAA National Youth Sports Program” (p. 237).

I felt it was important to take note of these three factors as one or a combination of all three could be potential reasons for why so many Black women athletes have chosen to participate in the sports of track and field and basketball. Ultimately, I am of the opinion that Smith (1992) eloquently explained the importance of needing to address the fact that Black woman athletes are overrepresented in two sports by stating:

...unless schools, community agencies, and national sport organizations increase their commitment and range of sports offerings to youths, as well as increase the diversity of sport leaders, only limited access to a wider range of sport opportunities and limited elite sport achievements by ethnic minority girls and women may be expected at lower income levels.

Members of ethnic minority communities continue to struggle with depressed economic conditions, which make certain sport experiences inaccessible regardless of the athletic potential of the individual (p. 238).

Heterosexism/Homonegativity in Women’s Sport & Physical Activity

For the purpose of this study it was important to specifically understand the Black lesbian collegiate student-athlete and the social factors that influence her. Despite the

closeted nature of lesbians in women's sport and physical activity, many researchers (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Bredemier, Cahn, 1994; Carlton, Hills & Oglesby, 1999; Broad, 2001; Greendorfer, 1997; Griffin, 1992; Griffin, 1998; Griffin, 2001; Hargreaves, 1993; Hargreaves, 2000; Krane, 1996, Krane, 1997, Krane, 2001; Krane & Barber, 2003; Krane, Barber & McClung, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005; Lensky, 2003; Messner, 1994; Riemer, 1997; Robinson, 2002; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; Sykes, 1996; Sykes, 1998; Sykes, 2001; Vealey, 1997; Veri, 1999; Wright & Clarke, 1999) have spent the last two decades gaining a better understanding of the multiple components that influence and effect lesbians within these contexts. I emphasize Griffin's (1998) groundbreaking book *Strong Women, Deep Closets*, in this section because she simplifies the existence, perception, and myths of lesbians in sport. However, my only resistance to Griffin (1998) is based on her emphasis and focus on homophobia, which I think is part of the issue but does not fully explain the matrix of domination. In my opinion, it is the combination of heterosexism and homonegativity that is the concern instead of the outright fear of lesbians.

Nonetheless, in the opening pages of her book, Griffin (1998) makes the following statement about the heterosexist and homonegative nature of women's sport and physical activity:

The closets in sport are so deep because so many women are hiding there.

These deep closets are full of not only lesbians, but also heterosexual women who fear that women's sport is always one lesbian scandal away from ruin. These strong women coach and compete in the shadow of a

demonized stereotype so reviled that all women in sport are held hostage by the threat of being called a lesbian (p. x).

Krane (1996) echoes Griffin's (1998) sentiments by stating "the sport environment is even more hostile toward lesbians, thus escalating the negative impact of homonegativism experienced by lesbians in sport compared to nonsport lesbians" (Krane, 1996, p. 237). Therefore, to comprehend the current context for the lesbian student-athlete it is essential to start at the beginning of her experience, more specifically, how she is socialized into sport.

Throughout history, sport has been considered a male-only space. It has only been since the rise of physical education at women's colleges in the late-nineteenth century that women have, in increasing numbers, begun to participate in a variety of sports. Starting with tennis, golf, and bicycling as a means of improving women's health (Paul, 2001; Griffin, 1998), women's sport participation has increased dramatically over the past 100 years thanks to policies such as Title IX. Conversely, sport for men has always been a means of socializing them into traditional masculine gender roles and through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was the "primary masculinity-validating experience" (Messner, 1994, p. 68). As Griffin (1998) mentions,

...sport for men serves five social functions that ensure that the gender order supporting presumed male superiority and female subordination is maintained... [by] (a) defining and reinforcing traditional conceptions of masculinity; (b) providing a context for acceptable and safe male bonding and intimacy; (c) reinforcing male privilege and female inferiority; (d)

establishing status among other males; and (e) reinforcing heterosexuality (Griffin, 1998, p. 20).

Although Griffin (1998) fails to mention how gay male athletes fit into her five social functions – in her introduction she made a conscious effort to focus on the experience of lesbian women in sport, it is important to keep in mind that these social functions serve to maintain “a gender order in which men and women adopt separate and unequal gender roles (p. 20). Since this study is focused on lesbian student-athletes, I will examine the affect of the fifth and final social function, reinforcing heterosexuality.

The fifth and final social function of sport for men, reinforcing heterosexuality, could better be defined as “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1993). Rich (1993) uses this term to illustrate our society’s hegemonic beliefs about sexual orientation, and more specifically, the inherent belief that all individuals are and should be heterosexual.

However, as Krane (2001) states:

Once compulsory heterosexuality is integrated into the discussion of the impact of gender and gender roles, the following interactions emerge: (a) gender-roles determine acceptable behaviors based on gender (i.e., females are to be feminine, males are to be masculine); (b) behaviors considered gender-role appropriate are predicted on heterosexuality; and (c) assumptions of heterosexuality guide ‘appropriate gender socialization (p. 117).

More specifically, female student-athletes who are perceived as feminine are without doubt categorized as heterosexual and are considered normal and acceptable (Krane,

2001; Griffin, 1992). This provides these female student-athletes with a privileged status over those female student-athletes who fail to adhere to the hegemonic feminine ideals. Thus, gender and the appropriate roles associated with each are “constructed against the backdrop of heterosexuality” (Krane, 2001, p.117).

In American culture in 2005, the pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1993) is perpetuated in sport through images that are used to control women in sport. Griffin (1998) identifies six media-created and promoted images of women athletes and student-athletes: (a) the lesbian bogeywoman; (b) the sexy beauty queen; (c) the wholesome girl next door; (d) the cute little pixie; (e) the bitchy slut; and (f) the wife and mom. However, as Griffin (1998) mentions despite the nice and neat categories, “athletes of color do not neatly fit into any of these predominantly white-associated stereotypes” instead the controlling images that are applied based on their race is implemented even within the sport context (p. 54). Nevertheless, the lesbian label is one of the most effective means of controlling all women in sport, and as Griffin (1998) further states:

As long as women’s sports are associated with lesbians and lesbians are stigmatized as sexual and social deviants, the lesbian label serves an important social-control function in sport, ensuring that only men have access to the benefits of sport participation and the physical and psychological empowerment available in sport (p. 20).

This label effectively plays off the beliefs – or more accurately the myths and stereotypes – associated with lesbians in sport. Some of these myths include but are not limited to: (a) lesbians participate in particular sports; (b) participation in athletics promotes lesbianism; (c) lesbians are sexual predators; (d) lesbians are immoral and are poor role models for young women; (e) lesbian cliques dominate sports and discriminate against heterosexuals; and (f) lesbians have an unfair advantage in sport (Griffin, 1998). These myths can be exacerbated or unsolved by athletic administration, who play a large role in determining what kind of climate lesbians will face in the sport environment.

In addition, Griffin (1998) identifies three climates that lesbians must negotiate their sexual identity within: hostile, conditionally tolerant, and open and inclusive climates. If the climate is hostile, a lesbian “must be prepared to deny her lesbian identity and act in ways that lead others to believe that she is heterosexual” with her being seen as the problem (Griffin, 1998, p. 94). Within this environment a closeted lesbian can make it just as hostile for other lesbians as her heterosexual counterparts. This is because, the “tyranny of heterosexuality can cause women athletes and coaches to spend as much time worrying about how they are perceived as they do honing their athletic skills” (p. 94).

On the other hand, the conditionally tolerant climate is similar to the United States military’s philosophy of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” which was established in 1993 by former President Bill Clinton and written by Colin Powell, and states “as long as gay or bisexual men and women in the military hide anything that could disclose sexual orientation, commanders won’t try to investigate their sexuality” (Wikipedia, 2005, ¶ 2).

In this climate, lesbians live in a glass closet, are in collaborative denial, and feel the pressure to be invisible (Griffin, 1998). Regardless, this environment is not safe for the lesbian student-athlete because if one's sexual identity becomes visible, then one might lose the support of others in the athletic environment or worse a spot on the team. Conversely, an open and inclusive environment "makes it clear that homophobia and discrimination against lesbians are the problems, not lesbians" (Griffin, 1998, p. 103). This allows lesbian student-athletes to be proud of their identity and to be free from the constant fear of homonegativity. However, few college athletes are fortunate enough to experience an environment that is open and inclusive. As Griffin (1998) notes:

Most college teams are either hostile or conditionally tolerant. Highly visible Division I programs whose teams compete at the national level are less likely to be open and inclusive....similar, less-visible Division 2 or 3 programs are more likely to be working toward being open and inclusive (p. 106).

One way that lesbian student-athletes deal with hostile or conditionally tolerant environments is to respond with "apologetic," defensive responses (Broad, 2001; Griffin 1998) to the lesbian label. More specifically, Griffin (1998) identified six variations of the "apologetic response" which include: (a) silence; (b) denial; (c) promotion of a feminine, heterosexual image; (d) search for heterosexual-only space; (e) attacks on lesbians; and (f) acknowledgement but disassociation from lesbians. Out of these six variations, the promotion of a feminine, heterosexual image is the most complex. Since femininity is often code word for heterosexuality, the complexity lies in the credentials it

takes to determine one's heterosexuality. These credentials are often the visibility of relationships, one's appearance and demeanor, and attitudes and actions about lesbians in sport (Griffin, 1998).

However, it is one's appearance and demeanor that truly takes precedence over the other two. Both Krane (2001) and Griffin (1998) see this credential as a performance by defining it as "performing femininity" (p. 13) and a "heterosexual drag show" (p. 71) respectively. Yet, Butler (1993) - known for theorizing on gender as a performance - states that individuals engage in behaviors (i.e., perform or signs, costume, or disguise we wear) that are considered consistent with their gender. Yet, as Krane (2001) notes, "Butler further theorizes that this is not necessarily a wholly voluntary performance" (p. 129). Instead, "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Krane, 2001, p. 129). In sport, gender performances can become quite obvious when one sees female athletes in feminine attire such as skirts, high heels, revealing clothing, or makeup (e.g. ribbons in their hair, makeup when competing, or long finger nails) on and off the playing field or court in order to repel the dreaded lesbian label.

On the other hand, in Butler's (1998) article – *Athletic genders: Hyperbolic instance and/or the overcoming of sexual binarism* – she discussed the athletic performance of gender in sport as a special case. Butler (1998) stated:

The athletic performance of gender is a special case, for women's sports in particular has shown us in the last few decades just how radically gender norms can be altered through a spectacular public restaging. Within the last fifteen years, certain women's bodies have gone from being perceived

as ‘outside’ the norm of being perceived, at least by some, as some of the most progressive instances of the norm, that is, as challenges to the norm that effectively unsettle the rigidity of gendered expectations and broaden the scope of acceptable gender performance (§18).

Butler (1998) goes on to use Martina Navratilova as an example of a female athlete who began her career as outside the norm based on her stature and strength, but as Martina’s accomplishments became increasingly apparent and consistent she broke barriers of gender shame in assuming muscularity and strength.

Indeed, what are we charting when we note that Martina was once outside the ideal – because outside of recognizable gender, too strong, too muscular, too aggressive – and that she ended her career by exemplifying that very ideal? Such a move could not be possible if gender ideals were not capable of transformation, of becoming more capacious, of responding to the challenge of what is excluded from their terms by expanding the very terms of gender themselves” (Butler, 1998, ¶ 22).

In my opinion, Butler (1998) was stating that as female athletes we can use our bodies to perform our gender in order to create new standards of femininity. Butler (1998) stated it best when she said,

The bodies that we become are facilitated by that set of norms: they precede us with their enabling and disabling power, but they do not determine us in advance. Gender is a field in which a variety of standards, expectations, relations, and ideals compete with one another, and for

women, this fractious state of the playing field of gender works to our advantage (¶26).

Such performances are also an identity management strategy for not only all women in sport, but specifically for the lesbian coach and student-athlete. This strategy could be defined as either passing as heterosexual or covering one's lesbian identity by staying in the closet (Griffin, 1998).

Based on interviews Griffin (1998) conducted with lesbian student-athletes, the following are identity management strategies they used "to overcome both internal and external manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism" (p. 147). These strategies included anti-gay/denying, special friends/ashamed and self-hating, member of a secret "club," prudent and proud, and out and proud (Griffin, 1998, p. 150). It is the out and proud lesbian student-athletes who "often identify more with the larger lesbian, gay, and bisexual community than with only the gay athlete community and have more friends from outside the lesbian athlete community" (p. 153). In addition, it is the out and proud lesbian student-athletes that hold the ability to affect and change the sport environment for not only closeted lesbian student-athletes, who have the most ability to foster more accepting sport environments, but also heterosexual women student-athletes. However, there are not many young student-athletes willing to step up to this role (Griffin, 1998).

Up until this point, the various stages of coming out about one's lesbian identity have been arbitrarily labeled "closeted", "glass closet", and "out of the closet". However, Riemer (1997) proposes a model of lesbian identity formation that is fluid and based on emotional age versus chronological age like most identity models. Riemer's

(1997) model consists of five levels with sub-stages; these levels and stages include: PreConformist (2 stages) – Stage 1: Individual understands female as defined by societal norms and Stage 2: Female may believe she is different from others; Conformist – Female lives as a heterosexual, understands society’s stereotypes about lesbians, and may think she is a lesbian, but does not act on her awareness; PostConformist (4 stages) – Stage 1: Female realizes stereotypes about lesbians may be false and forms her own set of beliefs about lesbians; Stage 2: Female comes to a personal realization that she is a lesbian; Stage 3: Female comes out to herself; and Stage 4: Female comes out to others; Lesbian Conformist – Female conforms to the lesbian community’s definition of lesbianism and acknowledges norms and values of the lesbian community; and Lesbian PostConformist (2 stages) – Stage 1: Female begins to question norms and her need for approval from the lesbian community and Stage 2: Female acknowledges community and may be active, but no longer feels the need to conform since she has established her own identity.

By using this model of lesbian identity formation, identifying as a lesbian or claiming one is out with one’s identity is less subjective. Nevertheless, the coming out process or as Griffin (1998) calls it “choosing truth” (p. 165) is important for two main reasons: (a) “lesbian silence and invisibility allow discrimination and stereotyping to continue,” and (b) “young women and men of all sexual orientations need self-affirming lesbian role models” (Griffin, 1998, p. 159). Therefore, it is vital to create a safe environment where female student-athletes can choose to be truthful about their lesbian identity or PreConformist to Lesbian PostConformist student-athletes can chose to be “a

poster girl with no poster” (DiFranco, 1995) and pave the way for all female student-athletes and athletes alike rather than waiting until they are not afraid.

Black Lesbians in Sport

Despite the vast amount of literature on Black lesbian identity and lesbians in sport, there is a tremendous dearth in the literature surrounding Black lesbian athletes. Until October 25, 2005, there were only two “out” Black lesbian athletes, Kisha Snow, a boxer, and Juliet Draper, a former power lifting and bodybuilding champion. Up until this point, one had to seriously question whether or not these were the only two Black lesbian athletes in America. However, the questioning was brought to a temporary stand still when WNBA star Sheryl Swoopes came out in a recent article in ESPN the Magazine. She states,

My reason for coming out now isn't to be some sort of hero. It's not something that I want to throw in people's faces. I'm just at a point in my life where I'm tired of having to pretend to be somebody I'm not. I'm tired of having to hide my feelings about the person I care about. About the person I love... (Swoopes, 2005, ¶ 6-7).

As the interview continues, Swoopes discussed the experience of telling her mom she was gay. In response to her mom asking her why and what did she do wrong, Swoopes stated the following:

But I'm tired of being miserable. Not being free to be who I am, not being OK with other people knowing who I am -- it has been miserable. And it hurts. I'm a very affectionate person. Going out to the movies or dinner,

seeing so-called normal couples show affection in public and knowing that I can't, that hurts. It's frustrating to keep everything inside and not be who I want to be. I'm sure life is not going to be easier for me just because I'm coming out. But at least I'll be free (Swoopes, 2005, ¶ 17).

As the article concluded, it became apparent that Swoopes' happiness was more important than how others perceived her sexuality or her status as a WNBA superstar, she states;

To me, the most important thing is happiness. I could have all the endorsements and all the money in the world, but if I'm not happy with who I am, that other stuff is not going to make me happy either. I know I've got to deal with the consequences of coming out, but I feel like I'll be able to be free. To be me" (Swoopes, 2005, ¶ 31-2).

Even though the consequence of Swoopes coming out has yet to be seen, there is no question that her coming out is significant for at least two reasons: (a) she is a high-profile, successful female athlete in a dominant sport in our society, and (b) she is a Black gay woman who acknowledges her Christianity. However, we all will have to wait and see if Swoopes' action will open the door to the closet for others to follow since this was simply the coming out story of one individual.

With this being the case, we are still left to ponder if other Black women athletes are lesbian. However, the reality is that perhaps other athletes are out, but maybe in the way Griffin (1998) talks about, to their lesbian and gay athletic community within their university or professional league instead of "out" to the world (i.e., media, fans, etc.).

Perhaps many of them have found safe and comfortable pockets where they can be themselves. It was the goal of my research to gain a better understanding of how these young Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate the various components of their identity and create spaces for themselves inside the world of athletics.

Summary

In this chapter, six areas of literature were examined in order to understand the experiences of the Black lesbian student-athlete. The six areas reviewed speak directly to the purpose of the study. It was necessary to pull from varying disciplines to gain a clearer understanding of the Black lesbian student-athlete since – to date - no study has focused on this specific population. Ultimately, the information was provided in order to present a contextual background for the current study. In the next chapter, Chapter Three, the theoretical framework and methodology of the study is discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate three components of their identity – race, sexual orientation, and being a NCAA Division I student-athlete – through semi-structured interviews in order to provide these student-athletes with a mechanism to have a voice and express their individual experiences. Since it was difficult to obtain co-participants who fit the criteria, I have included myself as a co-participant in order to tell my journey of researching a population with which I identify – one who has been forced to the margins of society as well as the black community. In this section, I discuss the qualitative methods I used for this study. I also provide the steps of the methodological process that were taken. All steps related to the interview process with two co-participants were taken after full approval from the Department of Exercise, Sport, and Leisure Studies and the University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Qualitative Research Methodology

One way to describe qualitative research is to place it in opposition to quantitative research. However, that definition is too simple. In line with Hatch (2002), I have defined qualitative research for myself as non-statistical knowledge provided from a specific population with the researcher as the instrument gathering the data. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) offer a relatively generic definition that I feel best describes qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

Similarly, Hatch (2002) characterizes qualities specific to qualitative research when he notes, “different research approaches within the qualitative domain emphasize certain characteristics, ignore others, and generate alternatives” (p. 6). These characteristics include natural settings, participant perspectives, researcher as data gathering instrument, extended firsthand engagement, centrality of meaning, wholeness and complexity, subjectivity, emergent design, inductive data analysis, and reflexivity (Hatch, 2002). However, Hatch (2002), Jones (2001), and Denzin & Lincoln (2000) assert that one of the primary differences between qualitative and quantitative research is that they are founded upon different research paradigms. A paradigm can be defined in one of two ways: As (a) “...a basic set of beliefs that guide actions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.19) or (b) more specifically, the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As Hatch (2002) notes, it is more important to define one’s epistemology, ontology, and methodology since paradigm is “one of those words that is overused to the point that its meaning has been lost” (p. 11).

My ontology – the nature of reality – can best be defined as a critical/feminist paradigm (Hatch, 2002). Most critical/feminists believe that the material differences of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are natural and immutable, and social actions that result from their perceived realness leads to differential treatment of certain individuals (Hatch, 2002). However, none of the five qualitative research paradigms (positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist) fully captures my ontology. That is why I have chosen a Black feminist thought/standpoint theory paradigm, which I feel it is the most appropriate approach to answer my research question.

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought/Standpoint Theory

The development of Black feminism came into fruition with Maria W. Stewart in 1831 and can be traced all the way to the present day with such writers as bell hooks, Barbara Smith, and Patricia Hill-Collins. Nonetheless, Ms. Stewart was the first to point out race, gender, and class oppression as the fundamental causes of Black women's poverty, which led to her assisting other Black women to reject the negative images of Black womanhood prominent during her times (Collins, 2000). As well as challenging the negative images, Ms. Stewart was one of the first to champion for Black women to use their relationships with one another to unite in order to provide a community for Black women's activism and self-determination (Collins, 2000).

As Collins (1997) notes, standpoint theory is a social theory that argues that a group's location in hierarchical power relations produces common challenges among the individuals within the group. Moreover, by helping Black women share a common

vision, Ms. Stewart laid the analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society, which with the help of Stewart as well as other Black women intellectuals, paved the way for such a tradition (Collins, 2000). This tradition had remained virtually invisible until the development of the five Black feminist organizations in the late 1960's through mid-1970's..

As Collins (2000) furthers, “suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization” (p. 3). In other words, hegemony is at work, and what is good for the status quo is good for everyone. Although knowledge is the most detectable form of suppression for Black women and Black feminist thought, Black women have faced and continue to face three interdependent oppressions: (a) the exploitation of Black women's labor representing the economic dimension of oppression; (b) the political dimension of oppression has denied Black women the rights and privileges that are taken for granted by white males; and (c) controlling images applied to Black women speaks to the ideological dimension of oppression (Collins, 2000). It is because of these three interlocking oppressions or what Collins (2000) terms the “matrix of domination” (p. 299) that Black women must come to terms with the intersecting identities of race, class, and gender as well as nation, religion, and sexuality (Collins, 2000).

This principle has been discussed in another context by the Combahee River Collective (1977) who put forward this statement, “we also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often

experienced simultaneously” (p. 65). These sentiments extend from what is termed identity politics and the realization that “the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us...the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression” (The Combahee River Collective, 1979, p. 65). Even though the concept of intersecting identities now exists under the new umbrella of Black feminist thought, the ideas themselves are not new.

Researcher and Researched as Co-Participants

In conjunction with Black feminist thought, Hatch (2002) makes the point that knowledge is always mediated through the political positioning of the researcher by attempting “to raise the consciousness of those being oppressed because of historically situated structures tied to race, gender, and class. With raising consciousness comes providing understandings that lead to social change” (p. 17). With the intention to raise consciousness among my co-participants along with helping “the participants and [myself] to re-evaluate their beliefs and to grow as informed human beings” (Jones, 2001, p. 87), I became a co-participant along with the other co-participants. In alignment with my Black feminist politics, I chose to be a co-participant along with the other co-participants in order to break down the hierarchies within the interview conversation, and most particularly, because it became apparent that it was very difficult to get Black lesbian NCAA Division I athletes in a southeastern U.S. town and region to participate in the study. Like other Black feminist researchers, as Collins (1986) suggests I want to “...move Black women’s voices to the center of the analysis, to study people, and by

doing so, to reaffirm human subjectivity and intentionality” (p. S28). I feel that by adapting a critical/feminist paradigm and specifically a Black feminist standpoint framework, I have attempted to answer my research question to the best of my ability.

“Outsider Within” Perspective

Collins (1986) has conceptualized the term “outsider within” in order to capture the status many Black women have felt when the dominant culture has persuaded them to assimilate despite their outsider allegiances. This causes us to not be an insider in the dominant culture, but an outsider to both dominant culture and our own allegiances, thus leading to an “outsider within” status. Despite the complexity of this status, it “has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Afro-American women” (Collins, 1986, p. S14).

As previously mentioned, as a young, Black, lesbian, middle-class female athlete and feminist raised in a predominately white environment by a black father and a white mother, I feel that as a researcher I can claim this “outsider within” status. In the beginning, I believed that this status would allow me to establish trustworthiness with my co-participants, but was unsure of the ramifications it would have on the entire research process. However, I was hopeful that my perspective could be a benefit throughout the duration of this study.

Autoethnography: A Method of Bringing Voice to My Journey

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, based on the fact that Black lesbian NCAA Division I athletes were unwilling to become participants in the study, I decided with the approval of my committee to include my own experiences for analysis and

reflection in what is called a narrative of self or autoethnography. Reed-Danahay (1997) states that although “The word ‘autoethnography’ has been used for at least two decades by literary critics as well as by anthropologists and sociologists, [it] can have multiple meanings” (p. 4). In the basic sense, autoethnographies vary in the emphasis placed on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto) (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). However, I feel that Ellis & Bochner (2003) fully captured the essence of autoethnography by defining it as:

...an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, auto- ethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms....In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language (p. 209).

Thus, it is my goal to accomplish such a feat by using my bracketing interview and my thoughts, feelings, and emotions throughout the research process as well as the dialogue that took place between me and the two co-participants – “Britney” and “Jackie” – on an individual basis in order to make sense of the position each of us saw ourselves in U.S. culture.

The typical research criteria of validity, reliability, and generalizability must be reevaluated by the researcher in autoethnographic work. Ellis & Bochner (2003) define validity as “I start from the position that language is not transparent and there’s no single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own” (p. 229).

Taking the above statement into account, I think the validity of this study comes down to me writing from the heart, being open and honest with myself, allowing myself to be vulnerable, and realizing that the truth is that we can never fully capture experience. As an individual, I am simply conveying the meanings I want to attach to the experience instead of capturing the entire experience. Plus, it is my goal to use this research to provide a glimpse into the lives of three Black lesbian athletes – myself included – in order to communicate to others those individuals who are pushed to the margins in sport and society. Ellis & Bochner (2003) discuss reliability as “...there’s no such thing as

orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research. However, we can do reliability checks” (p. 229).

With regard to the final concept of generalizability I agree with Ellis & Bochner (2003) that “Our lives are particular, but they also are typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions” (p. 229). However, I have chosen not to generalize my experiences or the experiences of the two co-participants, and have instead chosen to present the interviews with Britney and Jackie – each as unique and separate individuals – within the context of my journey to find fellow Black lesbian student-athletes.

Procedures

From idea to action. Once I had the research question in mind and two foundational books read – Boykin (1996) and Griffin (1998), I felt it was necessary to make two changes to the direction of my review of literature to include a section on black identity and instead of just discussing Black lesbians to examine the identity of Black lesbians. With the spring 2005 semester coming to an end and seventy-five articles, book chapters, or entire books to read, I needed to begin thinking about a method to answering the research question I had established. Based on my faculty advisor’s suggestion, I went through my list of references, figured out which articles were studies that used qualitative methods, – I had decided after reading Boykin (1996) and Griffin (1998) that my experience would be richer if I got to actually talk with these women – and summarized the studies and the varying components of them that I liked and disliked. This exercise would prove to be useful when I began writing the methodology section for the proposal.

Now with my independent study complete, it was time to select a proposal date. I chose June 8th – the day before my birthday – so that I would be able to enjoy my 23rd birthday. With a date in mind, next came the hard part, having only two and half weeks to read as much of the additional literature in order to compose the first three chapters of the proposal – the introduction, the review of literature, and the methodology chapter.

The proposal process. For me, I felt this was the hardest part of the entire research process – trying to make sense of the literature and write it in a format that conveyed that I understood the literature as well as the impact it would have on my study. Because of the difficulty of not knowing where to begin, I found myself first writing the sections with which I was most familiar, which included the sections on Black feminist thought, homophobia and heterosexism in women’s sport and physical education, and the easiest section of all – Black lesbians in sport. I could go on and on about the various challenges I faced or the numerous late nights I put in, but ultimately, I feel that this is what research and the proposal process is all about – figuring out strategies that do and do not work and burning the midnight oil.

However, I do think it is important to note one strategy that I found to be useful – writing bulleted notes on the books I was using for the review of literature that included key terms, quotes, themes, and potential interview questions. In addition, for the articles and book chapters I read, simply write a one-paragraph summary as a quick reference to the article or book chapter. If neither option is feasible because time just does not permit, then my suggestion – I didn’t figure this out until I was almost finished with the review of literature – is don’t just underline or highlight key sentences, but also write a key word

or phrase in the margins of the text so that you can find it when you later decide to reference or paraphrase it.

Once my proposal draft was completed, I forwarded it to my faculty advisor, who made any additional grammatical corrections or suggestions. In turn, I used these corrections and suggestions to create the best possible draft I could at that point and then forwarded it my thesis committee. Halfway relieved that writing the proposal was behind me, I still had to prepare for presenting my proposal to my committee.

Proposing my thesis to my committee. This part of the process was the one day during this entire process where I felt like a weight had been lifted off of my shoulders. I had gotten everything I wanted to convey down on paper, my committee members had had a week to read over my proposal, and now was my opportunity to present to them what I had spent the last month putting all my energy into. Despite a few stumbling of words and the occasional deep breath to calm my nerves, I felt that presenting my proposal was a piece of cake. The aspect that I truly enjoyed was sitting down with all the members of my committee to see what they thought I needed to include, emphasize, or an aspect of the study or paper that I should further consider. With the okay from my committee to move forward, the next step was submitting my IRB Form B to the department and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's Office of Research.

The bracketing interview. The purpose of the bracketing interview was twofold: (a) to expose my biases to the related topic of study, and (b) to tweak the interview guide prior to the pilot interview (Hatch, 2002). The bracketing interview was conducted by an individual with experience in qualitative interviewing who asked me questions based on

the same interview guide (Appendix A) I planned to use with my pilot and main study co-participants. In doing so, I was able to bracket out my biases that I needed to be aware of as I conducted the remainder of the study. My responses helped to create a bias statement. The bracketing interview was audio taped, transcribed verbatim with the digital file being destroyed upon transcription. The transcript was kept on file for the duration of the study. Additionally, the bracketing interview was used to compare and contrast my experiences with the two Black lesbian athletes who were co-participants.

Given that I had pushed myself to the limit to get my thesis proposed by the date I had committed to, I chose to take a nearly two week hiatus from the data collection process. I received IRB approval prior to the bracketing interview being conducted. Since I discussed the themes of my biases within the bias statement below, I will only discuss my experience of the bracketing interview and the changes I made to the study as a result of the interview.

My experience of the bracketing interview. Based on time constraints of the individual interviewing me, it was necessary to break up the interview into two sessions. The first part of the interview took place on June 22nd, and we were able to get through the following sections of the interview guide: Demographic Information, *Woman Identity*, *Raced Identity*, and the first nine questions of *Lesbian Identity and Coming Out*. Since I am no longer a current student-athlete as I have defined it, we decided to skip the *Student-Athlete Identity* section as it was not relevant to my current identity.

On the day of the first session of the bracketing interview, I was excited and nervous at the same time since I didn't know what to expect. By the end of the session, I

felt like I learned a lot. I learned that the interview guide is never set in stone, and it became quite apparent as I was being asked the questions that some were leading, some could be eliminated by integrating them into another question, and some needed to be reworded. I think the biggest challenge was knowing that the questions I was being asked were the ones I wanted to ask my co-participants. However, I realized as I was being asked the questions that some were hard to answer simply because I had never really given them much thought.

For example, two questions stand out in my mind as things I had thought about in passing but had not been forced to define: What constitutes your various communities? And how do you define family? Besides those few questions that made me think, which is never a bad thing, I felt like it was easy for me to answer the questions because I had read the research and I knew what it said – not that research is the absolute truth but it allowed me to think about things either I had never thought about before or things I had previously considered in new ways. However, all I could think about was if the individuals who didn't really know this information would be able to answer the questions.

More importantly, I think being able to answer a question is less about age and where you have lived – one of my biases I discuss soon – and more about a combination of awareness based on one's life experiences and the family in which you are brought up. This is particularly true if one is brought up in an environment that creates awareness about what one might experience because of one's race, gender, or sexuality. Even though only half of the bracketing interview had been completed, by the end of the first

session, I knew what I needed to do to move forward. I needed to narrow the interview guide so that it was not only more concise, but also make sure that the questions contained in the guide enabled me to have an understanding of the research question I attempted to answer – How do Black lesbian athletes negotiate their various identities of race, gender, sexuality, and being a student athlete within their family, community/university, and sport?

With half the bracketing interview behind me, I left campus and went home to lose myself to the television. I don't know if it was coincidence, fate or what, but when I was flipping through the channels I found a series entitled "Race-o-rama" on VH1. I ended up watching two episodes – an hour a piece – on "How do you get your ghetto pass?" and on "blackphobia." A third show aired that discussed blacks in film during the 1980's. I felt like this was a key night for me during the research process, because watching these shows got me excited and helped me realize that researching aspects of blackness or black identity may be my passion. I know this insight was not a direct result of watching those three shows, but I feel it aided in my understanding of my Black identity and really pushed it forward with the combination of my lesbian identity.

However, finding things you are passionate about can be a tricky thing. The combination of the day's events really left me perplexed as to how I could combine financial stability with the things I am passionate about. Of course, I didn't answer my question that night nor have I come any closer to figuring out how to create this balance for myself. Nonetheless, I was able to acknowledge that I want to make a difference and

have an impact on blacks and the black community, athletes, Black lesbians, and all the different components of my identity.

Twenty-three days after my eventful day, on July 15th, I completed the second half of my bracketing interview. I was nervous about letting so much time pass in between the two sessions as reality set in that being in a different state of mind might have an affect on how I answered the remainder of the questions. To my relief, as I started focusing on the questions and thinking about how I would answer them, I ended up forgetting about my previous concern because ultimately the questions were deep enough to which that was all I could focus. Plus, in splitting up the interview, there was the potential to lose a lot of what is said or the fact that things do change over time even if it is just a week. However, I didn't want this to be a concern when interviewing co-participants so it was at this point that I became aware that splitting up the interview would not be a good idea.

In addition, there were other changes to my study that occurred as a result of the bracketing interview. The main change occurred with the interview guide, which can be seen by comparing Appendix A to Appendix B (see Appendices A and B). The key changes made was deleting the *Woman Identity* section since my gender identity was expressed through being a lesbian and it was one aspect of my identity that was fixed. Plus, I moved *Raced Identity* to end of the discussion of Identity as well as moving *Lesbian Identity as Related to Sport* between *Student-Athlete Identity* and *Lesbian Identity and Coming Out*. In my opinion, this allowed for a better flow of the topics that

needed to be covered allowing time to build rapport with the co-participant prior to getting to the more difficult questions about their sexuality and coming out process.

Besides reformatting the interview guide, I also made the decision to not use the individual I had planned for the pilot interview. The decision was made after completing the first part of the bracketing interview and was based on not wanting to rush the process of transcribing the bracketing interview, thematizing it and making the necessary changes to the interview guide days before the individual moved to another city. Additionally, I had been reassured by my bracketing interviewer – a former graduate student herself – that I shouldn't be worried about not getting co-participants – my biggest fear throughout this entire research process – and that she would help me get the information about my study out to the necessary outlets. Because she was able to calm me down for the time being combined with not wanting to rush the process, I chose to find another individual for the pilot interview.

Bias statement. I attempted to bracket out my biases related to this study through the use of the bracketing interview. The bracketing interview brought to my attention the fact that the arrangement of questions in the first draft placed more of an emphasis on the co-participant's lesbian identity, her coming out, and how it was related to sport than the other identities of being female and being Black. So, we changed the emphasis of the questions to reflect a more holistic interview. With regard to how I answered the questions, I felt it was easy for me to answer the questions because of the literature I had read and my own experiences. I would like to clarify that I don't think the literature I read is the absolute truth; however, it did allow me to either think about things I had

never thought about before or things I had previously considered in new and different ways. In turn, I was able to tie my own experiences back to the literature, which helped to make sense of these experiences.

Based on how I answered the questions in the Bracketing Interview Guide (Appendix A), three biases emerged that were not directly part of my identity negotiation, but may have had an affect on how I negotiated the various components of my identity. These three biases were (a) I perceive family as more than biological, (b) I define women by their biology, and (c) I equate religion with spirituality. Now that I have presented these biases I will go into greater detail as the root of these three biases.

When I was asked the question, “How do you define family?” I stated:

I see family as being me, my mom, and my sister, but also as my relationship with my partner grows I see family as being more than biological, and being again [I had previously defined community in a similar way] more about people you care about you and your well being.

So, family...extended family it's kind of...I don't want...I don't think it is necessary to say extended because when it comes down to it if you are family, you are family. There is no reason to put a different label on it.

I believe this open-ended definition of family I have created for myself is an extension of being a lesbian relationship in which one day we plan on having children. Whether I physically give birth or adopt, within either scenario there will be one or both parents who are not blood related. However, the way I see it and stated in my bracketing interview,

...there are also a lot of male/female couples who are going out and adopting kids just like lesbian or gay couples are and I don't think that makes you any less of a family because you didn't actually give birth to these kids, but I think it comes down really to us expanding our definition of the family.

So, instead of the hegemonic definition of family as a two-parent household consisting of a man and a woman and their children I prefer the American Heritage Dictionary (2000) definition, "two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another, and reside usually in the same dwelling.

Even though I perceive family as more than biological, I in fact define women by their biology. When I was asked, "How would you define or describe women?" I stated:

...I think of women as breasts and curves and hips....some women wear skirts and some wear pants and some wear make-up and some don't wear make-up. I think there is a huge variation, but when it comes down to it we all have breasts and a vagina.

I thin this quote clearly illustrates my belief to define women by biology. This belief is based on the fact that there are the stereotypical gender roles U.S. society tells us to follow, but more importantly, diversity and variation among all women – a spectrum – with the two similarities being breasts – or what resembled breasts for cancer survivors – and a vagina.

The third and final bias to emerge as a potential influence on how I negotiate the components of my identity was that I equated religion with spirituality. As I stated when I was asked “Do you have any religious affiliation?”

Not today. I mean I grew up in Unity [not to be confused with Unitarian], which is non-denominational, Christian based but non-denominational. I would say at this point I have faith and I believe that there is a higher power, but at this point I don’t have any ties to a church or any belief system.

My desire for spirituality as oppose to religion was spurred by reading Phil Jackson’s (1995) *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior* during the time I tore my anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in my left knee my junior year of high school, and was in search for an answer to the “Why me?” question. This quest extended when I entered undergrad and has continued until present day as I search for a happy medium between organized religion and spirituality. For now, I will continue to use my faith to guide me through life.

On the other hand, consistent with my “outsider within” perspective, as a young, Black, lesbian, middle-class female athlete and feminist raised in a predominately white environment by a black father and a white mother, my personal identity negotiation was most strongly between my black and lesbian identity as well as a negotiation based on being a product of a white mom and a black dad – being a biracial individual. When I was asked, “How is the way you see yourself as raced similar to the way you see your race or blacks in general?” I stated:

I think the way I see my raced self is probably different than most blacks probably see themselves just because I kind of fall in between the cracks I mean I am mixed, my mom is white and my dad is black, and so I have also gotten a lot of questions like don't you feel like you are leaving something out by just saying you are black? For me it's a combination of (a) that's how the world is going to see me and (b) I know I am [half] white but at the same time I think it is important to...to me being black is a huge...there is a lot there historically not saying that white people haven't done great things, but I think that is [being black] more interesting side of me then focusing on a white identity. I think a lot of it comes down to education and a lot of people have told me throughout my life that "Oh, you don't speak black, you speak really proper." So, you know what I mean with things like that I think I view myself differently just because I don't think I have to look a certain way or do certain black things or speak you know in slang to really be black....one cool thing that I feel I am coming into my own with is my hair. You know going natural is definitely bringing out a different side of me and so I think...I think it is a process. You know there are so many different definitions of black like you are never going to fit into the "right one" that anybody wants you to fit into, so I think I fit how I see myself as black but maybe not how others see me.

Ultimately, I feel this quote illustrates why I continue to explore through readings, my experiences, and in this current study not only blackness but also my blackness. As I have mentioned previously, I have chosen to call myself a Black women. In my bracketing interview, I touch on why I have chosen black as my racial identifier by saying,

...I'm black, I'm brown whatever like it's black because that was what was historically what we've used. I mean I think I'm more brown than black, but...for me it is more about me getting closer to my roots and I think black explains that way better than African American.

In regards to the negotiation with my sexual orientation, I feel my sexuality was not a choice – instead it was an aspect of my identity with which I needed to come to terms with by myself. As I stated in my bracketing interview,

Well, I define my sexuality as lesbian. I know there is...for me it has been a progression that was like you know I like women or you know I am gay, but now it's...people feel more comfortable with queer, but I feel right now for me it's like my sexuality is defined by being a lesbian and saying yes I am a woman and I like you know...I am in love with a woman and I like women and it's not just a sex thing. It's emotional and physical and everything else that a heterosexual relationship is but just with a woman.

However, I do believe that sexuality can be a choice for some individuals that you can only come to accept if you love yourself.

Despite my comfort level with my sexuality, the reality is that I live in an ultra-conservative city and region of the country – commonly referred to as the Bible belt – where I must consider people’s reaction to my sexuality. In my bracketing interview, I speak directly to this occurrence and even more specifically, a retail job I held where not only the organization but also the women who worked there were conservative. I stated:

...that experience...I felt like I kind of had to go back into the closet for a little bit and not be so...I was still comfortable with myself, but I had to think about how my actions would affect other people and I didn’t want other people to feel uncomfortable. And I think again, a lost of that speaks to being in the South and the conservative nature of people in Knoxville and I wanted to feel it out and see how accepting they would be before I put myself out there and then I had to be uncomfortable in the working environment.

Therefore, I have found that I must feel out the environment along with the people within the environment as a strategy of self-protection in a society that finds my sexuality as deviant.

Additionally, as I consider the fact that by identifying as Black, lesbian, female, and as an athlete that I will be seen as representative of each of these components of my identity. Nonetheless, my experience in Knoxville has taught me one thing that I may represent a component of my identity, but I refuse to be THE spokesperson for the entire race, sexual orientation, or gender to which I hold membership. I think a good example to explain my position is the experiences I have had with one of my friends concerning

race. My friend, a white male who grew up in a small town in eastern Tennessee, has not been exposed to many individuals that are different from himself and his family. He is not opposed to learning new things or even hearing other's opinions, but when it comes to race I feel like he expects me to have all the answers or to be able to explain the actions or comments of every black person. I have no problem providing my perspective, yet I must constantly remind him that it is only my opinion and not everyone in my race thinks the same way I do. Therefore, these experiences with my friend have helped me to realize that I have no problem being a representative of my race while refusing to be THE spokesperson.

The purpose in identifying these biases was to be able to acknowledge that as a researcher they do exist, and in some circumstances I may have interpreted the data according to them. It was my intention to analyze the data as impartially as possible; however, the reality is that having similar identity components as the two co-participants influenced my perspective. Thus, it was still important to acknowledge these biases from the outset, so that they could be used as an instrument of accountability for me as a researcher as well as a co-participant.

Co-participants. The co-participants for this study were two NCAA Division I student-athletes from the Southeastern region of the United States and myself. To be considered as a co-participant of this study, the student-athlete had to be: (a) currently attracted to women, (b) black as defined in the operational definition, and (c) a current participant in an NCAA Division I varsity sport. It was impossible to attain a random sample of co-participants – nor was this desirable – because it was a purposeful sample of

Black lesbian student-athletes. I recruited co-participants in one of five ways: (a) through personal contacts; (b) by contacting trusted individuals who knew Black lesbian student-athletes via letter or e-mail (Appendix C) and explaining the purpose and procedure of the study while keeping in consideration the confidentiality of all those involved; (c) posting to an online forum; (d) e-mails to an electronic mailing list; and (e) snowballing (Patton, 1990; Martin & Dean, 1993) or obtaining additional participants through the individuals I interviewed. With the second technique, trusted individuals contacted potential co-participants, and then the co-participant was put into contact with me to set up an interview time and location convenient to them. I used the conversation of setting up the interview time and location as an opportunity to begin building rapport and to alleviate any concerns and/or questions regarding the study. Since the interview guide was lengthy, I informed co-participants of this fact – as well as the fact that the interview would face-to-face and audiotaped – and I made every effort to keep the interview to one session with breaks when needed.

Self-as-co-participant. Because no other co-participants were obtained – despite the intent of obtaining six co-participants including the pilot – my committee and I agreed that I would become a part of the analysis through the use of autoethnography. In order to obtain re-approval from the University of Tennessee’s IRB to add the methods of autoethnography, I had to identify myself as a co-participant and sign an informed consent in which I released my own confidentiality (Appendix D). My results are based on going through an interview myself, transcribing it, and thematizing it, and then using it as data. The transcript was analyzed for themes that were verified by my faculty

advisor. In addition, throughout the study, I kept an audio taped reflective journal that was transcribed weekly containing my thought processes, reasoning, and actions related to the study (Lawrence, 2001) along with how these thoughts and actions relate to the review of literature. Entries were made before and after each interview as well as during the data analytic process. The audio reflective journal was a mechanism to document my journey through the research process.

In search of co-participants. The day after I completed the bracketing interview, on June 23rd, I disseminated the criteria needed to be a co-participant of the study to two key informants – one within the Southeastern region and the other within the Northeastern region of the U.S., placed an online posting on the Gay & Lesbian Athletes Association (GLAA) Forum, and sent an email to the Zami – Atlanta’s premiere organization for lesbians of African descent – electronic mailing list. A day later I was contacted by Brian Osler – a board member of GLAA – who wanted to know if I would be interested in including my posting in an online newsletter they were planning to launch in August. When I received this e-mail, I was confident my search for co-participants was going in the right direction and it would be no time before interest would be rolling in. With this excitement, I prepared flyers to handout at Atlanta’s 2005 Gay Pride events, thinking I would have the opportunity to hand them out to interested individuals or be able to post them at various coffee shops. However, disseminating my flyers was not feasible since in the moment I realized that I didn’t want to assume any component of anyone’s identity that were criteria of being a potential co-participant, and I was left waiting for responses from the other sources.

Luckily, I did not have to wait long as I received my first email of interest on June 28th from a potential co-participant in the Southeastern region of the U.S. This woman would turn out to be the individual I interviewed for the pilot – “Britney”; however, it took almost two months for her to find a time that worked with her schedule. In her initial correspondence, she identified herself as not full out gay but instead bisexual, and that she had been with girls – her term – for the past three years. She stated that she would love to assist in my study and based on her knowledge of reading the letter would be willing to put her name out there, but she later changed her mind. The initial correspondence ended by her wanting to know specific details about how the study would be conducted. Perplexed by how she defined herself yet excited about the possibility of having a co-participant, I replied to her email by providing the format of the study, the confidentiality she would receive, and how I was defining lesbian for this study. I informed her that if she felt like this definition explained her sexuality that I would interview her for the main study and even if it didn’t that I could use her as the pilot. As my message floated off into space, I was left to wait.

The following day, to my surprise, I received another e-mail – this time based on the Zami electronic mailing list – from a young woman who said she was interested in participating in the study. When I replied to her email, I provided some additional information, emphasized the confidentiality, and explained that I would not be collecting data until the middle of July. Again, I anxiously waited for a response as well as any other potential responses from the other outlets.

On July 18th after nearly two and half weeks of waiting, I received a response from the young woman that had replied from the initial Zami electronic mailing. She informed me that she was currently out of the country and would be gone for a couple of months, and wondered if my study could be conducted over e-mail. Unfortunately, I didn't think this would be feasible nor supply the full experience I was expecting, so I informed her of the lack of feasibility and let her know I would be conducting the study until the beginning of October. Plus, I asked her if she knew any other individuals like herself that might be interested in participating. She replied back a couple of days later with a simple thanks. Feeling like I was getting nowhere on that particular day, I sent another email out on the Zami electronic mailing list and decided to place two new postings with information about the study along with the criteria for being a participant of my study on the Outsports.com discussion board – one in the women's sports section and another in the gays in sports section. To my disappointment, no one ever posted a reply on this discussion board.

However, I did receive an e-mail from a professor in England, who researches gay male athletes and just recently wrote a book that discusses the intersection of race and sexuality. Although I never checked his book out, he was able to provide me with the name and email address of a female scholar, who he thought might be able to help. Excited that I was conversing about my study with others, I emailed her immediately. To my surprise, she replied the next day. As she mentioned, even though she did her graduate work in the United States, she did not have any NCAA Division I contacts. She

thought my work sounded great, and ended the correspondence by saying she would forward my letter to anyone who may be of help. Encouraged, I continued to wait.

I didn't have to wait long. The next day the excitement kept rolling in as I received another response from sending an e-mail out to the Zami electronic mailing list. This particular woman who fit two out of the three criteria was a former NCAA Division II student-athlete and currently a graduate student. She made a great point by saying that she felt NCAA Division I and II athletes shared a particular characteristic: They don't identify as a lesbian in college based on the stigma. I agree with this comment to a degree, but I am also of the opinion that more and more women just do not want to be labeled anything. She concluded her correspondence by telling me a little bit about her thesis and wanting to share some additional thoughts. Of course, eager to speak with another Black lesbian athlete who was conducting research, I instantly replied to her email wanting to know more about her study along with informing her that if she was interested she could be my pilot co-participant. To my shock, I never received a reply back.

Beginning to get fearful that I would not be able to obtain co-participants, I decided to stop obsessively checking my e-mail and the message boards and began reading additional literature related to the study. I did, however, receive a private message in my GLAA inbox a couple of weeks later during the first week of August from an assistant professor at a college in upstate New York. The message provided support and encouragement with my endeavors. Plus, she expressed interest in seeing how many participants I pulled together along with the results.

It was also around this time that I finally got a response from “Britney,” who apologized for not getting back with me sooner, but had been traveling and working camps which did not allow for her to check e-mail. Since e-mail was hard for her to consistently check, she provided her cell phone number. Thrilled that I was finally getting the ball rolling I gathered my thoughts and called her. Expecting her voicemail, I ended up getting her on the first try. We discussed possible dates for conducting the interview and ultimately decided it would be best to wait until the day before the fall semester began, August 23rd. Before hanging up, I asked her if she needed me to call her in order to remind her of the interview prior to the date we had scheduled and she said, “Yes.” Eager to be moving forward, I used the two weeks prior to the pilot interview with Britney to solidify the interview guide.

Two days before the pilot, I called “Britney” to remind her of the interview. It was at this time she informed me that she would not be able to be interviewed on this day because of team commitments. Even though she was unable to let me know of another day that we could reschedule, she promised that she would contact me as soon as her academic schedule was set in stone. I was extremely disappointed that the pilot had to be rescheduled, and felt like this might have to be something I got used to – working around the schedule of the student-athlete versus my timeframe of trying to complete the study. Often times as a researcher, I was so caught up in trying to stay on schedule and get things completed that it was at that moment I realized that there would be times when things were completely out of my control and I must work around the co-participants

schedule. This was the moment I got really scared that I would not get enough co-participants.

Despite my anxiety, I let a few days past before contacting Britney again as I did not want to seem like a bother, so I directed my attention on still getting the word out about my study. I sent another e-mail to the Zami electronic mailing list and placed another on the GLAA forum. However, this time my posting on the forum took a different twist since fifty or so individuals had viewed my initial posting and I had not received one response from individuals interested in participating. On the posting, I stated the following:

I see that many of you have viewed my posting, but I am not sure if it is out of curiosity or if you or someone you know could be a potential co-participant. If the latter is the case, then please contact me. I am still in need of co-participants. There is no need to worry, any information you provide will be under strict confidence. Thanks for your help!

At this point, I was still left waiting, so I continued to read more literature on race and class and began to leave messages for “Britney.” Finally, after numerous attempts of trying to reach her by telephone, I had decided that if she was really interested in participating that she would get back in contact with me.

To my surprise, I heard from “Britney” a week and half later – I realize in retrospect this was not that long to wait, but I had been in search of co-participants since the end of June – via e-mail when she apologized for the lost of contact and was still willing to help me out. I knew she realized how important this was because she made a

point to let me know she had not been avoiding me and provided me with her schedule for the remainder of the week. Since I still had her phone number, I gave her a call and we scheduled the interview for the upcoming Saturday, September 10th. A few days later as I drove to the site to conduct the pilot interview, I was excited and nervous at the same time – excited that I was really about to conduct the interview and nervous because I wanted to do a good job.

The pilot interview. The pilot interview was conducted prior to the actual interviews for this study. The purpose of the pilot interview was to test the interview questions and protocol in order to determine that both were in line with the intended purpose of this study. The interviewee was a nineteen-year-old basketball player – “Britney” – who self-identified as bisexual, has “been with” girls for the last three years and is currently playing within an NCAA Division I institution within the Southeastern region of the United States. She was selected because of her willingness to participate as well as the fact that she meet the criteria set for the co-participants of the study.

The main study. Three days after completing the pilot interview with Britney, I received IRB approval to extend the criteria to look at both current and former – no more than five years out of school – NCAA Division I student-athletes. At the time my advisor and I felt that this would increase my chances of obtaining additional co-participants. In the end, it would prove not to make a difference in assisting the search for co-participants. A few days later the GLAA online newsletter was sent out with my study as one of the features. This format was useful as I forwarded it my advisor who was then able to forward it two of her colleagues. This lead to me contacting two potential co-

participants who were unable to assist since one only meet two of the criteria and other was only interested in forwarding the information to other qualified women.

With my search for co-participants in full force, the day had finally arrived – September 20th – for me to complete what was supposed to be the first interview of the main study. Yet, to my disappointment and shock “Jackie” cancelled on me two hours prior to the interview claiming she wasn’t feeling well. Although I respected her claims, I felt like an idiot since I allowed her to get off the phone without rescheduling. It would take numerous messages, me finally given up, and her re-contacting me for the interview to take place. However, in the meantime, the search for co-participants had to continue.

I e-mailed alumni from my department at the University of Tennessee for assistance, and they genuinely wanted to help but they felt that diversity did not exist within their university except for one who was willing to post my flyer. I even contacted our Lambda organization on campus to see if they could get the word out, but I never heard back from them either. Perplexed that around a hundred and fifty individuals had viewed my posting on the GLAA forum and yet nothing, I placed another posting on the forum, simply stating; “Can anyone help me understand why so many individuals have viewed my posting, but I have not received one individual interested in participating in my study?” To my relief, I received another e-mail from my key contact in the Southeastern region of U.S. who had a potential co-participant that expressed interest and would be in contact. Nonetheless, this potential co-participant never contacted me nor responded to the e-mail I sent her.

It was also around this time that an individual from Canada responded to the question I had posed on the GLAA forum. He made a great a point, one I think worth noting:

This might be reflective of the challenges facing athletes. Certainly given the extent to which people have viewed your posting, many persons with an ideal fit for your study are now aware of it. Hopefully, people will come forward as work like this will have a significant impact for future generations.

Grateful for this insight and words of encouragement, I marched forward. But, I must admit at this point and into the following week that I was feeling quite discouraged.

During this time, I had finally gotten a hold of “Jackie” who informed me that she was too busy with school and group projects to find time to do the interview.

Even though I knew that this situation as well as the willingness of individuals to step forward to be co-participants were completely out of my control, I was scared to death this study would never get done. However, on October 4th, Dr. Camille O’Bryant came to the rescue with the great idea to turn my study into a personal narrative of self, better known as an autoethnography. It was her idea that sparked a new vigor in me that ultimately was the key factor to completing this study within the timeframe I had intended. A day later, my entire committee was on board with the new change of methodology.

It was this change that led to needing to obtain re-approval from IRB.

Nonetheless, this change would prove to be a slight challenge as I would become a co-

participant with a voice. It was at this point that I had to contact the compliance officer at the Office of Research in order to see how I should proceed. During this conversation that she asked me, “Are you sure that you want to self-identify yourself and become a participant because it may affect you future and ever doing anything related to this study again?” Taken aback by the question, I immediately became enraged. Would she have asked me this question had it been related to any other factor – race or gender – of my identity? I immediately responded, “Yes. It is not a concern.”

Now let me state, I understand she was trying to protect me as a human subject, but give me break – why would I move forward with an autoethnography if I wasn’t comfortable in my own skin and willing to identify as a lesbian – yeah, I can say it. The answer was I would not have moved in this direction if I was not willing to be open, honest, and vulnerable with myself and most importantly, with you the reader. Regardless, it was in this moment, I realized through the knots in my stomach that I often forget how detrimental some people believe my sexuality will be to my career. I am here to show that my sexuality was and will be important and should have an impact that will be left behind.

With this realization, I was ready to move forward. Luckily, a few days later I would receive the encouragement I needed from a staff member at GLAA, who had the following to say on the forum on quite an appropriate day – National Coming Out Day – October 11th:

Hopefully, people will participate in the study. People should be encouraged to do so as projects like this in turn have an impact for those

who have yet to enter the system. Please pass the word out about the study!

Excited that others also saw the vision of the study, I still continued to wait. Exactly a week later, “Jackie” reappeared, willing and ready to participate. She had a day off from her sport, and was willing to be flexible as long as she got to sleep in. Empathizing with her love of sleep, I called “Jackie” without delay and we were able to set-up our interview for that coming Sunday, October 23rd. Exhilarated that my study was moving forward, I checked the GLAA Forum, hopeful that someone had finally replied. To my surprise, this was part of the message I found:

I really do hope more women come forward and participate in your research. I just know how difficult it is for a DI athlete to come out. My college [University of Massachusetts at Amherst] and the surround community is one of the most liberal, gay-friendly areas in the country. Unfortunately, most of the glbt athletes are scared to death of what would happen if they came out to their teams and coaches. Out of the 500+ varsity athletes here, I would say that there are 2-3 that are actually “out”. I’m currently struggling to get a glbt group going for athletes...but too many people are scared to even talk to their peers about what they are experiencing. Sometimes I feel like there is a lot of interest and certainly a need for the group, but no one wants to be the first to take the huge risk of coming out. I dunno...

When I read the above passage of the posting, I felt a whirlwind of emotions – excitement, confusion, and sadness. I was excited this woman had spoken up, yet confused and sad that so many students were scared to be themselves in a community, city, and state that is more likely to support and embrace their difference. I replied to her posting, but I have yet to get a response back from her. I used the whirlwind of emotions to inspire me in the coming days as I prepared for the interview with “Jackie.” Three days later, as I drove to the interview, I was nervous; I simply just wanted to do a good job and redeem myself from the mistakes I had made in the pilot interview – lack of probing and not really getting to the “why” of the question. Despite my nervousness, I was also excited that I was able to have the opportunity to hear another Black lesbian student-athlete speak about her experience of negotiating the various components of her identity.

Interview #1. The interviewee for what was supposed to be the main study was a twenty-year-old basketball player – “Jackie” – who did not want to be labeled as lesbian or bisexual, but stated she was sexually and emotionally attracted to women. She is currently playing on the same team and within the same NCAA Division I institution within the Southeastern region of the United States as “Britney.” Also, as “Jackie” described herself she met the racial criteria of being of African descent.

On the day and time of the scheduled interviews for both the pilot and the main study, I read the confidentiality statement of the primary investigator (Appendix E) and obtained informed consent (Appendix F) along with answering any questions the co-participant had about the interview. Then, the co-participant chose a pseudonym (from

this point on, their names will not be in quotation marks). After there were no further questions, I conducted the entire interview following the respective interview guide – the pilot interview guide (Appendix B) and the Interview #1 interview guide (Appendix G). As previously mentioned, the interview guide was semi-structured in nature (Patton, 1990; Hatch, 2002). The interviews were audio taped, transcribed verbatim, deleted upon transcription, and analyzed for themes. Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants were provided with a copy of the transcript to view for accuracy; each chose not to make any corrections or insertions.

Data Analysis

All interviews were analyzed using a thematic approach, meaning that the analysis worked from lower order meaning units to higher order themes and categories (Coté, Salmela, Baria & Russell, 1993). A line-by-line thematic analysis of each of the three interviews was used to identify specific codes, general categories, and then patterns of subthemes and themes. The process of moving from specific to general was conducted using a feedback and comparison method, an incident comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once analyzed, two individuals with a qualitative research background conducted a line-by-line analysis of the transcript in order to see if the themes and subthemes that emerged were consistent with the ones that I found. The members of the research group – including myself – analyzed Britney and Jackie’s transcript for themes and subthemes. I used all the subthemes that emerged to create an overarching theme that encompassed the many subthemes. Each individual signed a confidentiality

agreement (see Appendix H). The next chapter describes themes that came up from the analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEGOTIATION OF TWO WOMEN'S VARYING COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO A "RESULTS AND DISCUSSION" CHAPTER

Introduction

The chapter you are about to read is an unorthodox version of the standard "Results & Discussion" chapter you would see within a thesis. Despite the nature of this chapter, I think it fully captures how Britney and Jackie negotiated the various components of their identity of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a NCAA Division I student-athlete including how these components were affected by the institutions of family, community, religion, and sport. The chapter begins with Table 1 and Table 2 giving a quick summary of themes and subthemes for both Britney and Jackie, respectively. Then I describe how Britney and Jackie's identity components were integrated. I have chosen to discuss the themes and subthemes of each co-participant separately since both identified differently. This will allow for a clear understand of each individual's negotiation while also eliminating the desire to generalize their experience as the overall experience for Black lesbian student-athletes. After the data is presented for each co-participant, I reflect on my experience of each interview and how I see it relating to the literature. The chapter concludes with an additional reflection of how these two interviews influenced my negotiation of the various components of my identity.

Table 1

Themes and subthemes for Britney

Themes	Subthemes
Athletic Privilege	Sport on a pedestal Pride Relationship to student-athlete community Safe identity
Racial Expressiveness	Visibility Disassociation of racial identity Race as a performance
Sexual Expressiveness	Free choice In versus out Sexuality as a performance Gender expressed through sexuality Disassociation of sexual identity
Influential Factors	Religion Family Individual happiness
Integrated Identities	Race Sexuality

Table 2

Themes and subthemes for Jackie

Themes	Subthemes
Racial Expressiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-conformist Awareness of history Pride Responsibility
Being a Student-Athlete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of status Awareness of perceptions Her perception of being a student-athlete
Sexual Expressiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disassociation of lesbian label Implication of choice Being me versus a coming out process Gaydar Sexuality performed to create visibility Identity silenced among family
Influential Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mom Religion Lack of support from black community Sport
Intersections of Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport and sexuality Race and sexuality Race and sport

The Pilot Interview – Britney: A Black Bisexual Student-Athlete.

Although Britney – a nineteen-year-old basketball player and starter on her team who self-identified as bisexual has “been with” girls for the last three years and was currently playing within a NCAA Division I institution within the Southeastern region of the United States – identified as a bisexual Black student-athlete, an inductive analysis of the interview transcript revealed a different order of the various components of her identity. What follows illustrates and supports the themes and subthemes that emerged from Britney’s interview. The first three themes were arranged in order of importance to the co-participant; whereas, the last two themes spoke to the influence of additional factors and how other components of her identity were linked to her primary identity of being a student-athlete.

Theme 1: Athletic Privilege

When Britney was asked, “Which aspect of your identity comes closest to describing who you really are?,” she said without hesitation her student-athlete identity. Although she would later retract this as her primary identity, it appears to best reflect her as seen throughout the interview. Despite her struggle to not place herself above others based on the sport she played, it became glaringly apparent that her student-athlete identity was her one identity that provided her with privilege.

Subtheme 1: Sport on a pedestal. Within and outside of Britney’s university, the sport she played – basketball – was highly viewed and placed on a pedestal. Even though she was a woman playing a traditionally male sport, she was well aware of the status her sport provided. As she stated:

...for the most part a lot of the sports are overlooked as far as women's goes. We're really not, basketball we're kind of up there with football and men's basketball, so we are highly viewed, we're on a pedestal or in a fishbowl like our coach says.

In my opinion, this quote exemplifies Britney's awareness of the visibility she and her team received based on the athletic privilege that came with her sport being placed on a pedestal.

Subtheme 2: Pride. Since Britney had identified being a student-athlete as the primary aspect of her identity, I wondered if she claimed this aspect because she was proud of it. Her response was "Heck, yeah, I worked hard for it." This statement also debunks how student-athletes are viewed in society, as Britney stated:

A lot of people see it as hard work and it does take a lot to be a student-athlete, but then a lot of people think like I said it's the easy road you know like I said they get their school paid for, they get scholarship checks, they get money when the season starts, and things like that. But actually, we work for everything we get.

Based on the work Britney put into her sport as well as the privilege that's attached, allowed her to exude pride in being a NCAA Division I student-athlete.

Subtheme 3: Relationship to student-athlete community. With the time constraints of being a student first and an athlete second – this is how Britney viewed herself – she thought a relationship with the student-athlete community is "the most important aspect of being a student-athlete." She goes on to say, "It's just a friendship

you build on both the men's and women's side and just hanging out with each other and a lot of the social things we go to or parties or what not." Plus, this community allowed Britney to not worry about how other student-athletes would view her sexuality, which allowed her a safe place based on being a student-athlete. When speaking about the openness of the other student-athletes she states:

They're not really ignorant or close-minded to who you are or what you do. They are just like, 'Hey, that's what you do.' But, if you are a cool person to hang out with, they are going to hang out with you...regardless of what sexuality you are.

This openness within the student-athlete community created what Griffin (1998) would call an "open and inclusive climate" (p. 103) environment where Britney was safe and welcomed despite her perceived differences in the eyes of society.

Subtheme 4: Safe identity. Out of the four components of identity that Britney must negotiate, being a student-athlete allowed her the protection of her team as well as other student-athletes. Additionally, with her sport placed on a pedestal, she had the protection of her sport. It appears that the three previous subthemes demonstrate how prioritizing her student-identity was safe for Britney.

Theme 2: Racial Expressiveness

Even though Britney identified her race as primary when asked to prioritize them, it became apparent that this response was based on how others viewed her. This was why I placed her race – Black – as secondary to her being a student-athlete in the analysis.

Based on the multiple facets of her raced identity, the ways she has chosen to express her race stand out as a reflection of her race as an overall component of her identity.

Subtheme 1: Visibility. When I asked her why her black identity was the most important, she replied by saying, “Cause that is who I am, so I just put that first like that’s the first appearance, that’s the first thing people see before they even get to know you.” As the interview continued, I asked her if she felt that one aspect of her identity took precedence of another because it was visible. She stated:

I think a lot of people just say, ‘Oh, she’s Black. That’s the first thing I see now let me get to know her.’ Instead of, ‘Oh, your name is what? You do what?’ I just think people look at you first and they stereotype you whether they mean to or not in the back of their head.

Therefore, Britney was under the impression that individual’s were stereotyped based on what was visible, and in her case, she was stereotyped based on the visibility of her race.

Subtheme 2: Disassociation of racial identity. Although it appeared that Britney felt solidarity with her racial identity, I got the sense that at times she disassociated herself from it. She states, “I’m not the type of person that thinks in terms of race.” Although this perspective was respectable, I found it hard to believe that she did not mention one instance of being discriminated against solely based on her race except when it came to having to share an MVP award with another player who was white. Regardless of what privilege you might hold, I have never talked to a black person who has not been followed in a department store or accused of stealing. Even more startling was that she thought that racism makes blacks stronger. However, it is important to

mention that it is very possible that Britney made this comment in the context of/after years of racist oppression, that this has given blacks the strength to overcome similar and/or other challenging situations. As the dialogue continued, I asked Britney how she thought blacks were viewed in this culture, her response was:

Now I think we are pretty much viewed the same way. There is always going to be a sense of racism I think, especially where I am from. A lot of times they don't want to see blacks or anyone of color really excel and I just think that has an affect on the culture of blacks on the whole. But, all it does is makes us stronger.

Additionally, Britney believed that the face of corporate heads and those in higher ranks are "changing 'cause now you see people in higher jobs that are young black ladies or black men." Despite her solidarity with her racial identity, Britney seemed disassociated from her race based on her lack of awareness of the discrimination blacks still experience in the U.S. I think it was this disassociation that allowed her to make the blanket statement that "racism makes us stronger".

Subtheme 3: Race as a performance. When I asked Britney how she would define the term "black" as it applies to race, she stated;

Not white, not mixed (laughing), not African American; basically, not Mexican, Hispanic, or anything like that. If you aren't mixed with anything and both of your parents are quote unquote African American than I consider you black. I considered most mixed people black too...if they act black.

Perplexed that mixed individuals like myself would have to prove their blackness through actions, I asked her to elaborate. She replied:

If you aren't all that really preppy...the way you talk and what not. That's the difference between being educated and being straight out preppy and white you know and there is a difference between being ghetto and being educated. So, I don't classify the educated black people as being white. It just be the ones...I don't know it's hard to explain.

Unable to make a clear distinction of what it meant to “act black”, it was interesting that Britney distinguished between varying levels of blackness based on one's actions. I think this not only speaks to Britney's disassociation with her race, but also speaks to the predicament West (2001) acknowledges when he states, “How does one affirm oneself without reenacting negative black stereotypes...? (p. 97).

Theme 3: Sexual Expressiveness

I use the term *Sexual Expressiveness* to define Britney's bisexual identity because it became evident that her sexuality took on many different forms. Although her friends joke that she was “greedy” by being bisexual, Britney saw her sexual attraction towards woman as temporary and as simply having fun. What follows are the various ways she expressed her sexual identity throughout the interview.

Subtheme 1: Free choice. When I asked Britney if she believed her sexual orientation was likely to change, she replied by saying,

If it changes, I'll be straight again. I feel like if you mess with or you have been with a girl, especially in a long-term relationship that even if

you go back to guys and you marry that in the back of your head you will always have that thought, that attraction. You might not follow up on it, but I just believe that that's still going to be there, that's just something you can't get rid of.

Although Britney made the point that you can't get rid of the same-sex attraction, in her mind the fact remained that you still have a choice not to follow-up on that attraction. She provided a great example of how it would be no different if "you marry a guy, you are going to be attracted to other guys- that doesn't mean you have to go mess them, you know." I could tell she had given this some thought, and when I asked her what the major barriers to her accepting herself as a bisexual were she spoke of the constant battle she initially had within herself. However, Britney said she eliminated the internal battle by giving herself a way out. As she stated, "At the end, if it doesn't work out, you always have a back-up plan. For Britney, the back-up plan was guys even though she didn't trust them right now in her life. I was unable to obtain a solid answer as to why she saw being with guys as a back-up plan; however, having a back-up plan allowed Britney the free choice to be with whomever she chooses.

Subtheme 2: In versus out. Along with having the free choice to be with a man or a woman, Britney provided herself protection to be in or out of the closet – is there a closet for bisexuals? – depending on her location of being at home with her parents or at school with her teammates and friends. This *In versus out* was further explained when I asked her how "out" she considered herself. Her response was:

It depends where I'm at...So, here I don't care. I'm pretty much out. Everybody knows like our coaches know things like that it's not something we talk about but we know they know, so as far as the team and like other sports, they know. I don't have a problem with it, but like when I go home that's different. I'm so low key. Most of the time I talk to guys when I go home anyways, but I am so low key. If I go anywhere that I haven't been, then I'm kind of like whatever cause I don't know anybody out there, so it just depends where I'm at.

Britney's "low key" status when she goes home was due to the fact that she has not come out to her family. As she explained, "[with] my parents being two preachers it's not a comfortable situation to come out to." However, they have asked her about it, and she simply acted like she has no idea what they were talking about.

Subtheme 3: Sexual Identity as a performance. Once again, acting was part of Britney's identity except when it related to her sexuality. She was explicate about what it took to perform her bisexuality, which changed depending on if she was with a woman or man. She was able to perform and make visible her sexuality through the way she dressed. This performance is consistent with Butler's (1993) gender as a performance in which individuals engage in behaviors – the costume or disguise we wear – in order to be in harmony with their perceived gender and/or sexuality. She stated, "The way I dress mainly like I don't know I say I dress comfortable, but nah everybody else is like you dress like a tomboy..." When I noticed Britney kept making distinctions based on attire, I

asked her if she had given any thought to connecting attire to gender and gender roles.

Her response was:

Nah. I dress different when I am with guys. Yeah, like when I'm with girls I wear like my jeans, they're not really baggy, they just don't fit. I'm not much of a st[ud]...dressing like guys, but I like to wear the colored tees and collared shirts and stuff like that and hats. But, when I'm with a guy, I'm going to throw on the tight jeans, tight shirts, and heels...all that stuff to change it up.

Within this quote, Britney made a clear distinction of how she performed a different gender role based on changing her attire when she was with a woman – comfortable, loose fitting clothes – to a completely different standard – tight clothes and heels - when she was with a man. This sexual performance that Britney plays was directly linked to how she expressed her gender.

Subtheme 4: Gender expressed through sexuality. Interestingly, in the above quote, Britney stopped short of calling herself a stud. Yet, when I asked her about her back-up plan, she identified as a stud. Not wanting to assume what she meant by this identification, I asked her to elaborate. She replied:

Mainly, I think...you get the title of “femme” or “stud” based on the way you dress for one, that’s a main factor, and then after that it’s just kind of based on how you act also. So, I like dress like a guy. I dress comfortable, so the way I act...I’m not really a hard- ass and stuff like that, but I mean I can be sensitive. I don’t know I think more like guys

think just because when I was with guys and being around my brothers
just seeing how they do.

Derived from my knowledge of the lesbian community, Britney's language of "femme" and "stud" was used to make the distinction between a feminine woman and a more masculine, mannish woman. Furthermore, these distinction can be seen as heterosexist in order to make sense of why two women would be attracted to one another – one being femme/feminine and the other stud/masculine.

Subtheme 5: Disassociation of sexual identity. Based on *Britney's Sexual identity as a performance* and *Gender expressed through sexuality* themes, I believe that Britney was disassociated from her bisexual identity. First of all, she used language that was typically used among lesbians to describe either the type of woman they identify as or are trying to find. This leads to stereotypical roles and behavior depending on the title. In this case, Britney has identified as a "stud" and even said she dressed and thought "more like a guy." Plus, without there being a bisexual community that she was aware of and being involved in the gay and lesbian community through going to the club, Britney was left with no support from either community. All these factors appear to lead Britney to disassociate from her bisexual identity.

Theme 4: Influential Factors

This theme is not directly correlated to a specific aspect of Britney's identity. However, there were four key facts that seem to have influenced the three previous themes. I have placed *Religion* first since it has laid the foundation for how Britney

interacts with her family. This was the influential factor that enabled Britney to live in and out of the closet depending on her location.

Subtheme 1: Religion. The first thing Britney said when I asked about her family of origin was that both of her parents were preachers. Right off the bat, I had a feeling this would be influential in the various components of Britney's identity, especially as it related to her sexual identity. My instinct was right. As previously mentioned, Britney did not have a comfortable environment in which to come out, so I asked her if this was tied to the religious aspect along with whether this was what made it so difficult. Her response was simply, "Because God created Adam and Eve that was the most point blank reason (laughing) my dad gave." Another event that set Britney back from telling her parents about her sexual identity was not only the fact that her gay cousin came out, but also "the way my family reacted as a whole especially when she brought her girlfriend to our family reunion. I was like, I could never ever do that." This experience combined with the religious rhetoric of homosexuality as wrong appeared influential in Britney's not being open and honest with her parents or family regarding her bisexuality.

Subtheme 2: Family. However, Britney's family was an important aspect of her identity. As she moved away from home, her team has become family as well. However, her family of origin was influenced by the religious aspect; with her team, however, everyone had their own beliefs and religions yet they were all respected. Although Britney's home was the site of unconditional love and support, home was also the site of religious influence and her being trapped in the closet. Thus, depending on which family

Britney was around, this determined a differing set of rules of whether her sexual expressiveness was in or out.

Subtheme 3: Individual happiness. Despite the influence of religion and family, Britney did make it clear that it was ultimately about her individual happiness. When I asked her to tell me more about her internal battle of accepting herself as a bisexual, she said,

If I chose to even mess with one girl or be with one girl, how would my family see it? Or how would my brother see it? Or anything like that from the people I am close to, and then I took it into the aspect... Well, it's not them that's going to be happy. You know I have to make myself happy, so if I'm forcing myself to do one thing that I don't want to do than I'll be living miserable. So, I just took it upon myself to say, 'Hey, do what makes you happy.'

Even though it appeared that Britney had chosen happiness over what her family thought, she, in fact, had not. Her individual happiness was only influential in her projecting one aspect of her sexual identity.

Theme 5: Integrating Identities

Now that I have discussed Britney's racial and sexual expressiveness along with the factors that influenced all three components of her identity, it was important to see how she saw her primary identity – being a student-athlete – intersecting with the other components of her identity.

Subtheme 1: Race. When I asked Britney how the components of her identity interacted, she replied, “I guess my race interacts with me being a student-athlete and how you are stereotyped because most black athletes are the most athletic and what not.” In addition, Britney felt the athletic department and coaches use the racial identity of athletes as a recruiting tool to display diversity. At times, she felt this diversity and openness was a façade because “when it hits the fan like I know our coaches, one of our coaches is just like, ‘don’t play like this,’ like you know, ‘don’t play street ball.’ For real just say it, don’t play ‘black’ basically, like we aren’t stupid.” This quote made it apparent that Britney was aware that her race was tied to how her coaches perceived her style of play, yet she felt they took advantage of her race when it was to their benefit.

Subtheme 2: Sexuality. Simply put, Britney viewed sexuality as tied to the sport female student-athletes choose to play. As she states, “Most basketball players are gay or bi. Softball players are gay. This is a stereotype....Mostly, basketball and softball get viewed as having most of the gay athletes.” Therefore, as a female basketball player she was aware of how she might be perceived because of her gender and the sport she played.

My Reflection on Interviewing Britney

Reading over the themes and subthemes that emerged from Britney’s interview, I was struck by how much information can be obtained in a little more than an hour. When the interview was completed all I could think of was, “Wow”! It was exhilarating to be sitting across from another Black woman who could tell me her experience of negotiating the various components of her identity of race, sexuality, and being a student-athlete. Overwhelmed by the experience, it wasn’t until weeks or even after the second interview

that I fully comprehended everything that was said. However, now that I have had ample time to ponder on this experience I think I am better prepared to discuss what this experience was like for me.

Looking back, I had no clue that Britney's bisexuality would make it hard for me to ask the questions. Prior to the interview, I had gone through the interview guide and changed "lesbian" or any reference to only "lesbian" to sexuality to be more inclusive. Despite my attempt to eliminate placing Britney in a category or the awkward moments, they still existed. I discussed earlier the "outsider within" perspective (Collins, 1986), but I had never thought I would feel the epitome of being an "outsider within" by way of sexuality. Regardless, this was how I felt when interviewing Britney. I felt like an insider – I could relate – when Britney discussed her attraction and experience with women, but I felt like an outsider when it seemed so easy for her to switch her feelings and attraction towards men.

Additionally, I felt outside of myself since I had no experience of being bisexual and had not educated myself about this experience. I definitely felt myself having to push my biases aside – mainly thinking, "Why can't she just choose?" – as well as feeling completely out of control because I had no way to relate to Britney's overall experience. In retrospect, I wish I had taken some time prior to interviewing Britney – even just a few hours – to educate myself on the experience of being bisexual. However, a recent article in the *Advocate* (2005, November 22) helped me to understand the invisibility that bisexuals also face in our society. Plus, it dispelled the myth that "bisexuals can always exercise heterosexual privilege" (p. 24) by stating "Pretending to

be something you're not comes with emotional stress no matter who you are" (p. 24). This newfound awareness has helped me to grasp that we are all caught ramming our heads against the wall of heterosexism and the roles we are expected to follow based on our gender.

While I earlier described Britney as being disassociated from the racial aspect of her identity, I felt that she was truly disassociated from her gender and sexual identity as well. It was almost as if she was putting on a façade, and giving me only surface-level answers. I feel like I have already discussed her disassociation from her race, but I think the way Britney discussed her sexuality through gender and gender roles made me curious as to the root of this. I must say I respect Britney as identifying as a bisexual, but consistent with how Black lesbians are viewed within and outside the black community it seems that Britney has taken on the masculinized image and role when with women.

Although it is hard to relate the Black lesbian identity literature to Britney, I think the key factor that stands out as having the most influence on her and her actions is religion. Regardless, Britney may be portraying the perceived image of a Black lesbian while definitely going against the unspoken rule in women's sport of "reinforcing heterosexuality" (Griffin, 1998, p. 20) through "gender-role determine[d] acceptable behaviors" (Krane, 2001, p. 117). Therefore, Britney was encased in an aura of mystery for onlookers that allowed her to claim various components of identity while still disassociating from what each fully represented.

*The Main Study Interview: Jackie - A Brown Woman Student-Athlete of African Descent
Attracted to Women*

What follows illustrates the themes and subthemes that emerged from Jackie's interview. The first three themes were arranged in order of importance to the co-participant, whereas, the last two themes exemplify the influence of additional factors along with how Jackie saw the components of her identity intersecting.

Theme 1: Racial Expressiveness

What makes Jackie – a twenty-year-old basketball player and non-starter on her team who did not want to be labeled as lesbian or bisexual but stated she was sexually and emotionally attracted to women, was currently playing on the same team and within the same NCAA Division I institution within the Southeastern region of the United States as Britney, and met the racial criteria of being of African descent as she described herself – a unique woman was her ability to use her awareness of history to not allow herself to conform to the hegemonic labels and stereotypes that are all too often affixed on individuals from her race. This awareness created a sense of responsibility that Jackie took pride in following through on. The following demonstrates the importance of *Racial Expressiveness* for Jackie.

Subtheme 1: Non-conformist. When I asked Jackie what she called herself with regard to race, her immediate response was, "Like if someone gave me a questionnaire and then like had to check 'black' or 'white' ...I won't check it." Intrigued that Jackie provided me with an example as a way of answering my question, I asked her to further elaborate on why she wouldn't check her race. She stated:

Why? Why do I have to check that and then answer all these questions?
...It doesn't matter who I am or the color of my skin. I'm going to
answer the question regardless, so I just don't think...does that make
sense to you? I think that's kind of like racist in itself. Why do you need
to know that? Just ask the question.

Interested to see where this conversation of race would lead, I asked her the next question on the interview guide – “Do you call yourself a Black woman?” She replied, “See...the word ‘black’ gets me ‘cause that is ‘black’ over there [pointing to a television]. My skin color [pointing to skin] is not that color- you see what I am saying, but I would say I'm...of African descent.” Following up on the question I asked, “But not African American?” She responded:

No, ‘cause I am not African you now what I am saying, it's so hard for us
to trace our roots like how do you know? We could come from the
Caribbean. You don't know where you're from, so I just think we have
some African descent but would I call myself an American? No, because
they don't actually treat us like Americans.

When paraphrasing Jackie's response, she stopped to inform me that “a person on my team right now is really an African American like she was born in Nigeria.” Since it was clear that she did like to use the term black or African American, it was important to find out what term she used to define others in her race. It was then that Jackie informed me that she used the term brown and not differing shades depending on the person but just brown. This was even the term she used to reference herself “just because to mess

with people sometimes like...it's my pet peeve" when people use black. It "makes me mad."

However, it wasn't until later in the interview that I was able to get an understanding of what Jackie meant earlier about not really being treated like an American, even though instinctively I had an idea of what she was talking about. She said,

...yeah you're not in bondage but you don't still to this day have the same opportunities as white people...a black person has to work three times as hard to get a job as a white person...just because you're not picking cotton doesn't mean you are not still in slavery.

Jackie was all about not conforming to the labels of race since she felt like this lead to stereotypes.

Subtheme 2: Awareness of history. You might be wondering how a twenty-year-old was so race conscious. Curious myself, I didn't have to ask because when answering one of the initial race questions Jackie stated, "...we might be on this subject for a little while just because I see thing that a normal person wouldn't cause I'm a big fan of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Marcus Garvey." Later in the interview, when I asked her which aspect of her identity came closest to describing who she really was she replied after giving it some thought, "I would probably say my race just because I am so in tune." My response was "Where do you think that comes from?" Without hesitation, she said,

Probably, my mom....She just told me how people are you know they use you until they get what they need and forget about you just like different things that I might have to go through just because of my skin color and just schooled you to the game of...your young so you can recognize things before they happen..."

By combining the knowledge her mom provided with the knowledge of great black leaders like Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has influenced Jackie to not only be aware of her history but also to use this awareness be a non-conformist.

Subtheme 3: Pride. Curious if Jackie claimed her race as being the primary aspect of her identity because she was proud of it, I simply asked. Her response was a simple, "Yeah." Wanting to go deeper, I asked her why. She replied:

Why not? You know what I am saying to use white/black...white people are proud of theirs [race]. Why not be proud of something your people had to work so hard to get and die for you know what I'm saying just be proud of it and defend it everyday.

It was clear that she had every reason to be proud of her race, but what did she mean by defend it everyday?

Subtheme 4: Responsibility. While attempting to understand if she claimed and was proud of her race because it was visible, she clarified what she meant by defending it everyday. She stated:

Defending it cause if you don't then who will? You know what I'm saying like you just...right now there isn't really a strong leader out there, so I think every person has to do their part in order for yourself.

This particular comment made it clear why earlier in the interview Jackie had discussed correcting her teammates when they were in the wrong or makes others think about why race doesn't really matter. For example, she said,

I hate when people ask, 'Is she black or white?' What does that have to do with anything?Like you know what I'm saying, I won't tell you. I'll just give you a big...I'll lecture you about what does that have to do with anything.

Therefore, this illustrates that in Jackie being a non-conformist and being aware of her history as well as taking pride in her race has allowed Jackie to take responsibility for defending her race in order to break the stereotypes.

Theme 2: Being a Student-Athlete

Even though Jackie was a member of the same team and attended the same university as Britney, she was cognizant of the status her sport held within and outside of the university. Plus, she was mindful of the perception people held about student-athletes. However, despite this awareness, Jackie viewed herself in a different light. Simply put, being a student-athlete was what Jackie does.

Subtheme 1: Awareness of status. When I asked Jackie how she would define or describe a female student-athlete, her response was

The same [as a regular student-athlete]. I think being here at this college it's not like you are not known or not seen especially because of the sport you play, so it's like you are treated equally as if you were on the football team.

She further stated, "Do I think that it is the same for every sport. No, but just because we play basketball I think." I followed up by asking her if she thought it was different at other institutions. She said, "I think depending on where you go...yeah." Jackie's awareness of the status that came with playing her sport at the university she attended made it apparent she was cognizant of the privilege she held because of being a student-athlete.

Subtheme 2: Awareness of perception. Along with being mindful of the status that came with being a student-athlete, Jackie was also very aware of how student-athletes are perceived. She was of the belief that student-athletes are viewed based on two factors: (a) gender – male versus female and (b) academic achievement –whether one goes to class or not. Despite these perceptions, Jackie viewed herself differently.

Subtheme 3: Her perception of being a student-athlete. When I asked Jackie how she would define herself as a student-athlete, she replied, "I would probably say...I'm one of those people that don't really study just because I don't too much have to, so I probably make an athlete first and a student [second]." Captivated by her honesty, I then asked Jackie if there had been a progression to why she saw herself as an athlete first with her academics just trailing behind. Her response was:

They just come. I make A's and B's, but it just depends on the class and like if I don't have to study for something I won't....I don't stress over school." When I asked her why, Jackie simply said, "I'm tired of going to school. I just want to get my degree and move on from school.

Despite the fact that Jackie perceived herself as an athlete and then a student, she was still aware of the status and perceptions that came along with being a student-athlete within and outside of her university.

Theme 3: Sexual Expressiveness

I have placed Jackie's *Sexual Expressive* as third because she saw this aspect of her identity as separate from who she was and what she does. It was simply her personal life, which she felt was nobody's business. Although this theme encompassed more subthemes than the others, it was because there are many layers to the way Jackie expressed her sexuality.

Subtheme 1: Disassociation of lesbian label. Similar to not wanting to conform to labels related to her race, Jackie was just as passionate about not wanting to be labeled as a lesbian. As she states,

I wouldn't be offended [if someone called her a lesbian as an athlete] because I guess that is the lifestyle I am in, but I don't consider myself gay or lesbian either. I just...that is who I am attracted to. I wouldn't go to like a lesbian rally or anything like that and go gay power (raising her fist up). I wouldn't.

Even though she was aware of how others perceived her lifestyle, Jackie does not feel comfortable with the label because her relationship with the lesbian community was none existent. She further stated when I asked her how she defined her sexual identity:

Someone who is like attracted to women but I like guys too...it's just not what I am into. I wouldn't go to the step of labeling myself like I hate labels. Even if I was dating a guy like the boyfriend type, we would just be together without titles or labels.

Jackie's reasoning for not liking labels was "I just feel like someone is always trying to label you..." which lead to stereotypes. The above quotes illustrate Jackie's desire not to be labeled, but does she not want to be labeled because she has implied her ability to still choose men as a option?

Subtheme 2: Implication of choice. Although Jackie stated that she liked guys too, it was not until I asked her if she thought her sexuality was likely to change that it became apparent that she was more about happiness than the gender of her partner. She said,

[After a short pause]...it could just because like I said it's not like I don't think guys are attractive, that's not the case, I just think the guys I have seen so far are stupid, but if I were to meet a guy that I am really attracted and umm...is not dumb and has gotten past that stage. Yeah...if you can make me happy and I can make you happy than that's fine.

Thus, this quote exemplified that sexuality was more about what made Jackie happy versus the gender of her partner.

Subtheme 3: Being me versus a coming out process. Despite asking Jackie a set of questions about her coming out process, it wasn't until I asked her if she thought she had had a coming out process that she said, "No. I feel like I have just been me ever since I can remember." As I asked follow up questions, Jackie said she had always been honest with people when they asked, which was why just being herself did not feel like a coming out process. I will share with you a few examples Jackie provided that illustrated how she had just been herself. Even though she had her first same-sex encounter in middle school and had been in two long-term relationships since the summer before her freshman year of high school, it was during high school when "I didn't hide...I wasn't flaunting it either....I was just being me." In terms of her friends she states:

...they didn't care you know we've all been friends since elementary school or whatever, and like I said it wasn't like...everyone assumed it and pretty much knew since every time I went somewhere I had my girlfriend with me or the same girl.

On the other hand, when her mom found a letter in her jeans pocket while doing her laundry this was how Jackie explained the situation,

'What is this? So, you call yourself having a girlfriend?' I was like, 'Oh, gosh...(Jackie putting her hand to her forehead).' So, she gave me that whole spill, and was just like, 'I'm going to love you anyway.'

It was at this point that Jackie acknowledged that she was very fortunate since she had "had friends that their parents kicked them out of the house..." So, when it came to Jackie's sexual expressiveness she felt all she had to do was be herself instead of coming

out to everyone that was important to her. Since the majority of Jackie's experience had been positive she stated that "It's just assured me that if you are upfront like if you are straight with people upfront and have confidence in yourself other people will too..." Simply put, be upfront and honest with yourself and others with respect you for your actions.

Subtheme 4: Gaydar. Although this is a slang word used among the gay and lesbian community to mean an individual that has radar as to who is gay or lesbian, Jackie does in fact use this term. She states, "...people say gaydar...I have that, so I was like man I know these girls. I can pick them out right now who's gay on this team and I did that." For Jackie, she has the ability – instinct as she later called it in the interview – to recognize others who might be gay. It seemed that this was an important aspect of her sexual expressiveness since it made her feel more comfortable in a situation to know who was similar to her in that regard.

Subtheme 5: Sexuality performed to create visibility. Similar to her teammate Britney, Jackie was able to perform and make visible her sexuality through the way she dressed. This is another example of Butler's (1993) gender as a performance, which can also be applied to sexuality. Her response when I asked her how "out" she consider herself was, "...I'm going to dress how I dress and talk. I don't care who is in the room (laughing) or whatever, umm...but I'm not going to go shout it like I'm not going to where a sign on my back, "I like woman." It was in this quote that it became apparent that Jackie felt like her sexuality was visible by the way she dressed and talked. What I found to be even more interesting was that Jackie felt that the visibility of her sexuality

also depended on her comfort level with who she was around. This was evident when I asked her if she thought her sexuality was visible or invisible. She stated:

I think it depends who I am around. If I am around people I am comfortable with it will be visible, but if I don't know you I will sit here and not say a word and that's just how I am until I can get a feel about you or whatever like I am really shy until I get to know you and then I'll just go all out there.

This defense mechanism, which she would not acknowledge, allowed Jackie to perform her sexuality as either visible – among those she was comfortable with – and invisible with those individuals she was not.

Subtheme 6: Identity silenced among family. I think this final subtheme of Jackie's sexual expressiveness was particularly relevant because she was the only co-participant that I interviewed that was out to her family. Before I could even ask Jackie if her family talked about her sexual identity with others, she answered the question for me and said "...it wasn't a big deal [her coming out]. It is just something that is not talked about." This response was consistent with the literature that often times families were aware of a family member's sexuality and the components tied to their sexuality, but it was still not talked about. However, I found it interesting when I asked Jackie if she thought her sexuality or her attraction towards women had taken away from her family structure. She replied, "No, not at all. It's just...my family's so close knit like nothing, nothing could ever come between it." This may be the case, but it was still unfortunate that Jackie must silence or not talk about her sexual identity among her family.

Theme 4: Influential Factors

Again, this theme was not directly associated with a specific aspect of Jackie's identity. However, these were the five key factors that seem to influence the previous three themes. I have placed Jackie's mom first since she had been the initial and most consistent influential factor in Jackie's life.

Subtheme 1: Mom. Taking into consideration that Jackie made no mention of her father or her other sibling during the interview while only emphasizing the impact of her mom, made it glaring evident that her mom was and continued to be an influential factor for Jackie. As I mentioned in *Theme 1, Subtheme 2: Awareness of history*, Jackie's mom was influential in schooling her on the ways of the world and how the world would treat her because of her race. In addition, when I asked Jackie if the influence of her family or community or religion affected whether she came out, her response was "No." Intrigued that these components did not influence her, I asked her why she didn't think they had an influence. It was at this moment that all that really mattered to her was how her mother would react. In fact, Jackie feared her mom's reaction when she said "I really thought I was going to get a whipping out of it."

However, Jackie did not receive a whipping instead the night her mom found the letter in her pocket:

She just read me a couple of scriptures or whatever and she just wouldn't let me out of her sight the whole night like she made me sleep with her and everything like it was funny. She just wanted to like let me know that I could talk to her about anything and everything like that and stuff, and

she felt like as a mother she maybe didn't portray that I could talk to her about anything cause I was just hiding from her you know what I'm saying.

Ultimately, it seemed like this was a significant moment for Jackie because it reaffirmed that her mom wanted to be there for her no matter what the situation or topic.

Subtheme 2: Religion. This second influential factor affected how Jackie's mom handled her daughter being with another woman. In the above quote, Jackie mentioned that her mom read her scriptures, but prior to that comment Jackie had said "She read me the Bible the whole night." Although we have no idea what her mom's intentions were that night, it was obvious that she wanted to remind Jackie of her religious foundation – Seventh day Adventist – as well as how homosexuality was viewed.

Despite Jackie's sexual identity, she stated "I just have my own personal relationship with God." Although she was unable to go to church while in school since it conflicted with basketball – for a Seventh Day Adventist their day of rest was from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday – her religion gave her perspective by helping her figure out "what's important in life." When I further asked if her religious background was tied to being a student-athlete, she replied "I mean if something good happens or bad happens I am going to pray regardless or if I was a student-athlete or I wasn't a student-athlete that is just how I feel." In my mind, Jackie's religion laid the foundation for her to prioritize what was important in her life.

Subtheme 3: Lack of support from black community. Once again aware of the pulse of the black community, Jackie stated the following when I asked her how supported she felt by the black community to be who she was

Like does black people accept black gay people? Ooohh, I don't...no cause they feel...most people feel like we have enough problems we don't need that you know what I am saying, so I think it...they can be harder on you than any other race.

When I asked Jackie if she felt religion had anything to do with it, she replied:

I believe it first starts out with religion and then like we already have so much going on why do you need that on your plate you know what I'm saying. It's a mixture of everything.

So, Jackie felt that it started with religion then goes to why add another struggle to the plate and ends by being a combination of the two. Not only cognizant of how the black community supported gay and lesbians, Jackie was also aware of the power structure that was involved in how lesbians are viewed in our culture. She stated:

Like down...like last on the totem pole and if you are black it is even worst....It's just because like who has the power like you know men have all the power, white men and then white women and then you got...like black people are just lower than a white gay man....to be something different and you are already having problems in society like as being equal, I just think it's worst as you can see in society today.

Even though I don't think the lack of support from the black community was directly influential on Jackie, I think it has had an impact based on her being aware of her status on the totem pole within our society.

Subtheme 4: Sport. When I asked Jackie about her first relationship, she said; Once again I mean I think if I didn't play basketball I wouldn't know anybody, but just because I was such a high profile athlete...I guess I portrayed myself and how I dressed and everything like that and at that time I guess I was interested in women and here comes a junior on the basketball team I'm playing on hitting on me or whatever and that happen.

While I listened to this response, it became evident that Jackie felt that if she had not been playing basketball nor dressed the way she did the opportunity to be with a woman may not have presented itself in another environment. Later in the interview when I asked Jackie if the sport environment influenced her coming out, she stated, "I think just because like the environment I am in right now is just so easy..." Furthermore, Jackie also felt that she was more out while playing her sport. Unable to really say why this was the case, she simply said, "It's just something that you play with." Thus, I think that Jackie's sexual expressive has not only been influenced by the sport environment, but while also making it easier for her to find women as well as to be who she was.

Theme 5: Intersections of Identity

This theme was to illustrate how Jackie saw the varying components of her identity intersecting. The first two subthemes may reiterate points made earlier, but the

key was to demonstrate how she saw two components of identity being linked. What follows is a discussion of these connections that emerged during the interview.

Subtheme 1: Sport and sexuality. As mentioned in Theme 4 – Subtheme 5, Jackie felt that her sexual expressiveness was tied to her playing basketball and being in an environment that made it so easy. In addition to the connection that Jackie had established between her sport and sexuality, she also mentioned how she thought that society viewed female student-athletes based on the sport they play. She stated, “I think depending on what sport you play like if you are softball then everybody thinks that most softball players are gay, and some in basketball but the stereotype is there but no really cares about it...” Although the stereotype was there, Jackie was not worried about it despite feeling that her sport had allowed her to explore her sexual expressiveness.

Subtheme 2: Race and sexuality. Jackie made the connection between race and sexuality when she provided the example of the totem pole. Within this example, she acknowledged the status and power that individual’s hold was based on their gender, race, and/or sexuality. This acknowledgement kept her mindful of how the world viewed her based on being a brown woman of African descent that was attracted to other women.

Subtheme 3: Race and sport. Although this connection has not been made prior to this point, I think it was safe to assume that Jackie was aware of the stereotypes that individuals had because of the color of her skin and that she was an athlete. These lead individuals to have high expectations of her athletic ability simply because of the color of her skin. She stated:

They automatically think you are going to act this way you know what I'm saying. I'll tell you right now I'm not fast, I can't jump very high, but just because people see my skin is black then I am automatically a great athlete.

This was why Jackie had tried to redefine her race. Despite redefining her race, others still saw her as black and stereotyped her based on this visible aspect of her identity.

My Reflections on Interviewing Jackie

When I was done interviewing Jackie, I felt really good and confident about the experience. In my opinion, it was a combination of interviewing an individual that was aware of who she was, the varying components of her identity, and a willingness to share this with me. In addition, I felt I was able to redeem myself through confidence in my interviewing ability and not only take charge in asking the questions but also paraphrasing and probing further, which was lacking in the interview with Britney. On a personal level, I was definitely able to relate and connect my beliefs and experiences to Jackie. What follows is an overarching reflection – inserting my voice along with relevant literature – of interviewing Jackie. It was based on the themes and subthemes as well as the supporting quotes that emerged from Jackie's interview.

I will begin my reflection on Jackie's *Racial Expressiveness* since this was the aspect of her identity that I was able to relate the most with. Although I found it quite respectable that Jackie did not want to conform to race labels, it was difficult to ask her the questions related to race and simply plug in "brown." It was not like the questions changed, but it was hard for me to change my perspective of wanting to take pride in being a Black woman and all that encompasses for me. However, this was one of the

moments during the interview that I realized that the interview was not about how I viewed Jackie nor my personal perspective on race – instead I had to remind myself that it was important to stay true to how she viewed herself and focus on getting to the bottom of that versus my own perspective on race.

Once I got past referring to Jackie as a “brown woman of African descent,” I was blown away by the great examples that she provided to show her awareness, pride, and responsibility to her race. More specifically, when Jackie informed me that she would not check her race on a questionnaire it hit me that this was a possibility I had never considered. In all honesty, I thought I was validating my blackness by checking black or African-American. However, now I am hesitant to check my race because Jackie made a valid point – What difference does it make? My intention was not to answer the questions based on one aspect of my identity; instead, it was the combination of all these components that influenced how I respond to the questions. I am grateful to Jackie for this new perspective that made me question my actions as well as any future actions I may take. In addition, I am in agreement with Jackie that since there are currently no strong black leaders, consistent with West (2001) each one of us – individuals of African descent – are responsible to defend our history, break stereotypes within and outside of our community and create new definitions of self. This responsibility fell right into line with Black feminist thought and reiterated Collins (2000) call “to forge self-definitions of self-reliance and independence” (p. 1). Similarly, I felt that Jackie’s metaphor of the totem pole exemplified Collins’ (2000) matrix of domination in which we are all ranked and hold power based on the privilege that the intersection of our identity holds. The

reality of this visual allows us all to be mindful of our place in society whether we like it or not.

It was easier to relate to Jackie's *Sexual Expressiveness* than Britney's, but it reminded me that we are all at different stages of understanding and making sense of it. As I mentioned in my review of literature, Riermer (1997) proposed a model of lesbian identity formation based on emotional age versus chronological age. Based on this model, I think Jackie was a stage 4 PostConformist. She realized that the stereotypes about lesbians are false, has developed her set of beliefs about lesbians, has come to a personal realization she is a lesbian though she chooses not to define herself in that way, and she has come out – in her case, been true to herself – to both herself and others. Even though she is in the final stage for a PostConformist, I am unsure if she has any desire to move to the final two levels by conforming to the definitions and norms of the lesbian community and then to move towards questioning these norms and definitions. However, what I do think is important to note is the intersecting factors of her race and sexuality and how this is related to the literature.

Despite Black lesbians being viewed as masculinized or sexualized women (Greene, 1994), this was definitely not how Jackie viewed herself. Although she was aware that she portrayed a certain image that lead other women to hit on her, this did not stop her from wanting to change the image. As a matter of fact, Jackie saw this to her advantage since she identified herself as not the type to make the first move. Despite the image that Jackie portrayed, this has not affected how she was viewed in the black community and truly held no reference to the gay and lesbian community since she had

no relationship with this community. However, in the black community, Jackie was cognizant of the tolerance that existed that was based in religion – also consistent with the literature – yet extended to individuals within the community not wanting or seeing no reason for us to add another aspect to our identity that could be discriminated against and, therefore, oppressed.

Even though Jackie had dated and continued to seek women outside of her race, it appeared that individuals whom she saw as traitors to her race didn't bother her and, in fact, were seen as humorous. As she would say, "What difference does it make?" With regard to Jackie having to choose one identity over another, she did not feel as though she had to choose but she was well aware that her sexuality was simply not talked about. My hope for her is that this changes since I know from my own experience that when you are committed to another individual and making life decisions it is difficult to be silent. However, I have a feeling that when all is said and done, Jackie will be genuine, upfront, and happy with whatever her end result may be.

Summary

Although I discussed the themes and subthemes that emerged from Britney and Jackie's interview separately, this was simply to emphasize the individuality and differing experience of each woman. In addition, I felt this allowed each story to stand alone instead of being generalized to the existence of all Black lesbian student-athletes. It was the story of Britney as well as Jackie that helped lay the foundation for understanding how other Black lesbian student-athletes may negotiate the various components of their identity of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a NCAA

Division I student-athlete in the Southeastern region of the United States. Despite the fact that much can come from these women's stories, I am unsure that I can make grandiose conclusions about either their experience or how they fully negotiate the varying components of their identity. Nonetheless, I will conclude in the next chapter by reflecting on the impact this study can have for sport and the sport psychology literature as well as my suggestions and desire for future directions.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHERE WILL THIS PATH LEAD? MY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate various components of their identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and being an NCAA Division I student-athlete as well as the influence that the institutions of family, community, religion, and sport had on this negotiation. This exploration was possible through two semi-structured interviews – and my own autoethnography – which allowed a mechanism for Black lesbian student-athletes' voices to be heard through the expression of each individual's experience. I feel I was able to make our voices stronger by including my own voice as an additional co-participant. This allowed me the opportunity to tell my journey of researching a population with which I identified – a population that has been forced to the margins of not only society, but also the black community – despite most individuals, especially black, being afraid to talk about the issue. By researching my own population, I was able to apply theory and research to the real life experiences of Britney and Jackie along with my personal journey of researching Black lesbian student-athletes. The sections that follow outline the impact I foresee for my research, my suggestions as well as potential future directions and conclusions I was able to draw from exploring this population.

Impact of Study

Although the actual impact of the study will be unknown until the results are disseminated, it was my belief that this research will not only lay the foundation for

future research about Black lesbian student-athletes within other divisions of the NCAA structure but for Black lesbian athletes in general. It could also create visibility and awareness for this particular population. This belief was based on the lack of research at present as well as the interest that has been created as I have discussed this study with others and searched for co-participants.

Suggestions and Future Directions

Throughout this entire research project – as a researcher – I have learned valuable things that have lead me to want to make suggestions to those who want to delve into the unknown with either a particular population or qualitative methodology. I am of the belief that the region of the country that I was located in, wanting to conduct face-to-face interviews and the nature of this study might have all had an affect on the willingness of individuals to step forward to be co-participants of this study. Regardless, I realize now that my strict timeframe – roughly six months – of collecting the data, analyzing it, and comprehending it in order to write this document also contributed to not being able to obtain more co-participants. It has become apparent that recruitment takes time, and there is no way to speed the process up no matter how I tired. I think a perfect example is that there were many hits on the GLAA forum – 324 as of December 15, 2005 – of individuals who may have been interested in being interviewed. However, all I can conclude is that the stigma of “lesbian” in NCAA Division I collegiate athletics may have contributed to them not being willing to step forward.

In fact, as a researcher, I placed a lot a confidence in the methods of recruiting co-participants that I had set forth, especially the infamous technique of snowballing.

However, I think the key to this technique is obtaining co-participants early enough in the process so that one can pursue these additional leads while one is interviewing other co-participants or analyzing data. Allowing time for athletes, especially student-athletes with their many time commitments who constantly feel that there is not enough time in the day, to step forward in their own time – if they are willing – is crucial. Also, I think it is essential to consider other outlets of obtaining the data set forth by an interview guide through such methods as phone interviews or forwarding the questions via e-mail. Even though the latter is less favorable, it is a possibility. Nonetheless, in my particular case, I felt that both of these other methods would take away from not only the experience of the co-participant – including myself – but also the depth of their answers.

My final reflection is that if one is planning on using lesbian or gay to define a co-participant's sexuality that s/he tries to find a fluid term that encompasses the spectrum of women being psychologically, emotionally, and/or physically attracted to other women. Although this a difficult and challenging task, I think the time spent will pay off by having more individuals willing to participate in your study. I discovered the challenge of labeling the same-sex attraction of women as lesbian as both Britney and Jackie identified themselves differently than the choice I had given them. I now feel it was unfair to try to fit a stringent definition or criterion of sexuality on them since I am now more aware that there are varying levels of female same-sex attraction.

As I move to thinking of how this research can lead to future possibilities, I believe that the possibilities are not restricted to what I have placed on these pages. With this being the first research to explore not only Black lesbian NCAA Division I

student-athletes but also how they negotiate various components of their identity, I truly believe the possibilities are endless. On the surface level, I think the same exploration that occurred in this study needs to take place among the other divisions of the NCAA structure. This will allow us to compare the experience of Black lesbian student-athletes across divisions. More specifically, I think it is vital to explore the negotiation of identity and other experiences among former NCAA student-athletes of all divisions since time always allows us to make sense of our experiences. Plus, I think it is possible to explore the negotiation experience among Black lesbian athletes in general. As I suggested above, I think the research on Black women or women of African descent in sport should explore the spectrum of sexuality and the effect this has on their sporting experience.

In a general sense, I have come to realize that it would be just as important to explore the homophobic and heterosexist nature of the black community and to compare it to other communities. I think the results of such a study could then lead to an exploration of the affect the black community as well as other communities have on Black lesbians AND Black lesbian athletes. I also feel something important can be said for how Black and/or minority women in 2005 are creating new forms of femininity (Collins, 2004), which I think can also be explored among Black lesbians AND Black lesbians athletes. Through such an exploration, we could examine how these women create new standards and forms of femininity for themselves.

Applications to Sport Psychology

While I am creating a new path of research in sport psychology by examining not only sexuality and the intersection of identity but also the previously silenced population of Black lesbian student-athletes and athletes, it is important to consider the applications this study can have in the field of sport psychology. I think this study illustrates that being a student-athlete at an NCAA institution extends past simply playing your sport whether it is conscious or not. Both Britney and Jackie negotiated the varying components of their identity depending on their situation and/or location. Although this may not directly impact their playing performance, it is still a psychological experience they go through. Ultimately, by these two women and others possessing the triple threat of being – in no particular order – Black, lesbian, and female one must consider – researcher, coach, administrator, or sport psychology consultant – that this will affect their sporting experience.

Conclusions

Ultimately, I felt that the experience and journey of this research has made me not only a better person, but also reinforced the impact I can make as a Black lesbian athlete researcher. These two women opened my eyes and confirmed the thought in my mind that younger generations don't want to be labeled. There may be an aspect of their identity that was visible to some and invisible to others; regardless, it was these labels that lead to misperceptions and stereotypes. These very women are examples of Davis' (1981) "new standard of womanhood" (p. 3) and Collins (2000) desire to create new self-definitions. I admire both of these women in the varying ways they are able to negotiate

the components of their identity in a manner that made sense to them. I look forward to the day I get to talk with more women like myself, and end the silence and invisibility of our population!

Post-Defense

After defending my thesis on December 2, 2005, I took the opportunity to reread this entire document, and when I got to this chapter I quickly realized that I had not done justice to concluding this significant research. So, based on the suggestion of my committee, I have added this section as a P.S. to Chapter Five. I acknowledge this suggestion by my committee because they are the individuals that pushed me to further contemplate many aspects of this research. In staying true to the autoethnographic style I have incorporated in this document, my research journey continues as I discuss the following: (a) the interdisciplinary nature of this work; (b) how the method of autoethnography goes with and against traditional sport psychology literature; (c) the possibility of creating a new method of research by merging the methods of autoethnography and semi-structured interviews; (d) how Britney is an example of an individual reaffirming both female and male gender roles; (e) how neither co-participant discussed varying levels in color among the black community; (f) the fact the upcoming generations don't want to be labeled; and last but not least, (g) two additional future directions that speak to the interdisciplinary nature of this work. So, let the journey continue...

The interdisciplinary nature of this work. As I mentioned throughout, I had to pull from multiple disciplines – Women's Studies, African American Studies, Sociology,

History (Women's and Black), Gay and Lesbian Studies, Qualitative Research, and Sport Studies – in order to complete this work. I think it is important to note this fact because no single discipline alone could have helped me understand how Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate their various components of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being an NCAA Division I student-athlete. It was the task of navigating between and among these disciplines that helped to create the interdisciplinary nature of this work. Most importantly, it was this experience that taught me there is no better way to do research than to pull from multiple subjects as it – in my mind – produced the best result by incorporating the knowledge of countless individuals. Therefore, the positive experience I had of doing interdisciplinary work during this process will motivate me in the future to continue relying on numerous disciplines as I pursue other research quests.

Autoethnography: Breaking new ground in sport psychology. As I was reminded by my committee, I am breaking new ground in sport psychology and sports studies in general with this work. Even though autoethnography is not a new method, it was only recently introduced – mainly from a sport sociology perspective – into the sport and physical activity literature about twelve years ago. As a matter of fact, I am only aware of one other study – “I Know You Are, But (Who, Where, and) What Am I?: Using Autoethnography to Understand the (Embodied) Self in Sport and Physical Activity Participation” by Dawn E. Stephens and Kerry R. McGannon (2005) – that uses autoethnography within a sport psychology context. With this being the case, I am breaking the ground even further since I am veering from what is now established as a

traditional sport studies/sport psychology/sport sociology autoethnography. This traditional autoethnography in sport and physical activity is one in which the

...work entails the systematic exploration of personal experiences of sport and body histories. Such an approach recalls events from the author-as-researcher's life, and these events then form the core of a written narrative that facilitates interpretation from a variety of theoretical perspectives (Sparkes, 2002, p. 76).

Based on this notion of the traditional sport studies autoethnography, I have veered from the norm since I have not only explored my personal experience in researching a sport-related topic but I have also included the voice of other Black lesbian student-athletes – both similar to and different from me – through the use of semi-structured interviews. Therefore, by turning this work into an autoethnography I have included the emotional while still keeping intact the public, the theoretical, and the rational (Sparkes, 2002).

Merging methods. Although I have done nothing wrong by veering off the traditional research path, I have in turn created a situation where my work is groundbreaking while also being seen as an obstacle that could have unknown repercussions. Regardless, I think it imperative that I acknowledge that I had no intention in the beginning to merge the two methods of semi-structured interviews and autoethnography. Yet, as it turned out, I think I created a powerful methodology that allowed me to incorporate my experience within the context of trying to understand other Black lesbian student-athletes, which gave me the opportunity to make sense of the position each of us saw ourselves in U.S. society. Thus, I am pushing to create a new

methodology in which the methods of autoethnography and interviews – group and/or individual – are merged to create a stronger methodology that takes into account all perspectives –researcher and co-participants.

Other things to consider. Within this subsection, I ponder and discuss three other aspects of this research. They include (a) how Britney is an example of an individual reaffirming gender roles; (b) how neither co-participant discussed varying levels in color among the black community; and (c) the fact that upcoming generations – mine included – don't want to be labeled. With regard to Britney being an example of an individual who reaffirms both female and male gender roles, her actions go beyond simply adhering to the prescribed roles for her gender; Britney also calls on stereotypically prescribed male gender roles. In fact, she calls on these varying gender roles based on being with a woman (when she incorporates more of a traditionally masculine gender role) or being with a man – (incorporating more of a traditionally feminine gender role).

Although I previously discussed how Britney expressed her gender through sexuality by way of the femme and stud distinction, I failed to consider that by expressing her gender and sexuality in this manner that she was in fact reaffirming both female and male gender roles. It is my belief that Britney was unaware that this was what she was doing, yet doing so provided her with privilege in either situation. This can be seen throughout her transcript as Britney mentioned, "...I think more like guys think just because when I was with guys and being around my brothers just seeing how they do;" maybe this was why she chose "to throw on the tight jeans, tight shirts, and heels" when she was with guys as opposed to not only thinking like guys but also dressing like

them by wearing “the colored tees and collared shirts and stuff like that and hats” when she was with women. Regardless of Britney’s reasoning, it is now apparent that her aim was to place herself in positions that created privilege, which is not only a consistent effort among the other components of her identity, but in turn created a situation where Britney reaffirmed both female and male gender roles.

Turning to more general things to consider, one of my committee members alerted me the fact that there was no mention from my two co-participants or from myself of the varying levels of color among the black community. Caught off guard by this comment, I was reminded of the colorful – no pun intended – dialogue that took place among Jackie and myself when she introduced using the term “brown” as an alternative to black. Although Jackie did not speak directly to the varying levels of color among the black community and the effect this has among its members, Jackie did mention how she would still use the term “brown” to someone who was extremely dark. Jackie stated, “I hate when you see a true African and like [someone says], ‘Dang, he’s black.’ No. he’s not. He’s just a darker shade of brown.”

However, since my defense, I have been wondering why there was no distinction made – by myself in particular – as to the effect it has on the individual being a lighter or darker shade of black within the black community. Since it is nearly impossible to assume the thoughts of my co-participants, I am reminded of the story I was told by my father of his older sister being light enough to pass as a white woman; this, in turn, created privileges that his other sisters would either never experience or would have to wait until much later in life to do. Is it because of my lighter skin that many have

attacked my proper vernacular? Or noted my “good hair”? Or automatically assumed I was mixed? Despite mulling over these rhetorical questions, the reality is that I am mixed; many have noted my “good hair,” and I do speak proper vernacular. Some may say I’m not black enough. In return, my response is “by whose standards?” Regardless, the point is that if my lighter skin color has had an affect on me, then the truth is that it has positively motivated me to understand and actively be a member of the black community.

Even though this has been my experience, is it possible that this distinction was not made because it is generational? Is it possible that in an era where my peers and younger generations – regardless of race – are engulfed in hip-hop culture that they have broken the color lines? I don’t think it is safe to make that much of a leap, but it is something to continue pondering or even better yet another future direction for research in/with the black community.

The third and final aspect I was asked to further consider by my committee and have mentioned in reflecting on interviewing both Britney and Jackie is their desire to not be labeled as a lesbian. Is it generational to be label-free or is it personal choice? As I have contemplated this question, I was reminded of a column by Chad Graham in the *Advocate* (2005, June 21) titled “Young, happy, label-free” in which he interviews author and University professor Ritch C. Savin-Williams on his new book *The New Gay Teenager*. When Savin-Williams was asked what surprised him about this generation he stated,

What I found was that the way in which the women were resisting and rejecting our sexual identity labels was fascinating to me. They've integrated their sexuality into who they are. They don't want to be a 'lesbian poet'; they want to be 'a poet who loves women.' Then I discovered that the guys were not that much different. They too were beginning to understand: "Don't try put me in a box; don't try to categorize me' (p. 62).

Although this may be the case for many, I know I take pride in calling myself a lesbian because it not only exemplifies that I love women but that I am also a woman. This is why I think it is important to examine the spectrum of sexuality among women and to attempt to understand why many women are choosing to disassociate themselves from labels and/or claim multiple labels. Whether we reach this understanding through open dialogue among a group of individuals, surveys, or individual interviews, I see this as a significant topic that needs to be further explored.

Additional future directions. Despite the fact that the three other things I considered in the above subsection turned to potential future directions, the two additional future directions that I mention here are directly linked to the research question I attempted to answer by conducting this study. Whether you were cognizant of it or not, I hinted at and discussed within the review of literature (see Chapter Two) social class. Even though it was my intention to include social class into the discussion of *Black Women's Identity throughout Herstory and Black Women as Athletes in Women's Sport*, I

chose not to incorporate social class as a component of identity that Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate.

In order to be on the same page regarding social class, I will use a sport sociology definition of social class, which “refers to categories of people who share an economic position in society based on a combination of their income, wealth, education, occupation, and social connections” (Coakley, 2004, p. 326). I think it is important to make the connections between social class and sport because as I mentioned previously, social class plays a large role as to which sport many individuals, especially Black women, are socialized into playing. This not only effects the sporting experience of black youth but also impacts their ability to be a spectator (Smith, 1992; Coakley, 2004). However, we must walk cautiously because as hooks (2000) notes, “Nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It’s the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, uncertain about where we stand” (p. vii).

Although I am all about “breaking the silence” (hooks, 2000, p. viii) when it comes to sensitive issues, I think I felt uncomfortable with asking my co-participants about their social class. In fact, social class was a component one of my committee members requested that I incorporate more in the review of literature, but if the thought entered my mind to include it as additional component I allowed it to fall by the wayside based on my own level of comfort or lack of for that matter. In retrospect and as I move forward, I think it is imperative to add social class as a component of identity that Black lesbian student-athletes negotiate for two reasons. For one, I think it is key to bring voice to how social class has affected Black women’s sporting experience; and secondly, it

creates dialogue about a subject that is often ignored or silenced. I believe that we can no longer shy away from the topic of social class since it is what influences the hegemonic standards and ideals that are created in the matrix of domination that exists in U.S. society.

The final additional future direction I discuss is one I would have never considered had it not been for one of my committee members. Her suggestion was to use the interdisciplinary nature of the work to translate and analyze the pauses, silences, and types of language used that occurred in both interviews with Britney and Jackie. When she made this suggestion, I thought it was an interesting perspective but truly had no idea how this could be done. However, I was encouraged that it was a possibility when I was flipping through the new edition (3rd) of *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* and found Anssi Peräkylä (2005) chapter titled “Analyzing Talk and Text.” By analyzing the transcripts in this way, there is the potential for uncovering additional interesting material. With this being a possibility, this is my final suggestion for future research.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, I am absolutely speechless that I have finally completed this work. What was intended to be a simple and straightforward research plan turned into a complex and unforgettable journey. Yet, please be mindful that this research is just at the beginning stages – as far as subject matter and methodology are concerned – so there was truly no way to make any strong conclusions. Regardless, I am elated this significant piece of research is done for the time being as I am prepared to continue the numerous

paths this initial research will take me down. I hope all who read this document not only enjoy it but are able to take something away from it as well!

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Bracketing Interview Guide

Interview Guide (method modeled from Fisher, 1997)

Read confidentiality statement and get informed consent; answer any questions; pick pseudonym.

Demographic Info

- What is your age?
- What year in school are you?
- What sport do you currently play? Starter/non-starter? Scholarship athlete? What other sports have you been involved in?
- What was your family of origin like? (i.e., brothers, sisters, parents, other relatives)
- Where are you from? What was that culture like? How much value to you place on your home of origin/how important is it to you?
- How do you define community?
- What constitutes your various communities?
- How do you define family?
- What constitutes your family?
- Have you lived in other places in your lifetime?
 - What were their cultures like?
 - Were there cultural differences in each of these places?
 - If yes, describe these differences?
- Do you have a religious affiliation? If so, what? Do you belong to a place of worship?
- What role has religion played in your life?
- If religion plays a role in your life, in what ways (if at all) does it play a role in your community?

I'd like us to focus on four specific components of your identity now, in no particular order. These are yourself as a woman in general, yourself as a African American woman, yourself as an athlete, and yourself as a lesbian. I also want you to think about how important each of these components are to your identity, if they are.

Identity

Woman Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on a dimension of yourself, yourself as a woman. Which circle would you like to represent your "woman self"? I'd like you to write "woman self" across the top of this circle in magic marker, so that we can refer to it later on, and remember what it stands for (Fisher, 1997).

- How would you define/describe women?
- Is this how you define yourself as a woman? Why or why not?
- How is the way you see yourself as a woman similar to the way you see women in general?
 - How is it different?
- How do you think women are viewed in this culture?
- What gender roles are specific to women?

- In what way are there similarities in gender roles/expectations for Caucasian and Black women? In what ways are they different, if any?
- Is your gender your primary identity? How does it fit with the rest of your self-concept?

Black Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on another dimension of yourself, yourself as a raced person. Which circle would you like to represent your "raced self." Again I'd also like you to write "raced self" across the top of this circle in magic marker, so that we can refer to it later on, and remember what it stands for (Fisher, 1997).

- What do you call yourself with regards to race?
- Do you call yourself a black woman? If so, why? If not, why not? How would you define the term black (or the term you use) as it applies to race?
- What term do you use to define others in your race? Is it what you call yourself? Why or why not?
- How is the way you see yourself as raced similar to the way you see your race/Blacks in general?
 - How is it different?
- How do you think your race/Blacks are viewed in this culture?
- What constitutes [her term]/blackness?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of being a well-educated [her term]/Black?
- Is race your primary identity? How does it fit with the rest of your self-concept?
- How is religion tied to your race?

Student-Athlete Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on third dimension of yourself, yourself as a student-athlete. Which circle would you like to represent your "student-athlete self." Again I'd also like you to write "student-athlete self" across the top of this circle in magic marker, so that we can refer to it later on, and remember what it stands for (Fisher, 1997).

- How would you define/describe a student-athlete?
- How would you define/describe a female student-athlete? Similarly? Differently than a student-athlete in general?
- How do you define yourself as a student-athlete? Why?
- How is the way you define yourself as an athlete similar to or different from the way you see female student-athletes in general?
- How do you think student-athletes are viewed within your university? In society? How about female student-athletes at your university? In society?
- Are there any stereotypes about female student-athletes at your university? In society?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of being a female student-athlete?
- What role does FCA play on your campus?

Lesbian Identity and Coming Out

As a way for use to begin to discuss how you see yourself as a lesbian, I'd like you to choose one of these three circle pieces of color paper that I've cut to represent your "lesbian self". I'd also like you to write "lesbian self" across the top of this circle in magic marker, so that we can refer to it later on, and remember what it stands for... (Fisher, 1997).

- How do you define your sexuality?
- How would you define/describe lesbians in general?
- Is this how you define your sexuality? Why or why not?
- How is the way you see yourself as a [her term]/lesbian similar to the way you see lesbians in general?
 - How is it different?
- How do you think lesbians are viewed in this culture?
- How "out" would you consider yourself?
- When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be a lesbian?
- How did you come from your realization to a personal coming out?
- What has been your experience of coming out to others? (family, parents, etc.)
 - What was the environment?
 - What made it difficult?
 - What helped make it easier?
 - Say anything you would like about this experience.
- Did the influence of your family/community/religion affect whether you came out? In what ways?
- Does your family discuss your lesbian identity to others? What is the language used?
- In your opinion, does homosexuality/lesbianism take away from the family structure? Why or why not?
- Do you think there were/are the major barriers to you accepting yourself as a lesbian? What were/are they?
- Do you believe your sexual orientation is likely to change? Why/why not?
- Do you think homosexuality is a choice? Why or why not?
- In what ways has your experience been positive or negative since coming out as a lesbian?
- How do such experiences influence your lesbian identity?
- Are there times when you have to go back into the closet? Why/why not?
 - How does this make you feel?
- Have you ever tried to pass as heterosexual? Why/why not?
- Is your sexuality invisible? If so, how does the invisibility of your sexuality affect your identity?
- Are you fearful of gay bashing? Or of a male trying to prove you are heterosexual?
- Are you attracted to women outside of your race? Have you heard people say that, "having interracial relationships means you are a 'traitor to the race'"? Who's said that? How do you feel about that statement?
- Do you have a lesbian role model? Please elaborate.

Lesbian Identity as Related to Sport

- Are you aware of any stereotypes of lesbians in sport?
 - What are these stereotypes?
- Were your parents worried about you being a part of a team because of lesbians?
- Did the sport environment influence your coming out in any way?
- Could your behavior be considered more out while playing your sport than at other times? Why/why not?
- Have you come out to your team? If so, when?
 - How was the experience?
- Does your team provide you with support for being gay? If so, how?
 - How about from other or older lesbians on your team?
- Is there a gay athlete community within your university or team?
 - How does it operate?
 - Are they supportive? In what ways?

Integrated Identity

You've described yourself in 4 ways...as a woman, as a [her term]/black woman, as an athlete, and as a lesbian. I'd like you to help me to visualize this better by placing these four dimensions of yourself onto the larger piece of construction paper in any arrangement that you would like that represents how they interact. They can be placed in any configuration that you would like. They can be overlapping (demonstrate), not touching (demonstrate), on top of each other (demonstrate), etc. When you've decided how these circles should be to best represent you, I'll record what you come up with (Fisher, 1997).

- Which of those images, which of these circles, comes closest to describing who you really are? Or, how do you see these images making up your self?
 - Which is the most important to you? Why?
- How are these parts of yourself related to each other? How do they interact?
- What do you think influenced the way you see these components?
- Do you feel pressure from society to pick one identity over another? If so, how?
- Do you feel that one identity takes precedents over another if it is more visible? If so, how?
- Have there been situations in your life where you have felt you had to silence or reject one of your identities?
- Do you feel your actions are a reflection on a particular image for the respective identity?
- Is there any aspect of your identity that you consider central at present? If someone were to ask you who you are, and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?
- How has leaving home to attend college influenced your various identities? In what way(s)?
- Can you think of an experience that really opened your eyes to your multiple identities?
- What strategies do you use or implement to juggle your multiple identities?

- How would you describe your relationship to the gay/lesbian community as you define community? (Have you ever been active in the lesbian community)? To the Black community as you define it? For example, how supported do you feel by these two communities?
- Did your coming out experience and identity as a lesbian woman change your sense of acceptance in the Black community? Your level of involvement in the Black community?
- Do you think being a lesbian and/or Black affects the community in which you live? If so, how?
- Is there a difference in the ways that each community (lesbian, black, athlete) accepts your sexual orientation?
- Is there one identity that is more important in your social life?

Debriefing Questions

- Is there anything that you would like to add that was not addressed in my questions? What other comments do you have?
- How did you feel about the process of this interview?

Thank you very much! I really appreciate your time.

Appendix B
Pilot Interview Guide

Interview Guide (Method modeled from Fisher, 1997)

The questions highlighted in yellow will be asked if the co-participant does not answer the question in the question previously asked.

Read confidentiality statement and obtain informed consent; have the co-participant choose a pseudonym.

Introduction/Briefing

Today I'd like us to focus on three specific components of your identity. These components are yourself as a student-athlete, yourself as a lesbian, and yourself as a raced person. I also want you to think about how important each of these components is to your identity, if they are. Some questions may seem sensitive in nature, so please let me know if you feel uncomfortable and we can go on to the next question. Just keep in mind, this is an opportunity to think about and maybe re-evaluate your beliefs. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Demographic Info

- What is your age?
- What is your year in school?
- What sport do you currently play?
 - Are you a starter/non-starter?
 - Scholarship athlete?
 - What other sports have you been involved in?
- What was your family of origin like? (i.e., brothers, sisters, parents, other relatives)
- Where are you from?
 - What was that culture like?
 - How much value do you place on your home of origin/how important is it to you?
- Have you lived in other places in your lifetime?
 - What were those cultures like?

Identity

Student-Athlete Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on the first dimension of your identity, yourself as a student-athlete.

- How would you define/describe a student-athlete?
- How would you define/describe a female student-athlete?
 - Is this similar or different than you would define/describe a student-athlete in general?
- How do you define yourself as a student-athlete? Why?
- How is the way you define yourself as an athlete similar to or different from the way you see female student-athletes in general?
- How do you think student-athletes are viewed within your university? In society?

- How do you think female student-athletes are viewed at your university? In society?
- Are there any stereotypes about female student-athletes at your university? In society?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of being a female student-athlete?
- Is religion tied in any way to being a student-athlete? If so, why? If not, why not?
 - Do you have a religious affiliation? Do you belong to a place of worship?
 - What role has religion played in your life?
 - If religion plays a role in your life, in what ways (if at all) does it play a role in your community?

Lesbian Identity as Related to Sport

As a way for us to begin to discuss how you see yourself as a lesbian, we will talk about your lesbian identity as it is related to sport.

- Are you aware of any stereotypes of lesbians in sport?
 - What are these stereotypes?
- Were your parents worried about you being a part of a team because of lesbians?
- Did the sport environment influence your coming out in any way?
- Could your behavior be considered more out while playing your sport than at other times? Why/why not?
- Have you come out to your team? If so, when?
 - How was the experience?
- Does your team provide you with support for being gay? If so, how?
 - How about from other or older lesbians on your team?
- Is there a gay athlete community within your university or team?
 - How does it operate?
 - Are they supportive? In what ways?

Lesbian Identity and Coming Out

Now we will discuss your lesbian identity and your coming out process.

- How do you define your sexual identity?
- How would you define/describe lesbians in general?
 - Do you use this term to define yourself? Why or why not?
- How is the way you see yourself as a [her term]/lesbian similar and different to the way you see lesbians in general?
- How do you think lesbians are viewed in this culture?
- When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be a lesbian?
- How did you move from this realization to a personal coming out to family, friends, and/or teammates?
- What has been your experience of coming out to others? (family, parents, etc.)
 - What was the environment?
 - What made it difficult?
 - What made it easier?
 - Say anything you would like about this experience.
- Did the influence of your family/community/religion affect whether you came out? In what ways?

- How do you define community? What constitutes (makes up) your community or communities?
- How do you define family? What constitutes (makes up) your family or families?
- How “out” would you consider yourself? Are there times when you have to go back into the closet? Why/why not? How does this make you feel?
- Have you ever tried to pass as heterosexual? Why/why not? Do you think your sexuality is visible or invisible?
 - If invisible, how does this affect your identity?
- Does your family discuss your lesbian identity with others? What do they usually say?
- In your opinion, do you feel your homosexuality/lesbianism has taken away from your family structure? Why or why not?
- Do you believe your sexual orientation is likely to change? Why/why not?
 - Do you think your homosexuality was a choice? Why or why not?
- In what ways has your experience been positive or negative since coming out as a lesbian?
 - Do you think there were/are major barriers to you accepting yourself as a lesbian? What were/are they?
- How do such experiences influence your lesbian identity?
- Do you have a lesbian role model? Please elaborate.

Raced Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on the final dimension of your identity we will discuss, yourself as a raced person.

- What do you call yourself with regards to race?
- Is this how you think of yourself?
- Do you call yourself a black woman? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What term do you use to define others in your race? Do you use this term to define yourself? Why or why not?
- How is the way you see yourself as raced similar and different to the way you see your race/Blacks in general?
- How would you define the term black (or the term you use) as it applies to race?
 - Does this constitute (makes up) [her term]/blackness? Why or why not?
 - Does either of these {black/[her term]} define you? Why or why not?
- How do you think your race [her term] are viewed in this culture?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantaged of having an education as a [her term]/Black woman?
- Does religion influence your racial identity?
- Are you attracted to women of other races and ethnicities? Which ones?
- Have you heard people say that, “having interracial relationships means you are a ‘traitor to the race?’” Who’s said that? How do you feel about that statement?

Integrated Identity

You've described yourself in three ways...as a student-athlete, as a lesbian, and as a [her term]/black woman. Now we will discuss how these three aspects of your identity are integrated.

- Which aspects of your identity discussed (student-athlete, lesbian, [her term]/Black) comes closest to describing who you really are? Or, how do you see these aspects of your identity making up your self? (For example, how do you visualize them?)
 - How are these parts of yourself related to each other? How do they interact?
 - Which is the most important to you? Why?
 - Do you feel that one aspect of your identity takes precedence over another if it is more visible? If so, how?
 - Which aspect of your identity is primary? Why?
 - Is there any aspect of your identity that you consider central at present?
- Based on the [blank] aspect of your identity being primary, do you claim this aspect of your identity because you are proud of it? Why or why not?
- What do you think influenced the way you see these components of your identity?
 - How has leaving home to attend college influenced the components of your identity? In what way(s)?
 - Can you think of an experience that opened your eyes to the multiple aspects of your identity?
- Do you feel pressure from society to pick one identity over another? If so, how?
 - Have there been some aspect of your identity that you have felt you had to silence or reject?
- What strategies do you use or implement to juggle the multiple aspects of your identity?
- Do you feel your actions are seen as a reflection on a particular image for any component of your respective identity?
- How would you describe your relationship to the gay/lesbian community as you define community? (Have you ever been active in the lesbian community)?
- How would you describe your relationship to the Black community as you define it?
- How would you describe your relationship to the student-athlete community as you define it?
- How supported do you feel by these three communities? Is there a difference in the ways that each community (lesbian, black, and student-athlete) accepts your sexual orientation?
 - Did your coming out experience and identity as a lesbian woman change your sense of acceptance in the Black community? Your level of involvement in the Black community?
- Do you think being a lesbian and/or Black affects the community in which you live? If so, how?
- Are you fearful of discrimination because you are lesbian, black[her term], or a woman? Why or why not?
- If someone was to ask you who you are today, and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?

Post-Interview Questions

- Is there anything that you would like to add that was not addressed in my questions?
What other comments do you have?
- How did you feel about this interview?

Thank you very much! I really appreciate your time.

Appendix C

Letter to Key Contacts/Trusted Individuals

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to take this opportunity to share and inform you of a study I will be conducting as part of my master's thesis at the University of Tennessee. I am interested in understanding how Black lesbian athletes at NCAA Division I institutions negotiate their various identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a student-athlete. Often the best way to learn about another individual's experience is to ask her directly. Thus, it is my goal to provide a voice for this invisible population and then to share it with others, anonymously.

I am interested in interviewing co-participants who meet the following criteria:

- (1) they self-identify as lesbian;
- (2) they self-identify of being of African descent including bi- or multiracial;
and
- (3) they currently or formerly (no more than five years ago) participated in a varsity sport at an NCAA Division I institution.

If you know any individuals who fit this criteria (or you fit it yourself) and would be willing to talk about identity, please contact me by email at jross3@utk.edu. In addition, if you have any questions please feel free to contact me as well. Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Jillian R. Ross

Appendix D

Informed Consent with Release of Confidentiality

Informed Consent with Release of Confidentiality

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville supports the practice and protection of human subjects participating in research. The information that follows is given so that you are aware of the nature of the study and can then decide if you wish to participate in this study. If you decide to participate in the present study, you are free to withdraw at any point during the course of the study without penalty.

This study is being conducted in order to address how Black lesbian athletes at NCAA Division I institutions negotiate their various identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a student-athlete. Your involvement will include your personal thoughts, feelings, and reflections that have occurred throughout this study. With your participation in this study, it is hoped the information acquired can be used to help others interested in sport better understand not only this distinct population, but also facilitate the psychological aspects of negotiating through these identities.

We foresee no major risks associated with your participation. However, should you feel any emotional discomfort during the interview due to the discussion of your identity and specifically your lesbian identity, you will have a formal opportunity at the end of the interview to express any concerns or questions you might have regarding any process that occurred before, during or after your participation in this study. There are also counseling services available to students at most universities should you feel it necessary. The University of Tennessee has a policy that although there are no major risks associated with involvement in this study, compensation will not automatically be provided for physical injury or psychological distress.

In regards to confidentiality, you are consenting to not have the protection of confidentiality. This means you will not chose a pseudonym to protect your name, and in fact your name will be used to link you to your information. However, the principal investigator will still keep all records and data collected in a secure and confidential space located at the University of Tennessee. Any data collected over the course of your participation will be viewed by the principal investigator and her faculty advisor. Upon completion of the analysis, the data will be locked in a file at HPER for three years. Quotes will be used that will identify you as a participant of this study, including in formal write-ups or presentations.

Your participation is solicited, but strictly voluntary, and you can withdrawal at any time with no penalty. You will have a formal opportunity to express any questions or concerns following the completion of the interview. However, please feel free to contact the principal investigator or faculty advisor if there are any questions or concerns during any stage of your participation. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and those associated with the present study thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Jillian R. Ross
Principal Investigator
(865) 974-9973
jross3@utk.edu

Leslee A. Fisher, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor
(865) 974-9973
lfisher2@utk.edu

Participant's Name (Please Print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: ___/___/___

Appendix E

Confidentiality Statement of Primary Investigator

Statement of Confidentiality by Primary Investigator

As the primary investigator, I agree to maintain strict confidence regarding your name and everything that is said during this interview. Similarly, any individuals who are asked to help with this study will sign a confidentiality statement and will agree to the same. You will be able to choose a pseudonym to represent yourself in all transcripts and written analyses so that your actual name will not be linked in any way with your data. All records and data collected will be kept in a secure and confidential space located at the University of Tennessee.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Appendix F
Informed Consent

Informed Consent Statement

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville supports the practice and protection of human subjects participating in research. The information that follows is given so that you are aware of the nature of the study and can then decide if you wish to participate in this study. If you decide to participate in the present study, you are free to withdraw at any point during the course of the study without penalty.

This study is being conducted in order to address how Black lesbian athletes at NCAA Division I institutions negotiate their various identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and being a student-athlete. Your involvement will include the completion of one semi-structured interview. The anticipated interview time length will be two to four hours. With your participation in this study, it is hoped the information acquired can be used to help others interested in sport better understand not only this distinct population, but also facilitate the psychological aspects of negotiating through these identities.

We foresee no major risks associated with your participation. However, should you feel any emotional discomfort during the interview due to the discussion of your identity and specifically your lesbian identity, you will have a formal opportunity at the end of the interview to express any concerns or questions you might have regarding any process that occurred before, during or after your participation in this study. There are also counseling services available to students at most universities should you feel it necessary. The University of Tennessee has a policy that although there are no major risks associated with involvement in this study, compensation will not automatically be provided for physical injury or psychological distress.

To ensure that your rights as a participant are maintained, the principal investigator will keep all records and data collected in a secure and confidential space located at the University of Tennessee. Any data collected over the course of your participation will be viewed by the principal investigator, her faculty advisor, and a research group that will assist in analyzing the data. Upon completion of the analysis, the data will be locked in a file at HPER for three years. The audio recordings will be deleted upon transcription to a word processing document. No quotes will be used that would identify you as a participant of this study in any way, including in formal write-ups or presentations; all results will be used to discuss the general experience of Black lesbian athletes at NCAA Division I institutions.

Your participation is solicited, but strictly voluntary, and you can withdrawal at any time with no penalty. You will have a formal opportunity to express any questions or concerns following the completion of the interview. However, please feel free to contact the principal investigator or faculty advisor if there are any questions or concerns during any stage of your participation. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and those associated with the present study thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Jillian R. Ross
Principal Investigator
(865) 974-9973
jross3@utk.edu

Leslee A. Fisher, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor
(865) 974-9973
lfisher2@utk.edu

Participant's Name (Please Print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: ___/___/___

Appendix G

Interview #1 Interview Guide

Interview Guide

The questions highlighted in yellow will be asked only if the co-participant does not answer the question in the question previously asked.

Read confidentiality statement and obtain informed consent; have the co-participant choose a pseudonym.

Introduction/Briefing

Today I'd like us to focus on three specific components of your identity. These components are yourself as a student-athlete, your sexual identity, and yourself as a raced person. I also want you to think about how important each of these components is to your identity, if they are. Some questions may seem sensitive in nature, so please let me know if you feel uncomfortable and we can go on to the next question. Just keep in mind, this is an opportunity to talk about yourself in a supportive confidential environment. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Demographic Info

- What is your age?
- What year are you in school?
- What sport do you currently play?
 - Are you a starter/non-starter?
 - Scholarship athlete?
 - What other sports have you been involved in?
- What was your family of origin like? (i.e., brothers, sisters, parents, other relatives)
- Where are you from?
 - What is the culture like there?
 - How much value do you place on your home of origin/how important is it to you?
- Have you lived in other places in your lifetime?
 - What were those cultures like?

Identity

Student-Athlete Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on the first dimension of your identity, yourself as a student-athlete.

- How would you define/describe a student-athlete?
- How would you define/describe a female student-athlete?
 - Is this similar or different than the way you would define/describe a student-athlete in general?
- How do you define yourself as a student-athlete? Why?
- How is the way you define yourself as a student-athlete similar to or different from the way you see female student-athletes in general?
- How do you think student-athletes are viewed within your university? In society?

- How do you think female student-athletes are viewed at your university? In society?
- Are there any stereotypes about female student-athletes at your university? In society?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of being a female student-athlete?
- How would you describe your relationship to the student-athlete community as you define it? How supported do you feel by it to be who you are?
- Is religion tied in any way to being a student-athlete? If so, why? If not, why not?
 - Do you have a religious affiliation? Do you belong to a place of worship?
 - What role has religion played in your life, if any?
 - If religion plays a role in your life, in what ways (if at all) does it play a role in your community?

Is there anything else about being a student-athlete that you think is important?

Sexual Identity Stereotypes as Related to Sport

As a way for us to begin to discuss how you see your sexual identity we will talk about stereotypes of lesbians as related to sport.

- Are you aware of any stereotypes of lesbians in sport?
 - What are these stereotypes?
- Were your parents worried about you being a part of a team because of lesbians?
- How would you feel if someone called you a lesbian as an athlete?
- Does your team provide you with support for being gay? If so, how?
 - How about from other or older lesbians on your team?
- Is there a gay athlete community within your university or team?
 - How does it operate?
 - Are they supportive? In what ways?
- Have you ever been discriminated against as an athlete because of the lesbian stereotype?

Is there anything else about sexual identity stereotypes related to sport that you think is important?

Sexual Identity and Coming Out

Now we will discuss your sexual identity and your coming out process.

- How do you define your sexual identity?
- How would you define/describe lesbians in general?
 - Do you use this term to define yourself? Why or why not?
- How do you think lesbians are viewed in this culture?
- When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be [her term]?
- When was your first experience of being with a woman? What was the experience like?
- When was your first relationship with a woman? What was the experience like? How long did the relationship last? Is/was this your longest relationship with a woman?

- How did you move from a realization or feeling to a personal coming out to family, friends, and/or teammates? Did you/do you have a lesbian role model?
- Have you come out to your team? If so, when?
 - How was the experience?
- What has been your experience of coming out to others? (family, parents, etc.)
 - What was the environment?
 - What made it difficult?
 - What made it easier?
 - Say anything you would like about this experience.
- Do you feel you had a coming out process? If so, please elaborate. If not, why?
- Was there a person or relationship tied to coming out?
- How would you describe your relationship to the gay/lesbian community as you define community? (Have you ever been active in the lesbian community)? How supported do you feel by it to be who you are?
- How do you define family? What makes up your family or families?
- Did the influence of your family/community/religion affect whether you came out? In what ways?
- Do you think the sport environment did or does influence your coming out in any way?
- How “out” would you consider yourself?
- Are there times when you have to go back into the closet? Why/why not?
 - How does this make you feel?
- Could your behavior be considered more out while playing your sport than at other times? Why/why not?
- Have you ever tried to pass as heterosexual? Why/why not? Do you think your sexuality is visible or invisible?
 - If invisible, how does this affect your identity?
- Does your family discuss your [her term] identity with others? What do they usually say?
- In your opinion, do you feel your [het term]/homosexuality has taken away from your family structure? Why or why not?
- Do you believe your sexual orientation is likely to change? Why/why not?
- Why do you think homosexuality happens? (Probe only if necessary: nature vs. nurture, choice vs. biology). Please explain.
- In what ways has your experience been positive or negative since coming out as a [her term]?
 - Do you think there were/are major barriers to you accepting yourself as a [her term]? What were/are they?
- How do such experiences influence your [her term] identity?
- Have you ever felt discrimination as a [her term]? Please explain.

Is there anything else about your sexual identity and coming out process that you think is important?

Raced Identity

Now, I'd like us to focus on the final dimension of your identity we will discuss, yourself as a raced person.

- What do you call yourself with regards to race?
- Is this how you think of yourself?
- Do you call yourself a black woman? **If so, why? If not, why not?**
- What term do you use to define others in your race? **Do you use this term to define yourself? Why or why not?**
- How is the way you see yourself as a [her term] person similar and different to the way you see [her term]/Blacks in general?
- How would you define the term black (or the term you use) as it applies to race?
- Does this make up [her term]/blackness? **Why or why not?**
- Does either of these {black/[her term]} define you? Why or why not?
- How do you think [her term] are viewed in this culture?
- Is there a Black community where you live? If so, how would you describe your relationship to the Black community as you define it? How supported do you feel by it to be who you are?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having an education as a [her term]/Black woman?
- Are you attracted to women of other races and ethnicities? **Which ones? Why?**

Have you heard people say that, "having interracial relationships means you are a 'traitor to the race?'" **Who's said that?** How do you feel about this statement?

- Does religion influence your racial identity in any way? If so, how?
- Have you ever felt discrimination as a Black person? Please explain.

Is there anything else about being [her term related to race] that you think is important?

Integrated Identity

You've described yourself in three ways...as a student-athlete, as a [her term], and as a [her term]/black woman. Now we will discuss how these three aspects of your identity are integrated.

- Which of the 3 aspects of your identity that we discussed (student-athlete, [her term]/lesbian, [her term]/Black) comes closest to describing who you really are? **(Probes to use only if necessary):**
 - Which is the most important to you? **(Probe to use only if necessary: Which aspect of your identity is primary? Why)?**
 - **Is there any aspect of your identity that you consider central at present?**
- Based on the [blank] aspect of your identity being primary, do you claim this aspect of your identity because:
 - you are proud of it? If so, how?
 - **it is more visible? If so, how?**
- You said [] is your primary identity....how are the other two parts of yourself related to the way you see yourself?

- What do you think has influenced the way you see these aspects of your identity?
 - (Potential probe): Has leaving home to attend college influenced these three aspects of your identity? In what way(s)?
 - Can you think of an experience (or a defining moment) that opened your eyes to the multiple aspects of your identity?
- Do you feel pressure from society to pick one identity over another? If so, how?
 - Have there been some aspect of your identity that you have felt you had to silence or reject?
- What strategies do you use or implement to juggle the multiple aspects of your identity?
- If someone was to ask you who you are today, and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?

Is there anything else about your integrated identity of being a student-athlete, [her term]/lesbian, and [her term]/black that you think is important?

Post-Interview Questions

- Is there anything that you would like to add that was not addressed in my questions? What other comments do you have?
- How did you feel about this interview?

Thank you very much! I really appreciate your time.

Appendix H
Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

As an individual involved with this thesis, I understand the interview transcriptions that I will help analyze may contain information of a sensitive nature. I also understand the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the information given in the interviews.

With this in mind, I agree not to discuss these interviews outside of the context of working with the principle investigator. In addition, I agree I will make no attempts to identify the research co-participants. If at any point during my involvement in the research group I feel I can identify any of the research co-participants whose interviews are being analyzed I will excuse myself from the research group.

Signature

Date

Name (printed)

VITA

Jillian Robin Ross was born in Kansas City, MO on June 9, 1982 to Marsha Gene and Humphrey Robert Ross. She attended Pembroke Hill School until the end of her sophomore year and then transferred to St. Theresa's Academy. She graduated from St. Teresa's Academy in 2000.

In 2004, Jillian earned a Bachelor of Science in Human & Organizational Development and Psychology from Vanderbilt University. Upon completion of her degree, she earned the Peabody College Ed Martin community service award as well as graduating cum laude.

Jillian entered the master's program in the sport studies department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the Fall of 2004. While there she was awarded the University of Tennessee Black Graduate Fellowship and the University of Tennessee Commission of Women's 2005 Student Woman of Achievement Award. Her research focused on the intersection of identity – race, sexuality, gender, class, and being a student-athlete – in order to create social justice in not only sport but also sport psychology. Jillian received a Master of Science in sport studies with an emphasis in sport psychology. In addition, she obtained a graduate certificate in Women's Studies as well as graduating summa cum laude.