

HOOPERCHICKS: BLACK WOMEN, COLLEGE BASKETBALL AND IDENTITY  
NEGOTIATION

A Dissertation  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

This project used in depth interviews with Black women who played Division I college basketball from 1997-2007 to elucidate how they developed their racial, gender and athletic identities during adolescence, and how those identities are performed within the role of student athlete. My research shows that there are specific factors attributed the cultural significance basketball has in the black community and the increased visibility of women's basketball during my participants' adolescence that position basketball as a reference group of Black women's empowerment. I call my participants "Black woman hoopers" to represent the conflation of race, gender and athletic identity. The qualities of Black woman hoopers include but are not limited to: strong work ethic, perseverance, value of teamwork/sisterhood, and self-confidence.

Investigating my participants' college experiences at predominately white institutions revealed the following themes: the importance of having Black teammates and coaches to provide mentoring; exacerbated racial battle fatigue for participants with primarily white teammates and coaches; the development of a community of support extending beyond their teammates and coaches; and how the larger community of Black woman hoopers transcends individual teams and exists as a space for a wide array of representations of Black womanhood not constrained by Eurocentric standards of beauty and femininity.

Framing inquiries into my participants' experiences after their college careers with

the 2007 Don Imus incident in which he called women on the predominately Black Rutgers University women's basketball team, "Nappy headed hoes" revealed the extent to which my participants understood the negative perceptions of Black woman hoopers. It also allowed them to reflect on ways that their experiences as Black woman hoopers have equipped them to deal with similar stereotypes that exist in their current career fields.

This research combats the silence of Black women athletes' voices and presents Basketball as a unique space where Black women, because they comprise a majority at elite levels, can celebrate and build solidarity that include the spectrum of representations of Black womanhood that extend beyond athletics.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the memory of the “Mayor of North Minneapolis” Mr. Keith Davis who passed on June 19, 2012. Keith ignited my passion for basketball and helped me use it to avoid the many traps set on the Northside of Minneapolis. In 1995, he got me tickets to see the NCAA Division I women’s basketball final four at the Target Center. Seeing our hometown heroines Brandi Decker and Tracy Henderson as players for the UGA Lady Bulldogs and watching the UCONN Huskies go undefeated in their win over the Tennessee Lady Vols was the moment I truly believed that I could play Division I college ball one day; a goal I am glad he saw me accomplish.

Keith saw something in me beyond my basketball skills; he challenged me to be a leader in my community and be a role model for the younger kids who were looking up to me when I thought I was invisible. Keith always made sure that the YMCA was a safe place not only for me but for all my peers growing up and I can honestly say that on numerous occasions, his intervention saved my life from going in a very negative direction. Whether it was challenging me to a game of horse or conversing with me for hours about the best NBA and college players of the 1990s, he helped develop my love for basketball not only as a player, but also as a student of the game. It pains me that he is no longer here physically to witness the completion of my journey, but I know he is smiling at my accomplishments.

This project is also dedicated to every Black girl who found refuge in an empty gymnasium and fell in love with the sound of a bouncing basketball.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Social and Historical Context

#### ***The legacy of C. Vivian Stringer and the significance of the 2007 Rutgers University women's basketball team***

On April 3, 2007 the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers played the Rutgers University Scarlet Knights in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) women's basketball Division I championship game. Rutgers University head coach C. Vivian Stringer had finally reached the championship game after being eliminated in the semi-finals with the two teams she led to the Final Four. Stringer began her career as the head coach at Cheney State University, a Division II Historically Black College/University (HBCU) outside of Philadelphia. As the head coach there, Stringer led lady wolves to the first ever NCAA women's basketball final four in 1982. Just over a decade later in 1993, as the head coach for the University of Iowa Lady Hawkeyes, she led them to the final four where they lost to the Ohio State University lady Buckeyes in the semi-final game.

Stringer has been recognized as an advocate for Black players throughout her career; the majority of her players have always been Black and favored playing an up-tempo style of basketball that relied on toughness of defense and individual creativity attributed to Black cultural influences. Off the court, Stringer is considered a role model because of the way she has persevered through personal adversity with courage and

elegance. Her accomplishments are recognized throughout the basketball world and she was inducted into both the Basketball and Women's Basketball the Halls of Fame in 2009.

Coach Stringer became the head coach at Rutgers University in 1995 and led the school to their first 20-win season three years later. Stringer's reputation as a tough and loving coach enabled her to recruit some of the nation's best Black female prep players to Rutgers and the 2007 championship team was no exception with four players from that team currently playing professionally. Stringer's Scarlet Knights were the fourth seed in their tournament bracket and upset top seeded Duke University and third seeded Arizona State University to reach the final four with the lowest seed of any of the remaining teams. Though they dominated LSU in the semifinal game 59-35, they were underdogs as they faced fellow hall of fame coach Pat Summit's Lady Volunteers (Vols) team led by first team All-American, Wade Trophy winner, United States Basketball Writers' Association (USBWA) player of the year, Wooden Award winner and media darling Candace parker. The Lady Vols defeated the Scarlet Knights 59-46 giving coach Pat Summit her seventh national championship. Although Rutgers lost the championship game, their season's accomplishments were recognized as representative of the perseverance to overcome obstacles that have marked their head coach's coaching career and personal life. The team had no seniors and five freshmen and started the season losing four of their first six games. By the end of the season when the tournament seeds were determined, this Rutgers's team had won the university's first Big East Championship defeating UCONN. On their road to the championship game,

they defeated a Duke team that had beaten them by 40 points earlier in the season. In addition to the players' accomplishments, Coach C. Vivian Stringer was given another opportunity to win a National Championship (Stringer & Tucker 2009). Unfortunately, the team's accomplishments were soon overshadowed by comments made about them by radio shock jock Don Imus.

***Don Imus' "Nappy Headed Ho's" comment***

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, the morning following the game, radio host and infamous "Shock Jock" Don Imus, host of "Imus in the Morning", had the following exchange with the show's executive producer Bernard McGuirk about the NCAA women's Division I basketball championship game:

IMUS: That's some rough girls from Rutgers. Man, they got tattoos and...

McGUIRK: Some hard-core ho's.

IMUS: That's some nappy-headed ho's. I'm going to tell you that now, man that's some...whew. And the girls from Tennessee, they all look cute; you know so, like, kind of like...I don't know.

McGUIRK: A Spike Lee thing?!

IMUS: Yeah!

McGUIRK: The jigaboos versus the wannabees, that movie that he had...

IMUS: I don't know if I would've wanted to beat Rutgers, but [Tennessee] did ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)).

During the two men's exchange, there was no discussion of the actual game, no congratulations to coach Pat Summit for capturing her 7<sup>th</sup> national championship, no

mention of Rutgers center Kia Vaughn's double-double with 20 points and 10 rebounds or Tennessee forward Nicki Anosike's game high 16 rebounds (fs.ncaa.org 2011). The two men focused instead on the physical appearance of Rutgers' women's basketball players, referring to them as "nappy headed ho's" and "hard-core ho's" in contrast to the Tennessee team that Imus claimed, "all look cute." Imus' comments completely undermined the celebration of a milestone for Black women in college basketball.

### Controlling Images and Silencing of Black Women Athletes

Imus' reference to the Rutgers' women's basketball team as "nappy-headed ho's" reflects a number of various stereotypes of Black women that have existed since slavery. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins refers to a set of four gender specific racial stereotypes as controlling images because of the way they are used to manipulate the understanding of Black womanhood and to justify oppression of Black women (Collins 2000). Collins designates the stereotypes in her book as the mammy/matriarch, the welfare mother/queen, the Black lady and the jezebel/whore/hoochie. Although she acknowledges these as distinct images, she asserts that their characteristics are often combined when applied to one Black woman or a group of Black women. Collins discusses the controlling images in terms of behavior but also acknowledges that they are accompanied by African identified features (large lips, wide nose, dark skin, curly "nappy" hair, full figured bodies, etc.) (2000). She further asserts that Eurocentric beauty standards claim that no matter how intelligent,

educated or beautiful Black women are, the presence of African features automatically casts them as inferior to white women (Collins 2000).

The controlling images of Black women discussed by Collins have intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality that are all present in Imus' reference to Rutgers' women's basketball players as "Nappy Headed Ho's". The reference to their nappy hair identified the women as not in line with Eurocentric beauty standards, and the designation of them as ho's, which derives from the word whores, identifies them as non-respectable sexual objects. Though Collins traces these images back to slavery, Imus' use of them in his attacks on the Rutgers women's basketball team prove that they still exist as a frame of reference for all Black women today.

Collins further claims that Black women athletes, especially basketball players face an additional dilemma because of their muscular and athletic bodies, she writes:

The danger for Black women athletes does not lie in being deemed less feminine than white women because historically, Black women as a group have been stigmatized in this fashion. Rather, for all female athletes and for Black women athletes in particular, the danger lies in being identified as lesbians. The stereotype of women athletes as "manly" and as being lesbians and for Black women as being more "masculine" than white women converge to provide a very different interpretive context for Black female athletes. In essence, the same qualities that are uncritically celebrated for Black male 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 (2005 135-6).

Collins claims that Black female basketball players are more susceptible to attacks for being too "manly" because basketball is often characterized as a masculine sport. She also suggests that corporate interests within women's basketball have resulted in a marginalization of Black women even though they dominate the sport on professional

and intercollegiate levels because only images that fit within the boundaries of traditional femininity are highlighted.

In addition to being marginalized within the athletic community where they comprise a majority, Black women's athletic experiences are underrepresented within the scholarship pertaining to athletics that focus on gender and race (Bruening 2005). The justification for the absence of Black women's experiences has historically been the low numbers who participate. White women comprise an overwhelming majority of college athletes (76.2%); basketball is the only women's sport where Black players comprise nearly half (47.9%) (Lapchick, Harrison & Buckstein 2012). At the WNBA level, Black women comprise an overwhelming majority (73%) (Lapchick, Harrison & Buckstein 2012). Because Black women are competing in large numbers at the highest levels of women's basketball, it is necessary that their experiences be investigated proportionately. My research adds an important narrative to this growing body of research by looking specifically at Division I basketball and the ways in which Black women negotiate their race, gender, class and sexual identities within that context.

### Purpose of the Research

The purpose of my research is to elucidate the experiences of Black women as Division I basketball players. I chose basketball specifically because it is the sport where the greatest number of Black women college athletes is concentrated (Lapchick, Harrison & Buckstein 2012). This statistic fuels my curiosity about identity negotiation because basketball is also a sport that has traditionally been synonymous with Black



urban masculinity (Boyd 1997; May 2008; Brooks 2009). As a result, Black women playing Division I basketball are marginalized because their gender identity is perceived negatively because they are women playing what is considered to be a masculine sport. My research seeks to understand how they develop their race, gender and athletic identities during adolescence and how they navigate the terrain of college athletics and how differing perceptions of their identities influence their experiences as Division I student athletes.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Foundation

#### ***Athletic identity and role salience***

Borrowing from Adler and Adler's use of the concepts of role commitment and role evaluation as two variables used to analyze role salience (1987), my research seeks uncover the interaction between race, gender, sexual and athletic identity for Black women playing Division I basketball. By interaction, I am specifically focusing on the development of these women's identities during adolescence and the subsequent performance of these identities during their tenure as student athletes. According to Adler and Adler's research, this is an inquiry in role commitment, a predictor in which an individual's multiple identities are evoked in a given situation (1987). I am also concerned with the external factors that influence role commitment e.g. relationships with coaches, teammates and other student athletes, perceptions of Black women and student athletes, and university culture. Adler and Adler categorize these factors within

the variable of role evaluation. Role evaluation acknowledges that the way individuals are positively or negatively evaluated by other influences their identity salience (1987).

Before I can understand the interaction between these identities, it is important for me to understand the process of identity development during adolescence for Black women who play Division I basketball. Research on race and athletic identity focuses primarily on boys' understandings of masculinity and manhood. Researchers claim that athletic participation is a way for boys to perform masculinity (Majors 1990), and also point to the overrepresentation of Black men in sports, particularly basketball and football. This results in Black boys connecting sports participation to Black manhood (Harrison 2001). Studies about girls' participation in sports during adolescences are most often used to support claims that athletic participation is positively correlated with high academic performance and social acceptance (Butcher 1989, Perry-Burney & Takyi 2002). Though the findings of these studies are important, they do not provide any insight into the ways that athletic participation is connected to the development of racial and gender identity for Black girls. Understanding what role athletic participation plays in the development of Black girls' identity development during adolescence will inform my understanding of how these identities interact within the context of Division I basketball.

### ***Using intersectionality to critique identity salience***

While Adler and Adler's research borrows from Stryker's identity salience hierarchy, my research critiques Stryker's claims. Stryker claims that organizing multiple identities in a hierarchy can reduce or eliminate role conflict (1968). I assert

that, because discrimination often combines elements of race, gender, class and sexuality to attack an individual target, it becomes impossible to organize identities into any salience hierarchy when attempting to cope with or respond to discrimination. To make this critique, I use the concept of intersectionality that suggests that multiple identities interact and are performed simultaneously for Black women. In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw introduced academia to intersectionality, a theory that culminated over a century of work by Black women (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality asserts that Black women's experiences cannot be summed up by their race and gender because various forms of oppression like racism, sexism, homophobia and others do not act independently of each other. Crenshaw suggested instead that forms of oppression are interrelated and result in unique forms of discrimination. Although Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in 1989, the recognition the Black women experience discrimination based on both their race and gender dates back to 1851 when Sojourner Truth asked "Ain't I a Woman"? Ana Julia Cooper wrote about the "double enslavement" of Black women forty years later in 1892 in her book *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman*. At the turn of the century in 1904, Mary Church Terrell as the first president of the National Association of Colored women acknowledged what Frances Beale referred to as the "double jeopardy" of being a Black woman in 1969. The marginalization of Black women's experiences was visible in both the Black Power and mainstream feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s and Black women expressed feelings of exclusion from groups they had attempted to forge solidarity with, and worked to reframe both Black and feminist conscious (Hooks 1981; King 1988;

Wallace 1979). The concepts underlying Crenshaw's intersectionality were not new, but the concept was framed as a tool to be used in academia when previously, Black women's voices were relegated to literature where the novels of Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara and the writing of Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and others provided dynamic representations of Black womanhood that centered their experiences (Baker 1989; Brown 2010)

Intersectionality is a theoretical concept that allows me to build my research on the acknowledgment that because Black women experience unique gender and racial oppression simultaneously, their experiences should be studied separately. It is also a methodological approach that allows Black women the space to speak about and center their experiences to be used as the basis of theoretical analysis whereas previously they have been marginalized. This research employs intersectionality in an attempt to contribute to the growing narrative of Black women's experiences within athletics.

### Overview of the Study

#### ***Background chapters***

Chapter I, the current chapter, provides the historical social context and purpose of the research, as well as an outline for how this project is organized. This chapter introduces the assertions made in the research design and ends with an acknowledgement of its limitations. Chapter II further develops conceptual framework of the project by summarizing relevant literature. It begins with an overview of literature on athletic identity with respect to role conflict and racial and gender

identity. Next, there is a review of the literature specific to the experiences of Black women athletes at the intercollegiate level. Finally there is a review of literature of intersectionality as both a theoretical concept and methodological approach. Understanding this literature is essential in understanding both context and significance of this research. Chapter III provides details about the use of intersectionality as a methodological approach in this project. This chapter also provides a summary of the data collection process; participant recruitment, development of instrument, the transcription and coding process, and ends acknowledging the obstacles faced and how they were addressed.

### ***Findings and analysis chapters***

Chapters IV, V, and VI reveal the findings of the research, using the themes identified in the interview prompts as well as those that became relevant during the data coding process. These chapters will include direct quotes from participant interviews that articulate the various narratives that developed surrounding particular themes. In addition to reporting the findings of this research, these chapters will include the use of existing race, gender and athletic identity literature including, but not limited the studies summarized in chapter II to analyze participant responses. Chapter IV will specifically address the influence of race, gender and athletic participation on the identity development of my participants during their adolescence. Chapter V will focus specifically on the influence of their race, gender and athletic identity on their experiences as they perform their roles as student athletes within the context of Division I Basketball. Chapter VI uses the Don Imus incident to elucidate not only my

participants' understanding of negative stereotypes of Black women basketball players, but also their approaches to cope with these stereotypes and ways that playing basketball provided them with skills and strategies to deal with similar stereotypes beyond basketball.

### ***Discussion and conclusion***

Chapter VII, the concluding chapter, summarizes the findings reported in Chapters IV, V and VI. This chapter identifies the social implications of the research findings and how this work fits into existing bodies of literature on similar subjects. It also acknowledges important issues outside the scope of the study that suggest a direction for further research.

### **Research Assertions**

#### ***Self-identification as Black***

One requirement for participants in my research is that they identify racially as Black. Understanding that race is socially constructed, my interview questions will allow me to gain a clearer understanding of what "Blackness" means to my participants and how it shapes the construction of their identities as women and athletes. For my research I am not distinguishing ethnic cultural differences between Black women who are American born and those born elsewhere. This is not to ignore the differences in ethnicities within the racial category of Black, but rather with the acknowledgement that different ethnic groups are racialized and subject to racial prejudice. Rutgers University standout Matee Ajavon was born in Liberia and immigrated to the United States as a

young child but she was still characterized on Imus' radio show based on racial stereotypes of Black women regardless of ethnicity.

### ***Playing in the first decade of the WNBA***

Another requirement for my participants is that they played college basketball 1997-2007. I chose this timeframe because I assert that there are unique dynamics for Black women who played college basketball during the first decade of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) because it presented them with an opportunity to pursue basketball as a career here in the United States that was not provided to previous generations of players. My inquiries will attempt to elucidate ways that their experiences as basketball players were influenced by this opportunity.

### ***Former player recollections***

The third requirement for my participants is that they be former Division I players. I am aware that there are Black women playing college basketball at levels besides Division I, but I chose this level because it is the only level that Black women have ever comprised a majority of and consistently comprise nearly or more than half of the players (Lapchick, Harrison & Buckstein 2012). My assertion is that the increased visibility and focus on Black women in Division I college basketball affects both the players' identity performance and their public image.

### Limitations of the Research

I am aware that the timeframe for my participants' college careers prevents any longitudinal analysis but as previously mentioned, I am focused on the experiences of Black women college basketball players during the first decade of the WNBA. In the future I would like the opportunity to complete research in longitudinal research that investigates the dynamics in women's basketball that existed before the professional league in the United States; and those that evaluate the changes that have taken place as the WNBA approaches its 20<sup>th</sup> season. I am also aware that, by focusing only on NCAA Division I athletics, I am overlooking dynamics that exist at other levels not considered as competitive that may be important in understanding both the constructions of sport and the experiences of its players. Again, I chose Division I basketball because of the increased visibility and domination of Black women at the this and the professional level



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Chapter Organization

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical frameworks necessary to contextualize my study of identity negotiation for Black women playing Division I college basketball. The assertions of this project rely heavily on understanding how my participants develop their identities as “hoopers” during adolescence and how identities like race, gender and sexuality influence their role performance as student athletes. To understand the ways that these multiple identities interact within the context of Division I basketball for my participants, it is necessary to highlight relevant findings from previous research.

I begin with a summary of identity theory literature highlighting its two distinct approaches and justifying why they are both necessary to my research. Within the summary, I highlight studies that are specifically relevant to my research both theoretically and methodologically. After the summary, I briefly discuss how my research addresses acknowledged challenges within identity theory and what my findings can contribute to the existing literature.

I move next to a discussion of athletic identity beginning with Britton Brewer's athletic identity measurement scale (AIMS), used to measure how salient the athletic role is for college students. After introducing the AIMS, I summarize literature pertaining to women athletes. This summary focuses on the perceived gender role

conflict. I also summarize literature pertaining to Black student athletes that focuses on academic role conflict and stereotype threat.

In an attempt to better understand the experiences of Black women Division I student athletes specifically, I summarize Sellers, Kuperminc and Damas' 1997 research addressing their experiences in comparison to those of Black men and white women athletes.

I introduce Kemberle Crenshaw's Intersectionality as the theoretical framework for my research and to contextualize the development of Intersectionality and clarify its relevance to my project. I summarize the efforts of Black women since slavery, to have the ways that race and gender interact simultaneously to produce unique experiences for them acknowledged in literature and addressed through scholarship. Additionally, I summarize recent literature that uses intersectionality to address the experiences of Black women student athletes. I conclude each section by briefly highlighting how these findings inform my research and end the chapter by reiterating the importance of this body of literature to my project.

### Identity Theory Development

Identity theory is derived from George Herbert Mead's writings about the "I" and the "me". In *Mind, Self, and Society* Mead discusses the "I" and the "me" as distinct aspects of the "self". The "me" is the social self, an organized set of attitudes to others, which an individual assumes. The "I" is an individual's response to the "me" (Mead 1934). Mead's writings on the "self" and its relationship to "society" remained difficult

to interpret so the purpose of Identity Theory was to explain Mead's concepts thoroughly enough that they could be used for empirical research (Stryker 1968). A simplified assertion of Mead's framework states that, "Society shapes self, shapes social behavior" (Stryker and Burke 2000). In attempting to better understand the concepts of "society" and "self" and to clarify their relationship, identity theory is developed into two distinct, but closely related approaches. One approach focused on how social structures affect the self, and how the self thus influences social behavior. The second approach focused on the internal dynamics of self-development as it affects social behavior (Stryker and Burke 2000).

### ***Effect of social structure on the “self”***

Sheldon Stryker first connected Mead's work on self and society to contemporary sociological views of society and self. Stryker viewed society as:

A mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organized, embedded in an array of groups, organizations, communities, and institutions and intersected by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and other variables. In addition, persons are seen as living their lives in relatively small and socialized networks of social relationships, through roles that support their participation in social networks (Stryker and Burke 2000; p 285).

Stryker took this understanding and substituted Mead's concept of "social behavior" for what he labeled "role choice behavior" and defined roles as expectations attached to positions occupied in network relationships. He concludes that identities are internalized role expectations (Stryker 1968).

In his 1968 published article “Identity Salience and Role Performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction for family research”, Stryker suggests that the "self" is

an organizational structure with identities existing in a hierarchy that is determined by salience (p. 559). For Stryker, salience is defined as the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being evoked in a variety of situations (p. 560). He recognizes that individuals have multiple identities but insists that those identities do not have to be incompatible.

For Stryker, role conflicts occur under two conditions; 1) when an individual is unclear about the expectations of their roles or how to fulfill its expectations or 2) when an individual perceives that the expectations of various roles are contradictory. To resolve these role conflicts, Stryker developed the identity salience hierarchy (ISH). The ISH organizes an individual's identities in order from greatest to lowest salience as a way to both guide and understand their actions. ISH also addresses structural overlap, which occurs when a distinct set of relationships is mutually contingent at some point in time and evokes different identities by eliminating the necessity for an individual to perform multiple identities simultaneously (p. 560).

To explain how ISH works, Stryker introduces the concept of "commitment" which he measures as "the cost of giving up meaningful relations to others, should alternative courses of action be pursued" (p. 560). Stryker claims that the greater commitment an individual has to a particular identity, the higher that identity is located on the ISH (p. 562). In addition, he suggests that an individual's commitment to a particular identity will increase the likelihood that the individual's role performance will be consistent with the expectations attached to that identity (p. 563).

Finally, Stryker suggests that an individual's commitment to an identity will determine how frequently they will perceive situations as opportunities to perform according to the expectations attached to that identity (p. 563). These perceptions solidify the ISH because an individual will devote the majority of their time trying to fulfill the expectations of the identity to which they are the most committed. Stryker claims that individuals do not always consciously organize their identities, so they may not always be aware of the motivation for their behaviors. This is why he suggests using the ISH as a tool of analysis not only to predict individuals' behavior but also to increase their self-awareness and potentially influence future behaviors.

Stryker and his colleagues conducted research on various groups to further understand how role commitment predicts salience and influences behavior; Stryker and Serpe 1982 showed how salience of religious identity predicts time spent with religious activities, Callero 1985 investigated blood donor identity to connect a donor's salience and the frequency of donations, Nuttbrock and Freudiger 1991 provided evidence that the salience of mother identity predicted the extent to which mothers made sacrifices for their children (Stryker and Burke 2000).

Specifically relevant to my research is Richard T. Serpe's 1987 published article "Stability and Change in Self: A Structural Symbolic Interactionist Explanation". In this article, Serpe examines five identities associated with college life: 1) academic coursework, 2) athletic/recreational, 3) extracurricular, 4) personal involvements and 5) dating to elucidate the connection between identity salience and commitment (1987). Serpe extended Stryker's definition of commitment to include two independent

forms: the first form is interactional commitment, which refers to the number of social relationships associated with a given identity. This is also known as the extensiveness of an individual's commitment. The second of Serpe's forms is affective commitment, which refers to the affect attached to the potential loss of social relationships and activities associated with a given identity. This is referred to as the intensiveness of an individual's commitment (Serpe 1987, p. 45). Serpe introduces "choice" as a mechanism that affects commitment, asserting that it presumes a social structure that provides options while acknowledging that meaning of social structures lies in the way they limit and constrains choices (Serpe 1987). In recognizing this connection, Serpe claims that social relationships are constrained by the larger social structure.

To assess the level of choice freshmen felt with each of the five identities associated with college life, he asked 631 first semester freshmen the following question "How free do you feel to decide for yourself what you will do?" with respect to of the aforementioned identities. Students used a 1-7 scale to indicate their level of freedom with a response of 1 meaning "no freedom" and a response of 7 meaning "complete freedom to choose" (Serpe 1987, p. 46). Of Serpe's 631 participants 247 were men and 384 were women and Serpe separated his results by gender. Men in Serpe's study arranged the five student related identities in the following order from greatest freedom to least: Dating (6.1), Athletic/Recreational (5.9), Personal Involvement (4.9), Extracurricular (4.2), Coursework (2.2) (Serpe 1987). Women in Serpe's study arranged the five student related identities in the following order from greatest freedom to least:

Personal Involvement (5.8), Extracurricular (5.1), Dating (4.9), Athletic/Recreational (4.1), Coursework (1.9) (Serpe 1987).

Serpe's overarching inquiry was whether the self was "stable" or malleable and subject to change in response to factors both internal and external to their environment (Serpe 1987, p. 44). He concluded that, the "self" remained stable for freshmen who were able to join organizations that provided them the opportunities to behave in accordance with the highly salient identities they held before entering college (Serpe 1987; Stryker and Burke 2000). Serpe's 1987 research is particularly important to my project because it provides me with a basis to evaluate my participants' identities as college students.

### ***Internal dynamics of self-development***

While the work of Stryker, Serpe and others developed the aspect of identity theory connected to social structure, others scholars asserted a link between identity salience and behavior based on role expectations attached to an individual's identity building on Stryker's claim that identities are internalized role expectations (Stryker and Burke 2000). One of the theorists focusing more on the internal dynamics of self-processes is Hazel Markus. In her 1977 published article "Self-Schemata and Processing Information About the Self", Markus situated identity within the concept of cognitive schemata. According to Markus, "self-schemata are cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information contained in an individual's social experience" (Markus 1977, p. 63). For Markus, Self-schemata is the mechanism that allows individuals to cognitively give

meaning to experiences and determine how to behave in order to perform a desired identity. Markus writes:

The concept of self-schemata implies that information about the self in some areas has been categorized or organized in a way that results in a discernible pattern which may be used as a basis for future judgments, decisions, inferences, or predictions about the self (Markus 1977, p. 64).

Building on Markus' research, Burke and Reitzes asserted that shared meaning is the link between identity and behavior (1981; Stryker and Burke 2000). In their 1981 published article "The Link Between Identity and Role Performance" they indicated three distinctive features of identities:

First, identities are social products that are formed, maintained and confirmed through the processes of 1) naming or locating the self in social categories; 2) interacting with others in terms of these categories, and 3) engaging in self-presentation and altercasting to negotiate and perform the meanings and behavioral implications of the social categories. Second, identities are self-meanings that are acquired in particular situations and are based on the similarities of a role in relation to its counter-roles. Third, identities have symbolism that resonates in one person the same way it does in others (Burke and Reitzes 1981; Stryker and Burke 2000, p. 242).

For Burke and Reitzes, commitment is the mechanism that connects an individual to a stable set of self-meanings and links the self to social structure (Burke and Reitzes 1991).

For Burke specifically, identity is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is (Burke 1991, p. 837; Burke and Tully 1977). In his 1991 published article "Identity Processes and Social Stress" he asserted that when identity is activated, a feedback loop is established. He detailed the four components of this loop as the following:



1) A standard or setting (the set of self-meanings); 2) an input from the environment or social situation (including one's reflected appraisals, i.e., perceptions of self-relevant meanings); 3) a process that compares the input with the standard (a comparator); 4) and an output to the environment (meaningful behavior) (Burke 1991, p. 837).

Burke's model is used to evaluate the extent to which an individual's cognitive process aligns their self-perception to produce behaviors consistent with the expectations of the identity standard they seek to achieve. Burke's models clarifies these processes in two important ways: first, by seeing behavior as a function of the relationship between an individual's perception of their situation and the internalized self-meaning associated with that perception, and second by incorporating emotion into the model as a result of how well an individual's perceived self-meaning is consistent with the identity standard (Stryker and Burke 2000).

### ***Combining both models***

Although the two approaches to identity theory are viewed as being developed independently, combining them allows for deeper analysis of the identity development and role performance of individuals. Stryker and Burke acknowledge that identity can be either category based (e.g. race, gender) or role based (e.g. student, athlete) (2000). Stryker's social structure approach deals primarily with role based identities while Burke's cognitive processing approach deals primarily with category based identities. My research allows for investigation into both of these bases of identity by elucidating the ways that development of category based identities influence individuals' self-perception of the expectations of their role based identities. Specifically for my participants, I am examining the way that the development of their categorical identity as

Black women influences the ways they perform their role-based identity as student athletes.

#### Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

While Serpe's 1987 research gives me a basis to use for evaluating identities associated with college life, Britton Brewer's research provides me a basis for evaluating athletic identity. In 1993, an article entitled "Athletic Identity: Hercules' Muscles or Achilles Heel?" developed a way to measure athletic identity (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder 1993). The authors define athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role (1993, p. 237). Brewer recognizes both components of athletic identity and concluded that; in relation to the individual, it is a self-schema while in relation to society, it is a social role (1993).

Drawing on previous literature, Brewer asserts that the value of importance an individual attributes to a given behavior determines the extent to which perceived competence or incompetence in that behavior influences that individual's self-esteem (Brewer 1993, p. 238). Consequently, an individuals' incompetence in a domain of low perceived importance is unlikely to have a significant impact on that individual's self-esteem but incompetence in a domain of high perceived importance is likely to have a negative effect on an individual's self-valuation (Brewer 1993; 238). How an individual perceives the importance of their athletic identity is influenced by that individual's place in society. This relationship justifies Brewers designation of athletic identity as a social role.

A social role is defined by Pearlin within the context of athletic identity as a role that extends beyond the individual and can be influenced by family members, friends, teammates, coaches and other individuals with whom the athlete has significant relationships (Brewer 1993, p. 238; Heyman 1987; Pearlin 1983). Admitting that athletic identity has a social role, Brewer draws connections to Cooley's "looking glass self", a concept claiming that an individual's sense of self is derived from their internalizations of others' views of them (Brewer 1993, p. 238-9; Cooley 1902). This realization caused Brewer to acknowledge the possibility that individuals could be motivated to report a high athletic identity by the potential of gaining social status.

To further assess individual athletic identity salience, Brewer developed the athletic identity measurement scale (AIMS) after recognizing that there was no instrument with items that reflected both an individual's strength and exclusivity in relation to the salience of their athletic identity (Brewer 1993). Brewer also felt that this scale would advance investigation into positive benefits and negative consequences of strong athletic identity.

Brewer acknowledges that positive benefits of athletic participation include allowing individuals the opportunity to engage in social interaction that can build confidence (Pepitas 1987). Brewer also acknowledges that individuals with strong athletic identities have difficulty transitioning out of a career in sports, especially when the end of one's athletic career is caused by being cut from the team or by serious injury (Brewer 1993, p. 241-42; Deutsch 1985; Heyman 1986; Pearson & Pepitas 1990).

Brewer's athletic identity measurement scale (AIMS) is comprised of 10 items that he viewed as an accurate evaluation of the psychometric properties of athletic identity including its social, cognitive and affective aspects. Each of the ten items is a statement that an individual will record a value on a 1-7 Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" that speaks to the individual's athletic identity salience. The items on the scale are as follows:

1. I consider myself an athlete
  2. I have many goals related to sport
  3. Most of my friends are athletes
  4. Sport is the most important part of my life
  5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else
  6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself
  7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete
  8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport
  9. Sport is the only important thing in my life
  10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport
- (Brewer 1993, p. 243)

In order to evaluate the validity of the AIMS to measure athletic identity, Brewer conducted a study with 124 female and 119 male college students enrolled in a sports psychology class at Arizona State University. Brewer concluded that a measure of validity for his scale would be how significantly its results correlated with measures of similar instruments. He chose the perceived importance profile (PIP) that had been used in the past to distinguish between high and low physically active college students (Brewer 1993, p 242). Brewer found that AIMS scores correlated directly with PIP scores on the importance of sports competence scale (Brewer 1993 p. 244). This correlation satisfied brewer's concerns about the validity of the AIMS.

Brewer also satisfied the question of whether or not participants were reporting a strong athletic identity to gain higher social status by using the short form of the Marlow-Crowe Social Desirability scale; a 15-item questionnaire intended to measure the tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner (Brewer 1993, p. 243). The scores of Brewer's AIMS did not correlate significantly with scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale, thus Brewer concluded that his participants were reporting honestly about their athletic identities (Brewer 1993, p. 245). Though the results from this initial study satisfied some of Brewer's concerns about the validity of the AIMS, there were questions raised that subsequent studies were conducted to address.

The initial study raised concerns about the similarity between the AIMS and the Self-Role scale that measures involvement of the self in the sports role (Curry & Weaner 1987; Curry & Weiss 1989) because they both measured the commitment of an individual to sports. Brewer recognized that if the two were essentially measuring the same thing, then there would be no need for the AIMS. Similar concerns about the similarities between the AIMS and the PIP also arose in part because of the significant correlation in the results of the two measures. In order to address these concerns, Brewer conducted two additional studies.

The first of these studies found that although the AIMS "athletic identity" and the Self-Role Scale's "involvement of the self in the sport role" are similar, there is not enough shared variance to conclude that they have the same underlying construct (Brewer 1993, p. 247). The second study found that although there is some correlation

between the AIMS and the PIP, "athletic identity is related to but not the same as the importance one places on being good at sports" (Brewer 1993, p. 248). Understanding how athletic identity is measured is important for my research because all of my participants self-identify as "hoopers" but may have different definitions of that identity. The AIMS provides me with an instrument to guide the development of my own instrument in an attempt to identify common themes in my participants' definitions of a "hooper".

### Role Conflict for Student Athletes

In 1987, applying Stryker's hypotheses about identity salience and role performance to "big time college athletics," Adler & Adler performed a four-year ethnographic study of members of an NCAA Division I Men's basketball team to elucidate how student-athletes balance their athletic, academic and social role-sets (Adler & Adler 1987, p. 444). The concept of a role-set was first introduced by Merton in 1957 in an article entitled "The Role Set: Problems in Sociological Theory". In that article, Merton asserted that an individual's social status involves not simply a single role but rather a multitude of roles that comprise what he defined as a role-set (Merton 1957, p. 110). For Merton, a role-set is defined as "the complement of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status" (Merton 1957, p. 110).

The role-set for the student athlete participants in Adler & Adler's study was comprised of significant others whose position in the three role-sets (athletic, academic and social) was largely predetermined by the intercollegiate athletic environment. Within

the athletic role-set, primary significant others included participants' teammates, coaches, trainers, managers, secretaries, and athletic administrators. Secondary significant others in the athletic role-set included boosters, fans, and the news media. Within the academic role-set, significant others consisted of professors, tutors, classmates, and, to a lesser extent, academic counselors and administrators. Within the social role-set, significant others included girlfriends, local friends outside of the university, non-athlete members of the student body, and college athlete peers that played other sports.

The major finding of Adler & Adler's study revealed a role conflict for participants between the role of athlete and the role of student. Participants in the study resolved their athletic/academic conflicts by realigning, reducing or completely dropping their academic role in order to focus on basketball. Despite many participants' initial desires to achieve balance between the athletic, academic and social roles, their ISH had athletic identity at the top, and academic identity at the bottom, with the social identity somewhere in between the two when the study was completed (Adler & Adler 1987, p. 446).

Adler & Adler's findings identified 4 factors that influenced their participants' process of structuring their ISH with athletics at the top and academics at the bottom:

1. Overwhelming demands of the athletic role from powerful role-set members,
2. A peer subculture that emphasizes athletics and devalues academics,
3. Academic frustrations and failures caused by poor training and skills coupled with perceived irrelevance of their courses
4. A small influence of role reinforcing members in the academic role-set (Adler & Adler 1987, p. 446).

In addition to identifying those 4 factors, Adler & Adler's findings also clarified and reaffirmed the relationship between role evaluation, role distance, role reinforcement, role identification, and role commitment. These 4 variables contribute to the organization of an ISH that leads to the resolution of role conflict.

Role evaluation is an individual's self-analysis of how well they can fulfill the expectations of a role. Role distance is an individual's process of diminishing the importance they place in a role. Role reinforcement is the extent to which members of a role-set praise and encourages an individual's fulfillment of a role's expectations. Role identification is the extent to which others recognize and individual for the fulfillment of a role's expectations.

Adler & Adler's analysis of their participants' academic role evaluations revealed that participants felt too unprepared for college academics to succeed. That evaluation led them to distance themselves from their academic role. In addition, the lack of academic role reinforcement and identification that Adler & Adler's participants received, influenced their decrease in commitment to the academic role, especially because members of the social and athletic and social role-sets provided the participants with more than adequate reinforcement and identification (Adler & Adler 1987).

Although Stryker previously introduced the concept of role commitment, Adler & Adler added a dimension called "role power". In their findings, they noted that their participants perceived Division I basketball as having a power structure that placed athletics over academics. Furthermore, the participants expressed that the power structure put them in a position of "institutional powerlessness" in which their coaches



and other members of the athletic role-set had the ability to control their personal time, academic schedules, and playing role on the team (Adler & Adler 1987, p. 453).

Although Adler & Adler's study was done with men's basketball players, I expect some of the dynamics of "big time college sports" to be similar to those of my participants because basketball is considered the revenue producing women's college sport. The experiences of Adler & Adler's participants also inform my research by providing me a reference point for individuals to include in my participants various role sets.

#### Gender Role Conflict for Women Athletes

In 1979 Sage & Loudermilk published an article entitled "The Female Athlete and Role Conflict" that reported the findings of a study using 268 collegiate female athletes to measure perceived and experienced role conflict. The participants in the study played in both socially approved sports for women like tennis, golf, swimming and gymnastics and for non-socially approved ones like basketball, softball, volleyball and track & field (1979). The study asked participants to rate their perception and experiences with gender/athletic role conflict on a 5 point Likert scale with "no conflict" having a value of 1 and "very great conflict" having a value of 5. Only 26% of Sage & Loudermilk's participants reported perceived role conflict as a "great problem", and only 19% of them reported experiencing role conflict as a "very great problem" (1979). These low numbers are inconsistent with the assumptions that most women athletes experience gender/athletic role conflict. The authors did note however, that

participants involved in "non-socially approved" sports experienced greater conflict than those involved in socially approved sports (1979).

To explain the low percentage of role conflict reported by their participants, the Sage & Loudermilk suggested that since women in their study were college athletes who had most likely began playing sports since childhood, and thus had resolved the conflicts by the time they participated in their study (1979). To investigate this suggestion, Anthrop & Allison published an article in 1983 entitled "Role Conflict and the High School Female Athlete" to see if greater gender/athletic role conflict was greater with younger athletes.

Anthrop & Allison conducted a study similar to Sage & Loudermilk's study with 133 female high school athletes and reported similar results. Only 17% of Anthrop & Allison's participants reported perceived role conflict as a great or very great problem and only 11% of them reported experienced role conflict in the same way (Anthrop & Allison 1983). The authors' research findings reaffirmed the discrepancy between the level of role conflict assumed for female athletes and the actual conflict they reported. The authors also categorize possible role conflicts for female athletes as internal and external to further distinguish their cause and manifestation. Internal conflicts are those related to the female athlete's physical/psychological self-concept. External conflicts are assessed by perceived and/or experienced pressure for female athletes due to outside factors (Anthrop & Allison 1983).

Acknowledging the distinction between internal and external role conflict made by Anthrop & Allison and applying it to Sage and Loudermilk's report that women

participating in non-approved sports have report more conflict than women participating in approved sports, Allison & Butler performed a study on female power lifters in an attempt to measure the role conflict for female athletes in a non-socially approved sports (Allison & Butler 1984). The authors acknowledged that the assumed role conflict for female athletes is based on Victorian ideals of femininity like submissiveness, grace, beauty and passivity conflicting with athletic ideals of strength toughness, aggressiveness and dominance (Allison & Butler 1984, p. 157). Of the 44 participants in Allison & Butler's study 59% of them perceived and 71% experienced little to no role conflict (Allison & Butler 1984, p. 160). Their findings support previous research findings of female athletes experiencing little to no role conflict. As a result, they (who's they?) suggested that scholars may have been guilty of "reification" by creating role conflict for female athletes as a conceptual category without testing its existence (Allison & Butler 1984, p. 163).

The authors suggested two explanations for the insistence that there is a severe gender role conflict for female athletes even though the majority of studies present findings that suggest otherwise. The first explanation provided was that contemporary female athletes do not experience the conflict that scholars recognized for the previous generation of athletes. The second explanation is that members of society view female athletes differently than they view themselves (Allison & Butler 1984, p. 163). The authors further assert that, even though negative stereotypes of female athletes exist, it is not guaranteed that female athletes internalize these stereotypes. Finally, Allison & Butler also suggest that female athletes' awareness of the negative stereotypes about

them may result in feelings of anger and frustration about society's view of them, but that their athleticism does not make them feel any less like women (Allison & Butler 1984, p. 164).

Goldberg & Chandler's 1991 published article "Sports Participation Among Adolescent Girls: Role Conflict or Multiple Roles" applied Stryker's identity salience concept of role commitment to female athletes in an attempt to explain low reports of role conflict. The authors suggested that low reports of role conflict for adolescent females may be the result of low role commitment to the athletic role. They also identified 4 causes of external role conflict for adolescent females: competing demands of time, space, and resources; inconsistent norms; competing pressure from different role sets; and conflicting array or role expectations (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 214). The causes identified by Goldberg & Chandler were similar to those identified in Adler & Adler's research.

Using the Survey of School Climates to gather a sample of 627 high school girls, Goldberg & Chandler measured the perceived importance of the 4 different status positions: outstanding student; outstanding athlete; leader in activities; and member of a leading group (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 218). Of the 627 girls in the study, 467 of them expressed interest to continue athletic participation in college (Goldberg & Chandler 1991; 216). The subjects for this study were categorized as either sports participants or non-participants, and their responses were evaluated along 4 criteria: remembrance status, parental approval, peer popularity and multiple roles.

Results of Goldberg & Chandler's study found that with respect to remembrance status, 51.4% of participants that played sports reported importance in being an outstanding athlete as compared to only 12.4% of participants that did not play sports (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 217). With respect to parental involvement and peer popularity, both participants who played sports and those who did not acknowledged the importance of athletic participation to their parents and peer group. However, with respect to parental approval, being an outstanding student had the most importance, whereas with respect to peer popularity, being a member of a leading group had the most importance (Goldberg & Chandler, p. 217).

One of the most significant findings of Goldberg & Chandler's study was in the area of multiple roles. 54.6% of participants that played sports identified at least 2 of the 4 roles as important whereas only 27.1% of those who did not play sports identified more than one role (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 218). The authors concluded that participants who played sports had higher athletic identity salience but also acknowledged various status positions as multiple roles comprising their self-identities whereas participants that did not play sports did not acknowledge the multiple roles as having a significant influence on their self-identities (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 218).

Another important finding was a connection found between race and parental approval. Goldberg & Chandler's study found that Black participants were the only group who reported a perception that athletic participation was more important to parents than academic achievement (Goldberg & Chandler 1991, p. 220). The authors

do note that with Black participants comprising only 11% of the total participants, further investigation is necessary to investigate the implications that Black parents place higher importance on athletic participation than academic achievement for their children. Their finding however, does support research conducted by scholars who investigate the connection between racial and athletic identity in Black adolescents.

These research findings pertaining to gender role conflict for female athletes is important to my research because it acknowledges that women athletes may simultaneously occupy both role of woman and athlete without seeing an inherent conflict. They are also important because of the suggestions that Black girls perceive the same athletic pressure from their parents that research has identified in Black boys.

#### Athletic Identity and Black Male Adolescent Development

Since the 1980s, famed race and sports sociologist Harry Edwards has critiqued the Black community for "channeling" their children into athletics by drawing connections between race and athletic potential (Edwards 1984; Edwards 1994). He and other scholars have discussed the negative consequences for socializing young Black men to neglect their academic studies to pursue athletic careers (Harris 1994; Harrison 2000; Hobberman 1997). For young Black men specifically, sports participation was found to be an important factor in adolescent development in terms of social acceptance and bonding (Sailes 1993; Edwards 1994; Bimper and Harrison 2011). Athletic participation has also been found to be a space where young Black men learn to perform masculinity (Atencio & Wright 2008; Brooks 2009; May 2009). In addition to the

"channeling", researchers also recognizes the influence that Media plays in socializing young Black men to have such a strong connection between athletic and racial identity. Specifically, they point to the marketing of products from cereal and athletic sneakers to luxury automobiles with images of African American Athletes (Boyd 1997; Kelley 1997).

This body of research does not include the connection of race and athletic identity for young Black women but a 2011 study by Bimper and Harrison noted that with the success of the WNBA, the athletic "channeling" that has historically occurred in the Black community with young men, may now begin to apply to young women (Bimper & Harrison 2011). These findings inform my research because I am concerned with the development of athletic identity for young Black women during adolescence.

#### Black Woman Student Athletes

Studies into the connection of race and athletic identity with respect to gender for Black women began with Sellers Kuperminc and Damas' 1997 published article "The College Life Experiences of African American Athletes" (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997). To understand more about the experiences of Black female student-athletes the authors compared the responses of 154 Black female student athletes to those of 628 Black male student athlete, 793 white female student-athletes and 250 Black female non-student athletes from the a sample of 39 NCAA Division I universities in four areas: academic performance; alienation and abuse, perceived social advantage as a result of being college athletes; and self-satisfaction (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997).

Their findings show that in comparison to white female student athletes, Black female student athletes have lower grades. The authors assert that the disparity in grades between Black and white female student athletes is a function of racial and class factors influencing players' educational experiences both before and during college. Considering that more Black student-athletes came from lower income communities than whites, the authors suggested that their academic preparation before entering college was often behind their white teammates who grew up in more affluent communities with greater access to college prep curriculum (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997). Additional findings suggest that both Black and white female student athletes share similar feelings of isolation. The authors analyzed players' isolation as a function of the culture of college athletics and the way that student athletes' schedules often inhibited their ability to interact with the larger university community. Findings also showed that Black and white female student athletes shared perceptions of their athletic participation facilitating their positive personal development (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997).

In the comparison to Black male student athletes, Black females were found to have higher grades. The authors explained the disparity in grades between Black male and female student athletes as a factor of athletic and educational expectations in their communities. With Black boys, athletic participation is often privileged over academic pursuits but Black girls who participate in athletics are reminded to focus on academics because they do not have the same opportunities to play sports professionally. The findings of that study also showed that Black male and female student athletes share



feelings of isolation on their college campuses not only because of their rigorous academic schedules but also do to racial factors on their campuses. (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997). In measuring perceptions of athletic participation facilitating positive personal development, Black female student-athletes expressed greater difficulty than their male counterparts in translating their status as athletes into respect outside of the athletic context.

Overall, the findings showed that Black female student athletes experiences were most similar to the experiences of Black female non-athlete students. These findings suggest that race and gender identities influence experiences more than athletic identity for Black women student athletes. While this study also shows that Black female student athletes have lower grades than their white female counterparts, it is attributed to academics being viewed as less important than athletic pursuits within the Black community. There is no discussion of stereotype threat; a process by which stereotypes are activated their targets, are made of the stereotype's expectations of their inferiority. This activation results in pressure for the target of the stereotype to perform well enough to defy it, which often hinders their ability to do so. For Black women student athletes, the potential for stereotype threat is important to understand because of the ways it can potentially influence these women's experiences collegiate experiences. I will discuss stereotype threat in the next section more thoroughly.

This study is important to my research because it shows how analyzing Black women's experiences in comparison to Black men in regards to race and white women in regards to gender, does not provide a thorough analysis of their unique experiences. My

research seeks to further elucidate the factors of Black women's experiences as Division I student athletes that are distinct from both their Black male and white female counterparts.

### Stereotype Threat

#### ***Effects of stereotype threat on women and Blacks***

Stereotype Threat is a theory that was introduced by Steele and Aronson in 1995 and in Claude Steele's 1997 article, "A Threat In The Air: How Stereotypes Influence Intellectual Identity and Performance", he addressed how negative intellectual stereotypes of Women and African Americans can hamper their academic performance. Stereotype Threat is defined as:

A social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. The predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype (Steele 1997, p. 614).

Describing the effects of stereotype threat, Steele remarks:

Where bad stereotypes of these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. For those who identify with the domain in which these stereotypes apply, the threat of these stereotypes can be sharply felt, and in several ways, can hamper their achievement (Steele 1997, p. 614).

In his work, Steele focuses on how stereotype threat influences the academic performance of women and African Americans on math exams. Steele's studies involve "priming" the stereotyped identity; a process done intentionally to increase an individual's salience with their negatively stereotyped identity. This is done to determine whether an individual's awareness of the negative stereotypes of their group creates

enough fear and anxiety about confirming those negative stereotypes that they perform poorly.

Steele's research found that stereotype threat did exist for both women and African Americans. When gender was primed, women in his study did only half as well as when there was no gender differentiation (Steele 1997, p. 620) and when race was primed, the African American students in his study did only half as well on the SAT than when race was not primed (Steele 1997, p. 621). Critiques of Steele's research point out that Stereotype Threat depends on how much an individual believes the validity of the negative stereotypes of their group and their level of salience to the negatively stereotyped group. Acknowledging these critiques, Steele discusses Disidentification; a condition in which individuals' self-esteem is not affected by the negative stereotypes that exist of their group in certain domains. He acknowledges that for minority students that did not link self-esteem to their school performance are less likely to be affected by stereotype threat even if they perform poorly academically (Steele 1997, p. 623). These students did not see their academic performance as a reflection of their membership in a negatively stereotyped group. Instead, they focused on positive characteristics of their group that were unrelated to the academic task. However, after reviewing more recent literature, even when people are involved in counter movements, are susceptible (Davis, Aronson and Salinas 2006).

### ***Stereotype threat and Black student athletes***

Applying stereotype threat to Black student-athletes, Stone, Harrison and Mottley's 2012 published article "Don't Call Me a Student-Athlete: The Effect of

Identity priming on Academically Engaged African American Student Athletes" claimed that Black student athletes who are academically engaged are the most susceptible to stereotype threat because both their racial and athletic identities are stereotyped to be academically inferior. The authors note that in addition to dealing with stereotypes of academic inferiority tied to race, scholarship athletes are often viewed by "traditional" students, faculty, and administration as "dumb jocks" that are less intelligent, less motivated and less prepared for the academic rigors of college than students who are not scholarship athletes (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012, p. 99).

Further extending the understanding of stereotype threat, the authors used findings from Schmader, Johns and Forbes 2008 published article "An Integrated Process Model of Stereotype Threat Effects on Performance" that claimed stereotype threat is caused by a cognitive imbalance that occurs when cues in social context provide three links: salience of the stereotype that one's social group typically underperforms in a domain; the salience of one's positive membership in the target group; the salience of one's personal goals to perform well in the domain (Schmader, Johns and Forbes 2008; Stone, Harrison, & Mottley 2012, p. 99). Stone, Harrison & Mottley further claim that an imbalance in these three factors leads to tension and distress that undermines working memory capacity and increases performance monitoring processes that impair the ability to demonstrate one's full potential. They believe that the integrated model of Stereotype Threat helps understand individuals with multiple stigmatized identities; in their study, Black and student athlete. Previous research has evidenced that Black student athletes are aware that their athletic identity added an additional burden to the stereotype of their

lacking intellectual capacity because of their race. These students reported experiencing pressure to “prove themselves” in the classroom because their professors and their white classmates saw them as "dumb jocks". As a result, the authors claim that, the term "student athlete" can exacerbate stereotype threat for Blacks (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012, p. 101).

As with previous research, Stone, Harrison & Mottley noted that the influence of these primers and cues has a lot to do with the salience an individual has with the stigmatized identity and performance domain. For disengaged student athletes, although they are likely to do worse academically than engaged athletes they are also less likely to be influenced by stereotype threat. Their study included 151 student athletes that played 9 different varsity sports at a major university. After using the Academic Disengagement Scale (ADS) to determine which potential participants qualified as "academically engaged". The priming of participants was done with the cover page. For participants whose athletic identity was primed, they were asked to check a box that read "I am an athlete", for those whose student athlete identity was primed, they were asked to check a box that read "I am a scholar athlete" and if the participants who did not have any identity primed, they were asked to check a box that read "I am a research participant" (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012, p. 102). After priming various identities, researchers administered a 40-item test of verbal analogies; some from the SAT and others from the GRE standardized exams.

The results of their study reported that with a control group of engaged student athletes, the white and Black participants scored similarly with regard to difficult

questions; whites correctly answered 44% of questions and Black identified 41% (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012, p. 103). When various identities were primed however, findings support the influence of stereotype threat. Whereas white participants scored similarly no matter what identity was primed, (41% of difficult questions answered correctly when their athletic identity was primed and 43% answered correctly when their student athlete identity was primed), Black participants did worse when negatively stereotyped identities were primed. When Black participants' athletic identity was primed, they only answered 24% of questions correctly and only 20% correctly when their student athlete identity was primed (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012, p. 103).

With regards to disengaged student athletes, the authors' prediction that they would perform worse on the test was correct as both white and Black athletes correctly answering less difficult questions than their academically engaged peers. Interestingly though, for disengaged Black participants, they answered more difficult questions correctly when various identities were primed. Whereas the control group only answered 23% of the questions correctly, the group primed with their athletic identity answered 25% and the group primed with their student athlete identity answered 30% of the questions correctly (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley 2012, p. 104). This suggests that disengaged Black student athletes may have a positive association with their roles as athletes and as student athletes. It could also suggest that these participants feel less pressure to perform academically because they do not consider academics as having any important influence on their self-esteem.

### ***Stereotype threat and women student athletes***

While Stone, Harrison & Mottley's article made little mention of the impact of gender for Stereotype Threat in student athletes, an article published in 2009 by Harrison, Stone, Shapiro, Yee, Boyd & Rulan entitled "The Role of Gender Identities and Stereotype Salience With the Academic Performance of Male and Female college Athletes" analyzed student athletes stereotype threat with respect to gender. This study used the same primers as Stone, Harrison & Mottley's article; no prime, student athlete prime and athlete prime and with all three but used both male and female student athletes. Overall, research findings showed that female student athletes scored less than their male counterparts. More specifically, female participants performed worst when no identity was primed and best when their athletic identity was primed while male participants performed best when their athletic identity was primed and worst when their student athlete identity was primed (Harrison, Stone, Shapiro, Yee, Boyd & Rulan 2009, p. 86).

Even though Steele's initial Stereotype Threat research indicated that women are at risk of stereotype threat activation in similar ways that Blacks are, Black women college athletes' experiences with Stereotype Threat are not explicitly analyzed. Although the studies summarized in this chapter seek to elucidate potential role conflict for the athletic role for individuals with marginalized intellectual, racial and gender identities, there is no acknowledgment in the unique outcomes of the simultaneous interaction of these identities. The research on stereotype threat is

important to my research because it informs my understanding of how racial, gender and athletic identities can influence athletic performance for Black women student athletes.

For female student athletes, the gender role conflict that has been assumed by scholars has been questioned by research suggesting that female athletes do not think that their athletic role make them any less feminine. Research shows that priming negatively stereotyped identities to increase identity salience and acceptance of the negative stereotypes influences the effect of stereotype threat on both Black and female student athletes. This effect undermines successful performance in academic roles.

Unfortunately, none of these studies thoroughly analyze the development of athletic identity or the experiences as collegiate student athletes for Black women. The only study that addressed Black women's student athlete experiences used a comparative method that made suggestions to race, gender and athletic culture related influences to their experiences but did not investigate their experiences to the extent that my research does. In order to thoroughly analyze the experiences of my participants, I will be using the theoretical framework of intersectionality that was created specifically to address way that race and gender marginalization simultaneously interact to influence the experiences of Black women

### Intersectionality

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw problematized the tendency in academia to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis in feminist and antiracist theory, research and politics (Crenshaw 1989, p. 58). She claimed that the result of that treatment is an attempt fit Black women's experiences into race and gender



discourses that do not consider the interaction of both. To show how Black women's experiences remain invisible in both feminist and antiracist discourse or are assumed to be understood by combining "women's experiences" and "Black experiences", Crenshaw analyzed the case of *DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors (GM)* in which five Black women brought suit against GM alleging that employer's seniority system perpetuated the effects of past discrimination against Black women.

Crenshaw pointed out that GM refused to consider the women's claim of sex discrimination because the company did hire women, even though they were all white women, and also dismissed the women's race discrimination complaints and suggested they'd be better combined with in a similar case involving Black men. Crenshaw concluded that the underlying message to Black women was that they are only protected to the extent that their experiences can be linked to either Black men or White Women (Crenshaw 1989, p. 59). Crenshaw discussed how this marginalization of Black women's experiences also exists in women's and Black empowerment movements.

Crenshaw asserted that there was refusal to acknowledge white supremacist framework that exists in the development of feminist theory. She further asserted that white feminists often ignore how their own race functions to mitigate sexism and how it often privileges them over other women of color, and allows white women to contribute to the domination of others (Crenshaw 1989, p. 67). To further articulate her point, Crenshaw focused on the feminist discourse on rape that neglects to consider that Black women have never been considered chaste and therefore not protected by law or society. She asserts that feminist discourse contextualizing rape as a manifestation of

male power over female sexuality neglects Black women's (and to some extent Black men's) experiences with rape being used against them as a weapon of white supremacy (Crenshaw 1989, p. 68). Shifting from Black women's marginalization within mainstream feminist movements to Black liberation struggles, Crenshaw also reminds readers that the Black men who were often lynched as punishment for an alleged rape or sexual assault of white women occupied the Black community's agenda while the refusal to recognize rape of Black women as a crime went largely unacknowledged (Crenshaw 1989, p. 69). Crenshaw also discussed the controversy over the movie *The Color Purple* where Alice Walker was accused of being divisive by portraying Black men negatively, as an example of ways that Black women's experience is subordinated with efforts to "ensure the security of the larger Black community" (Crenshaw 1989, p. 71). Because of this marginalization, Crenshaw holds that Black women's experiences deserve individual attention to more thoroughly be understood.

#### Race x Gender Marginalization and Resistance for Black Women

##### ***Early articulations of Black women's gender and racial subordination***

While Crenshaw introduced intersectionality as a theoretical approach to more accurately analyze Black women's experiences with respect to race and gender marginalization, Black women's efforts to have both their racial and gender experiences recognized have been documented in literature since the slave trade when Sojourner truth asked "Ain't I A Woman" in 1851 at a Women's convention in Akron, Ohio.

In that speech, Truth pointed out that Black women do not enjoy the protections of womanhood that white women are afforded and that they are worked and beaten as hard as Black men on plantations. She further asserted that although Black women are allowed to be equal to men to benefit the plantation, they are treated as women only when it comes to denying them rights because they are considered the “lesser” gender (Truth 1851).

Nearing the turn of the century in 1893, scholar Anna Julia Cooper spoke at the World Congress of Representative Women and asserted that the Black woman was “doubly enslaved” (Hooks 1981). She also asserted that Black women’s humanity was necessary for the liberation of Black people, claiming that, “Only the Black woman can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me’” (Cooper 1892: 1988).

Cooper also spoke out against the invisibility of Black women in academia, and believed that experience is as relevant as theory, especially when no theory exists related to the experiences. Her work laid a foundation for Black women to use experiential narratives to address phenomena of Black women that remained invisible within academia. Throughout the 20th century, Black women used poetry, novels, and personal essays to critique existing theory that failed to acknowledge and address Black women’s experiences.

***Black women's marginalization within both mainstream feminist and Black liberation movements***

In 1969, Frances Beale, founding member of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) women's liberation committee and member of the third world women's alliance, wrote a criticism of Black women's lack of value in society in her piece entitled, "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female." In this work, Beale problematized the image of womanhood being limited to a woman who stays at home raising the children, doing housework and being completely subservient to her husband (Beale 1969). She further pointed out that while the housewife image has been held as the ideal of womanhood, Black women were always excluded from embodying this image because they have always made up a substantial percentage of the Black labor force (Beale 1969). Beale also pointed out that in addition to the Black women in the labor force also being wives and mothers, there are also women who have no desire to be wives or mothers and that their womanhood should not be marginalized. Beale advocated for Black women to rewrite the definitions of womanhood to include and respect all women in a way to help facilitate the end all oppression (Beale 1969).

In the 1970s Black women took Beale's suggestion and began developing theories to address their "double jeopardy" as part of a movement apart from the mainstream feminist movement of that decade. In 1975, Barbara Smith organized the Combahee River Collective to develop a Black feminist ideology. Black women who wanted to identify as "feminists" in the 1970s felt alienated by the mainstream movement because white feminists refused to consider their different ways that non-

white women experience gender oppression accompanied by race, class, and/or sexuality oppression. Two years later, the collective held its first retreat in South Hadley, MA. Out of that meeting came a statement organized into 4 parts: the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; what we believe, i.e., the specific providence of our politics; the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief history of our collective; and Black feminist issues and practice (Guy-Sheftall eds. 1995).

In addition to addressing racial and sexual oppression, the collective's statement sought to address heterosexism and classism. The statement acknowledged that race, gender, class and sexuality oppression are impossible to separate for people who embody more than one of those marginalized categories. For many of the Black women in the collective who were feminist and involved in the third world women's movement, all forms of oppression are experienced simultaneously so the collective aimed to facilitate a better understanding of Black women's dynamic identities to promote a recognition of the their humanity.

In reiterating the importance for Black women to develop their own ideology to combat the academic invisibility they had been relegated to, Barbara Smith wrote in her article "Towards A Black Feminist Criticism" that:

For whites, this specialized lack of knowledge is inextricably connected to their not knowing in any concrete or politically transforming way that Black women of any description dwell in this place. Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression, which shape these, are in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown (Smith 1981).

Smith drew from the work done by novelists like Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison who infused Black women's experiences into their novels within the context of

racial, gender, class and sexual oppression (Smith 1981). Smith discussed the importance of texts, fiction and non-fiction to be written to “reflect the reality” of Black women, and in the 1980s, those texts began to surface.

Later in the same year, bell hooks published the book *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. In that text, she asserted the need for Black women to invest in their own scholarship because the historical invisibility of Black women within both race and gender scholarship. Hooks writes:

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as Black women. We are recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men, or a present part of the larger group ‘women’ in this culture...When Black people are talked about the focus tends to be on Black men; and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women (Hooks 1981).

Instead of attempting to develop a new ideology, hooks’ work focused on understanding feminism from a Black woman’s perspective. Hooks’ claims that the salience of racial identity for Black women makes it difficult to participate in type of feminism that presents men, especially Black men, as the enemy of women.

In 1984, Audre Lorde published a collection of essays titled *Sister Outsider* that included a piece called “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. With that essay, she sought to mobilize the academic community of those, “who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women...those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older” to facilitate understanding of their various identities to develop scholarships to end all forms of oppression (Lorde 1984).

Acknowledging the shortcomings of Beale's "Double Jeopardy" of only recognizing racism and sexism, Deborah King created the term "multiple jeopardies" to better reflect the interaction of multiple types of subordination for Black women (King 1988). King argued that double jeopardy confines women to the race-sex analogy and neglects the dynamics of discrimination based on class, sexuality or other categories. She further claimed that the concept of double jeopardy lacked the simultaneous aspect of oppressions (King 1988). King articulated the ways that multiple jeopardies that Black women's experience depends on where they exist and asserted a need for a Black feminist ideology that was based in Black women's reality (1988).

Crenshaw's development of intersectionality was built on the work of these and other Black women who recognized the marginalization and invisibility of Black women's experiences. Intersectionality operates as a theoretical framework that allows scholars to acknowledge the simultaneous interaction of race and gender for Black women when analyzing their experiences. Crenshaw asserts that Black liberation efforts must include analyses of patriarchy and sexism just as feminism must include analyses of race in eradicating women's oppression. She further asserts that Black women's race and gender experiences should be investigated with the acknowledgement that race and gender oppression are interrelated and result in unique forms of discrimination (McCall 2005).

### ***Intersectionality as a methodological approach***

Extending Intersectionality from a theoretical to methodological approach, Leslie McCall provides three approaches that allow scholars to methodologically address the

complexities that accompany the recognition of fluid and interacting identities; anticategorical complexity, intercategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity (McCall 2005).

The anticategorical approach is based on the deconstruction of analytical categories. This approach assumes that social life is so complex and that identity is so fluid that fixed categories cannot acknowledge difference without attaching hierarchical value to those differences (McCall 2005). The intercategorical approach requires that scholars use existing analytical categories in order to document existing and monitor changing inequalities in relationships between various social group relationships (McCall 2005). The third approach, intracategorical complexity, falls conceptually between the other two approaches. While anticategorical complexity rejects categories and intercategorical complexity uses categories strategically, intracategorical complexity acknowledges the stability in relationships that social categories provide while maintaining a critical stance toward the hierarchical relationships result from those categories (McCall 2005).

Most recently, Hawkins & Carter used intersectionality to elucidate coping strategies of Black Women Student athletes in their 2011 published work entitled "Coping and the African American Female College Athlete." For that research, the authors conducted narrative interviews of 12 Black women student athletes at a Predominately White Institution of Higher Education (PWIHE) located in the southeast United States. The authors acknowledged that many Black students on PWIHE campuses express feeling isolated and alienated and that those feelings may be



exacerbated by the additional athletic demands of student athletes. They further asserted that understanding the way Black women student athletes cope with various forms of stress is important for understanding how to facilitate productive development of these young women both on and off the playing field. Hawkins & Carter used Folkman & Lazarus' definitions of coping:

Behaviors in response to a stressful event...A cognitive process, such as denial, repression, suppression and intellectualization as well as problem solving behaviors that are invoked to reduce or manage anxiety and other distractions (Folkman & Lazarus 1988, p. 466; Hawkins & Carter 2011).

The authors further acknowledged different types of coping identified by previous scholars highlighting Lazarus & Folkman's task, emotion and avoidance oriented coping distinctions (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and Anshel's approach-behavioral, avoidance-behavioral and avoidance-cognitive coping (Anshel 2001; Anshel et. al. 2009; Krohne 1993; Hawkins & Carter 2011). Applying these understandings to their participants, the authors highlighted themes in coping strategies for Black women student athletes.

Hawkins & Carter's study showed that Black women student athletes primarily used an avoidance approach to coping and ranging within four major strategies: talking, prayer and religion, awareness of context and personal consciousness (Hawkins & Carter 2011, p. 80). Of these strategies, awareness of context and personal consciousness are the most important for my research. The authors echo Patricia Hill Collins' assertion about Black women understanding how their personhood is perceived within various social contexts is key to their mental and physical survival (Hill Collins 2000; Hawkins & Carter 2011, p. 82).

My research investigates the identity development of Black women collegiate athletes during their adolescence to elucidate the ways they develop the personal consciousness and awareness of context that Hawkins & Carter discuss and also how those strategies affects their experiences as Division I college athletes. My research also builds on Hawkins and Carter's suggestion that "Safe spaces for African American female collegiate athletes to discuss their experience and have a local support structure which endorses the cultural coping styles and strategies may be beneficial" (Hawkins & Carter 2011, p. 84). My research considers that Black women comprise a sizeable percentage of Division I women's basketball players, and examines if and how basketball can provide this space.

### Conclusion

Reviewing literature on identity salience and role conflict for athletes with marginalized identities provides an understanding of previously explored dynamics of these categories useful for my research. Through this review and summary I have identified gaps in the literature that my project will seek to fill. Acknowledging Stryker and Burke's limitations of identity theory, my project seeks to incorporate both approaches to uncover how individuals with multiple identities negotiate their identities within a specific environment. In assistance with filling the gap in identity theory literature, I employ Critical Race Theory's Intersectionality for my research because it acknowledges the negative social constructions of Black women and seeks to allow them a space for self-definition. Intersectionality is also useful for my research it does not

encourage Black women to identify more with race or gender but elucidates ways in which their gendered and racial identities contribute simultaneously to their experiences.

My project uses Intersectionality's intracategorical complexity approach for understanding the experiences of my participants. Instead of denying the existing identity categories of Black women playing NCAA Division I basketball, my analysis will acknowledge the way they shape perceptions and influence relationships. Additionally, my analysis critiques existing assumptions about the interaction of various categories and elucidates interactions previously neglected in research of Black women athletes.

I will draw on categories and interactions presented in identity theories including, but not limited to, self and collective identity, imposed identities, and identity salience to thoroughly investigate the process of identity negotiation for my participants. I chose the intracategorical approach because I believe it acknowledges the fluidity of identity categories while providing both authors and audiences an organized way to understand them and the action among them. Details of my methodology will be provided in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Chapter Organization

In this chapter I lay out the methodological approach to my examination of the identity negotiation for Black women playing Division I college basketball. The project employs Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality to challenge the concept of salience within identity theory literature in an attempt to account for the simultaneous performance of category and role identities by individuals (1991).

In the introduction, I mentioned the underlying assumptions, limitations and theoretical approach, but this chapter will provide more details about the development and utilization of the actual research instrument as well as the process of coding and organizing interview data for analysis. This chapter will also provide basic demographic information about my participants to help contextualize the responses that will be analyzed in the next three chapters.

I begin by reiterating the project's theoretical approach, assumptions and limitations to the extent that they frame the development of my research instrument. Next, I justify intracategorical intersectionality as my methodological approach, then present the two primary research questions driving my research and disclose the prompts of my research instrument aimed at answering these primary questions. After justifying my methodology and introducing my research instrument, I will provide details of the data collection process. Discussion of my data collection

process includes participant recruitment, demographic information about my participants, and obstacles I encountered during the process. Finally I will acknowledge the limitations of my research introduce the major themes that will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

### Theoretical Influences on Methodology

My research seeks to elucidate the identity negotiation for Black women playing Division I college basketball by qualitatively exploring their experiences. Reviewing identity literature, Richard T. Serpe's research provided a useful scale to measure college student identity salience and Britton Brewer's research introduced the AIMS used to measure athletic identity salience (1987). Applying Stryker's ISH to Division I men's basketball, Adler and Adler's research showed that student athletes organize their academic, athletic and social roles in a hierarchy influenced heavily by individuals in their various role sets (1987).

These, and the majority of studies I reviewed in the previous chapter fail to acknowledge what Kimberle Crenshaw refers to as intersectionality; the unique way that the imposed identities of race and gender interact to complicate identity performance of Black women (1989). My research contributes to the identity literature by exploring a situation in which Stryker's hierarchy may not resolve identity conflicts because the race and gender identities of Black women are often conflated in a way that produces experiences that single gender or race analysis cannot capture. Previous studies like Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas were only able to analyze experiences of Black women

college athletes by comparing them to Black men and white women college athletes and Black women non-athlete college students (1997). Studies about Black women college student athletes that do employ intersectionality like Hawkins & Carter focus on coping strategies and survey participant experiences across sports thus the unique dynamics that I assert exist for Black women in basketball are not elucidated by those studies (2011). In order to best understand the experiences of Black women playing Division I college basketball, my research uses in-depth interviews.

#### Justification For Use of In-Depth Interviews

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, my research uses the intracategorical intersectionality approach that critiques the hierarchal relationships that social categories like race and gender create and reproduce. Of the three intersectionality methodological approaches mentioned in the previous chapter, I chose the intracategorical approach because although I am critiquing the inequality Black women experience within the white supremacist hierarchy and the position of privilege student athletes receive in the college campus hierarchy, I do acknowledge that these hierarchies have existed long enough to provide stability and become normalized within our society (McCall 2005). As a result, instead of attempting to ignore them completely, my research will focus on how my participants negotiate with an understanding that these hierarchies exist.

Basing my methodological approach on these critiques necessitated that my data be descriptive in order to provide evidence useful for analysis. Because the performance

of identity is largely determined by symbols and their meaning, I am using symbolic interaction as an underlying concept of my research. Dealing with a marginalized population like Black women college basketball players, I wanted to provide data that allowed them to inject the meaning they assign to significant symbols into the analysis as opposed to me attempting to derive it using my own biases. To best achieve this goal, I determined in-depth interviews the best way to capture this descriptive data.

### ***Symbolic interactionism***

It is important for my research that I elucidate how actions from other individuals and groups influence the way my participants perform their identities. Within athletic culture there are significant symbols that are used to determine whether or not members are athletes or spectators. George Herbert Mead writes the following about significant symbols and meaning:

Significant symbols [are] gestures which possess meanings and are hence more than mere substitute stimuli...Meaning arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given human organism and the subsequent behavior of this organism as indicated to another human organism by that gesture. If that gesture does so indicate to another organism the subsequent (or resultant) behavior of the given organism, then it has meaning (1934, p. 75).

Understanding the meaning of these significant symbols guides the development of identity for individuals seeking to be recognized as athletes, or specifically in my research, “hoopers”.

### ***In-depth interviews***

I used in-depth interviews because they allow respondents to develop a narrative about their identities. My questions required my participants to reflect on their experiences as student-athletes; if and how their racial and gender identities shaped their

understanding of their academic and athletic roles. My research also inquired about my participants' racial, gender and athletic identity development during adolescence. I also used in-depth interviews to combat the historical marginalization of my participants. My literature review has acknowledged the marginalization of experiences of Black women in Division I college basketball, although they comprise nearly half of the players. By allowing my participants to elaborate on their experiences, and using their words as the basis of my analysis, I will be centering their voices.

### ***Insider research***

In addition to using in-depth interviews, my methodology is also considered insider research because I am a researcher who fits the criteria for participation in this study so I understand the issues related to the availability to “objectively” report findings. Research evaluating the effectiveness of qualitative researchers considers insider researchers to have an advantage within marginalized communities because they are not met with the same skepticism and concern of exploitation by the community as outside researchers (Kelly 1997; Madison 2005). Findings further assert that inside researchers often have an easier time developing rapport and are in a better position to gain insight because of their familiarity with the norms and values within the community they are conducting research (Twine & Warren (2000; Madison 2005).

I hold that my experience as a Black woman who played Division I college basketball adds a level of experiential knowledge to my academic background that will allow me to further explore the acknowledge difference between how women athletes perceive themselves, and how they are perceived outside the sports world (Allison &



Butler 1984, p. 163). When referring specifically to the potential of Black women in academia, Patricia Hill Collins discusses the “outsider within” to point out how Black women’s access to backstage white culture while still being marginalized provides them with distinctive analysis of the ways race, class and gender interact (1986). Collins further asserts that disciplines like sociology would benefit from centering these analyses to “reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches” (1986, p. S15). Although there are advantages to insider research, disadvantages also exist.

Van Heughten, in the 2004 published article “Managing Insider Research: Learning from Experience” acknowledged that all qualitative research raises questions about subjectivity because there is no control group or standardization of research. Van Heughten continues to claim that a researcher’s values, beliefs and personal interests should not only be declared but continually scrutinized. She further asserts that insiders must create well-calibrated instruments that both value and harness passion (Van Heughten 2004, p. 208).

Sema Unluer’s 2012 published article “Being an Insider Researcher While Conducting Case Study Research” connected many limitations of insider research to role duality. Role duality occurs when researchers are conflicted between their roles as insiders in the community they are researching and their role as researchers of that community. This duality can result in the researcher overlooking routine behaviors from their participants, making assumptions about meanings of events and not seeking clarification, or assuming they know participants’ views and issues without asking (Unluer 2012). An insider researcher’s closeness to participants can also result in

participants assuming that the researcher understands their experiences and not providing details that would enhance the quality of research.

In an effort to overcome these disadvantages, Unluer had her research instrument reviewed by a “trustworthiness committee” with her dissertation committee to evaluate the validity of her research instrument before data collection. To overcome influences of bias in her analysis, Unluer conducted follow-up interviews with her participants to allow them to clarify any unclear responses. I have done similar things with my research instrument by having it reviewed by members of my dissertation committee and colleagues in my department. I also have conducted follow-up interviews with many of my participants to allow them to provide more detail or insight into responses from their initial interviews.

### ***Former players***

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, my research participants are Black women who played division I basketball 1997-2007, because I am especially curious about how the existence of the WNBA may have influenced the dynamics of women's college basketball. The inaugural WNBA season took place during the summer of 1997. I also choose to interview former players because research indicates that former players are better able to articulate which aspects of their race and gender identities influenced their experiences as student athletes than those still going through the process (Beamon 2008).

Collective memory literature asserts that remembering takes place temporally in the present and that recollections are not objective but rather influenced by the context of

the time in which they are recalled (Olick and Robbins 1998). Furthermore, Conway and Rubin claim that between the ages of 10-30, individuals generally go through a "reminiscence bump" -- a period of marked increase in memories of events significant to the formation of a stable self during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (1993, p. 311). Having participants recall their experiences as division I basketball players after they have completed their careers allows them to express influences that remain years later. Any aspects of their careers that remain influential to their identities even years after they have ended will be considered relevant and significant for analysis.

I also chose to interview former players because they no longer have direct ties to the universities where they played. My inquiry about their experiences requires that they discuss potentially sensitive information that may reflect negatively on some of their former teammates, coaches, athletic departments, university communities and even themselves. I tried preliminary, informal, interviews with current players and found that even with my commitment to confidentiality, they were hesitant to go into detail about their experiences out of fear of backlash if they were linked to their statements.

### ***Development of my research instrument***

There are two primary questions that guided the development of my research instruments, my data collection and my analyses of data. The first question is: how did my participants develop their identities as "hoopers" during adolescence? The second question is how did the development of their identities influence their experiences as NCAA Division I basketball players? My research instrument contained prompts to allow participants to respond extensively about the development of their athletic identity

and their experience as college athletes. They also include questions to gather basic demographic information about my participants and questions about their responses to the comments that Don Imus made pertaining to the Rutgers Women's Basketball team to better understand their views on the negative perceptions of Black women basketball players.

With my research having four outcomes, I conducted five preliminary interviews with former teammates whose responses were not included in the sample to determine the best way to organize the interviews. After conducting the preliminary interviews, I determined the best way to organize my interviews was to begin in the present with the basic demographic questions, then go back to my participants' basketball beginnings and work chronologically through their adolescence and college careers. The interviews ended with the participants discussing the Don Imus incident that occurred after the majority of my participants had completed their college playing careers. An example of the questions used to guide my interviews is contained in the appendices of this project.

### Data Collection

#### ***Snowball sampling***

Because I fit the criteria for participation in my own research project, I recruited from within my personal network and used snowball sampling for participants.

Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique where the researcher requests their participants to provide them the names of other individuals who fit the criteria for participation in the study. This technique has proven successful in studies where the

participants are concealed (Faugier & Sargeant 1997; Atkinson & Flint 2001). Because my participants are former players, and some may not be currently involved with basketball as careers are often no longer identified as “hoopers”, using snowball sampling has allowed me to include these individuals in my sample. Atkinson & Flint also claim that snowball techniques can locate individuals and groups that are needed to fill in gaps in our knowledge in certain social contexts and allow researchers to obtain more comprehensive data to address their research questions (2001). Acknowledging that my participants’ experiences are marginalized in the literature, this research will allow me to insert them into the existing cannon.

In addition to acknowledging the advantages of snowball sampling, Atkinson & Flint also identify three difficulties with the technique: limiting the validity of the data because of the representativeness of the data; finding initial participants, engaging participants as research assistants (2001). My research does not face any of these difficulties. As mentioned earlier, using snowball sampling has allowed me to reach individuals who fit the criteria for participation, but may no longer identify as “hoopers”. Snowball sampling allows my sample more representative than if I was limited only to participants that were still involved with basketball in their daily lives. Because my project uses insider research, I did not face the difficulty of finding initial participants. I began my recruitment by reaching out to friends and acquaintances that fit the criteria. The use of interviews as opposed to observation as a methodology prevented me from facing the difficulty of assigning proper meaning to symbols that leads researchers to informally use participants as research assistants. Through interviews, I allow my

participants to expound on significant symbols within their athletic community as well as the meaning of those symbols and how meaning shapes their behavior.

### ***Data collection***

I collected data between for two years, from May 2011 until May 2013. In that time I was able to conduct 11 complete interviews. Because this research is exploratory, 11 interviews is adequate to allow me to analyze themes I considered relevant in the attempt to answer my research questions as well as those themes that my participants deemed relevant through their responses. This research can be extended to include the themes introduced by my participants in future research with a larger sample.

Geographically, my participants span across the continental 48 states. To organize the participants', I divided the 48 continental United States into 6 regions loosely based on athletic conferences. I have at least one participant who played at a school in each. Basic biographical information about participants is presented with their first responses and the regional division is provided in the appendices.

Initially, I anticipated that this data collection process would take under a year, because, as a former player, I assumed that I would have a large network from which to pull participants. Unexpectedly, I ran into a number of obstacles that extended the data collection period longer than the one year I had initially anticipated.

### ***Difficulties with data collection***

One of the biggest difficulties I had was scheduling time to conduct the interviews with my participants. My goals was to recruit a representative sample of participants that played in the six regions I have identified; west coast, mid-west,

southwest, mid-south, south east, and east coast. Recruiting participants from so many regions of the country, I faced scheduling conflicts because I live in a different time zone from the majority of the participants. To resolve this conflict, many of my participant interviews were broken up into multiple sessions instead of one long session.

In addition to the time difference, many of my participants had very limited availability because many of them were balancing full time jobs and family commitments, and others were overseas training and playing basketball. This made it difficult to conduct interviews over the phone. I discovered early on that my participants were most opposed to telephone interviews because it was sometimes difficult to hear what was being said. I also found phone interviews difficult because I could not always make out the responses in the recordings and had to schedule follow-up interviews to get their responses. Unfortunately, sometimes the participants did not remember what they initially said so the responses I was able to record and transcribe may have been different than their initial sentiments.

To address these difficulties, I used a combination of, in person, telephone and Internet chat interviews. Using multiple methods of interviewing proved to be most effective in allowing me to complete my interviews in a way they were easy to record and transcribe without exhausting my participants. Ultimately eight of my interviews were conducted with a combination of Internet video/voice/text chat; one interview was conducted via telephone and two in person via digital vocal recorder.

### Limitations of the Research

One question about my research that arose when I discussed my project with colleagues was the reliability of snowball sampling to produce a diverse sample. Although I used snowball-sampling beginning with my personal contacts, I excluded any of my former teammates from participation. As a result, I excluded a number of potential participants in an attempt to provide a geographically representative sample. Also, I recognize that, with the small sample size for this project, I will not be making generalizations, only suggestions based on themes that arise from my participants' responses.

Another limitation of my project is that my sample does not include any participants from an (HBCU), so any analysis is limited to the dynamics that exist at PWI. Also, my sample only contains one participant from the west, southwest, and southeast regions so I will not attempt to make many regional generalizations based solely on their responses. I recognize these limitations and reiterate that purpose of this project is primarily to introduce new voices into the literature and demonstrate how race and gender interact simultaneously to influence identity negotiation and role performance specifically for Black women in Division I college basketball.



### Coding Process and Major Themes

Because this research is exploratory, I did not depend solely on the themes I considered relevant when I designed my research instrument. I coded my interviews by highlighting and connecting similar responses made by multiple participants and I also highlighted different views on the same prompt. In determining the major themes presented through my participant responses, I also looked at how much participants expounded on various prompts. Because one of the goals of this research is to allow the voices of marginalized voices to be heard, I wanted to consider what my participants considered to be important in the designation of significant themes. Presentation and analyses of these themes come in the following three chapters.

### Conclusion

Using the intracategorical intersectionality approach to investigate the influence that race and gender have in the experiences of Black women as Division I basketball players, I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with former players. The inquiries sought to address two major questions containing a number of subsequent questions. The data collection, transcription and coding process of the participant responses provided themes that will be analyzed in the next three chapters. Chapter IV will focus on my participants' development of basketball identity as "Hoopers". Chapter V will elucidate how their experiences as Division I basketball players is influenced by their identities as Black women and "Hoopers". Chapter VI, the last of the findings chapters, will allow

them to connect ways that basketball continues to inform their identities as Black women even after they have completed their college careers.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEVELOPMENT OF BASKETBALL IDENTITY DURING ADOLESCENCE

#### Chapter Organization

All of my participants identify as hoopers. They use terms like, “baller” “ball player” hooper and others, but at the core, they are acknowledging that basketball is, or at one time was, more to them than a recreational activity. In the next chapter, I focus on how my participants negotiate race, gender, and athletic identities within the context of playing Division I college basketball. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate ways that Black girls become interested in and engulfed by basketball, how it affects their identity development through adolescence and shapes the roles they play within their communities.

Contextualizing my participants’ responses using relevant identity theory literature, this chapter begins with my participants discussing their earliest memories of playing basketball, moves to discuss the events that solidified their identity as hoopers both to themselves and within their communities, and ends discussing the process of, and the circumstances under which they decided to play basketball in college. Earlier I claimed that there are unique conditions of my participants’ development related to the changing culture of women’s basketball and its increased visibility and celebration of Black players at elite levels during their adolescence. This chapter will provide support to those assertions. Additionally, because basketball remains the most popular sport among Black girls and because they comprise nearly half of women’s players at the

Division I collegiate level and a majority of WNBA players, this research seeks to understand more about why basketball is so inviting to and arguably empowering for Black girls and how it facilitates their identity development as Black women in accordance with research findings identifying important factors and experiences necessary for Black girls to develop positive self-concept considering their race and gender identities are marginalized in society.

### Child Identity Development

In his 1968 published book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erik Erikson made adolescence the focal point in child identity development claiming:

Not until adolescence does the individual develop the prerequisites in physiological growth, mental maturation and social responsibility to experience and pass through the crisis of identity. We may, in fact, speak of the identity crisis as the psychological aspect of adolescence (91).

Erikson created 8 stages in psychosocial development that he believed every individual had to complete in order to develop and maintain a healthy ego identity. Each of these 8 stages is determined by the psychosocial conflict it forces individuals to reconcile, the significant relationships influencing the individual's behavior, and the virtue they are supposed to learn before proceeding to the next stage. Of Erikson's 8 stages of development, stages 3-5 span childhood and adolescence and are therefore relevant to my participants' responses because they began playing basketball in either stage 3 or 4 and their identity as hoopers was solidified by stage 5.

Stage 3 is defined by the conflict between initiative and guilt. Erikson claims, "Individuals must emerge with a sense of initiative as a basis for a realistic sense of

ambition and purpose” before progressing to the next stage (1968, p. 115). This stage refers to individuals of pre-school age whose most significant relationships are between them and their parents with whom they exclusively identify (Erikson 1968, p. 115). Stage 4 is defined by the conflict between industry and inferiority where children “become dissatisfied and disgruntled without a sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly” (Erikson 1968, p. 123). A sense of competence is needed before an individual progresses to the next stage of development. This stage refers to individuals of elementary school age whose most significant relationships are between them and their school and neighborhood community. Stage 5 is defined by the conflict between identity and role confusion and is, as Erikson notes that, “the vital regenerator in the process of social evolution, for youth can offer its loyalties and energies both to the conservation of that which continues to feel true and to the revolutionary correction of that which has lost its regenerative significance” (1968, p. 134). This stage refers to individuals of junior and high school age as well as those in the first years of college whose most significant relationships are between them and their peers. Individuals who resolve the identity crisis of adolescence are those who enter adulthood with a healthy ego identity (Erikson 1968; Seaton, Sellers and Scottham 2006).

For Erikson “an optimal sense of identity...is experienced merely as a sense of psychosocial well-being” (1968, p. 165). Providing examples of how this sense of identity is manifested, Erikson claims a “feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from

those who count” (1968, p. 165). Erikson refers to this optimal sense of identity as commitment (Seaton, Sellers and Scottham 2006).

Providing further understanding of the process individuals use to solidify their ego identities, Marcia’s 1966 published article “Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status” developed four identity statuses: identity diffusion where individuals have not committed to any identity; identity foreclosure where individuals have committed to an identity based solely on the opinions of influential others; moratorium where individuals explore who they are but have not committed to an identity; identity achievement when individuals have committed to an identity after exploring what that identity means (Marcia 1966; Seaton, Sellers and Scottham 2006).

While neither Erikson nor Marcia’s research took race or gender into account, scholars like Phinney have applied Marcia’s four-stage model to analyze ethnic identity development arguing that the same statuses existed (Seaton, Sellers and Scottham 2006). Phinney claimed the difference with ethnic identity is that the levels of exploration about the meaning of an individual’s ethnic membership depended on the individuals’ level of commitment to or role within that ethnic group (Phinney 1989; Seaton, Sellers and Scottham 2006).

Although there have been attempts like Phinney’s to apply identity development models across race and gender, there are valid critiques. A critique of Phinney’s application of Marcia’s four-status model is that it fails to acknowledge the distinction between ethnic and racial identity. One critique about Erikson’s stages of development that is particularly relevant to this project are made in Steven 1997 published article

“African American female Adolescent Identity Development: A Three-Dimensional Perspective” in which she claims that:

[Erikson’s] formulations of race and gender in the identity construct are theoretically flawed. For instance, it is reasoned that female identity is realized through spousal attachment and that African American identity is decidedly compromised. African Americans living in hostile racist environments, it is argued, form negative identities (Stevens 1997, p. 147).

Steven’s goes on to add, “African American adolescents experience multitextured socialization experiences from which complex identities develop” (Stevens 1997, p. 147). As a result of the race and gender critiques of his work, I will be using Erikson’s stages only as a guideline to organize my participants’ development but primarily using theories and concepts specific to Black girls’ adolescent development for my analyses.

### Identity Development for Black Girls

As mentioned in previous chapters, simply combining the racial experiences of Black people and the gendered experiences of women cannot adequately capture the experiences of Black women. Anderson and Collins acknowledge that race and gender may have differing levels of salience or importance for Black women depending on the context, but hold that gender and race are overlapping and cumulative in the effect on Black women’s experiences (2004, p. 7). When attempting to understand the significance of these effects on the development of Black women’s identity development, self-concept and self-esteem scholars have identified two primary factors; the influence of oppression and stereotypical images and the need for self-determination and strength (Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha 2011; Stevens 1997; Shorter-Gooden and

Washington 1996). Furthermore, scholars have claimed that the core task for Black girls in identity development is synthesizing coherent meaning systems from three different socialization experiences: mainstream society with its Eurocentric view, a devalued social status both as woman and Blacks, and a cultural reference groups with a Black empowerment worldview (Stevens 1997). I will refer to these two factors and three socialization experiences in my analyses of the role that basketball plays in my participants' identity development as Black women during adolescence. It is my assertion that basketball provides Black girls with ways to engage in both primary factors and provides them with all three socialization experiences from which meaning is synthesized to develop positive identities as Black women.

#### First Experiences With Basketball

All of my participants were introduced to basketball through family members, often women, who played the sport. They all discussed how those early experiences drew them into playing for different reasons. Understanding my participants' orientation to the sport can provide valuable insight into how they define being a hooper and how they perform that identity. For some it was the approval of family members or to follow in their footsteps that drew them to basketball, for others it was the camaraderie or competition with their peers; ultimately though, they all grew to love playing for the sport itself.



Some of my participants were encouraged to play by their parents who played basketball. For Tasha, a 23 year old who played college basketball in the Mid-South region, it was her father:

I first began playing basketball in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade at 10 years old. I wanted to play basketball mainly because I knew that my dad had played, so when the school tryouts came along, I decided that I would try out for the team. Outside of seeing my dad play, I really didn't begin watching basketball until after my first season of playing. The summer between my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade years is when I really got into the game and blossomed on the court.

Tasha acknowledged that initially she didn't know much about basketball and rarely even watched, and that she only wanted to play because she knew that her father had played. Simply knowing that their parents played was reason for her and some other participants to play before they knew anything about the sport. Tasha never discussed being directly pushed into the sport by family members but knowing that her father played, initially piqued her initial interest long enough for her to begin developing her skills and continue playing basketball because of the enjoyment. For Britney, a 25 year old who played college basketball in the East region, it was both her mother and stepfather who influenced her:

I started playing basketball when I was 8 or 9 years old. My mother is a former player, coach as were most of the people in my family and social circle coming up. But more specifically when I was around that age, my stepfather was co-coaching a park board team...and encouraged me to play. After one very nervous practice, which pretty much consisted of a bunch of little girls, running around aimlessly, I was hooked. I don't remember being too engaged before that practice. Basketball was more so this constant humming in the background of my life. So I'd say I was familiar with the atmosphere, the gym, the bodies, the sounds and smells, but I wasn't directly engaged until that first practice can't explain what it was but I knew I wanted to do it again.

Britney was influenced indirectly by seeing and watching her mother play as well as being raised around family and family friends who were all involved with basketball before she understood the sport. Unlike Tasha, who was influenced by her father to begin playing but developed her skills without his direct support, Britney's first experience playing came in a practice organized by her stepfather who coached a team. This added an additional element of direct influence and support in the development of her skills. Other participants like Lauren also mentioned having parental support in the development of their skills. While Britney's support from her stepfather was formal, Lauren, a 28 year old that played college basketball in the Southeast region, she had a father who supported her skill development informally:

I started playing at home with the boys when I was 8 or 9. [I] Played organized when I was 10. I guess because I was just always running around doing something, one day my mom gave me a ball and I couldn't put it down after that. I played outside with the boys. I think my dad saw that I was serious about ball so he put a goal up in our driveway and people would come over to my house and play.

Although Lauren's father played basketball, it was actually her mother who bought her first basketball. It was only after her father recognized that she was, in his eyes, committed to playing, that he invested into helping her develop her skills by buying a basketball goal for her. Tasha, Britney and Lauren's experiences all speak to different levels of parental involvement. Research acknowledging the role of parental involvement in socializing their children through sport concludes that the initial parental support is more important for women than men (Anderson, Funk, Elliot & Smith 2003; Higginson 1985). With the perception of athletics as non-gender conforming for girls, it becomes imperative in girls' decision to begin and continue playing sports that their

parents are supportive of their decisions because they are likely to face exclusion and negative stereotyping from other individuals within the sporting arena. This body of literature also distinguishes between parental support, related to “expressions of care, concern...or encouragement displayed by the parent toward the adolescent”, and pressure is defined as “behavior indicating expectations of improbable or impossible levels of accomplishment” (Anderson et. Al, p. 243-244).

None of my participants’ expressed feeling pressure from their parents, in part due to them having their own expectations of playing basketball at the highest level. Also, none of my participants were “coach’s kids” who spent significant years playing for their parents’ on highly competitive teams. Brittney initially played on her stepfather’s team but admits that he had low expectations of her and her teammates because they were just beginning to understand basketball. Little research is done on the parent/coach impact on young athletes but both positive and negative aspects have been identified by Weiss & Fretwell’s research conducted using an adolescent boys' soccer team. The youth players interviewed in that study indicated some positive aspects of playing for their parent as: getting to spend quality time, receiving encouragement, understanding of their skill level, technical instruction to develop skills and seemingly superficial perks like keeping team trophies at their house (2005). Additionally they identified some negative aspects as being: negative emotional responses, added pressure lack of empathy (Weiss & Fretwell 2005). Considering how important parental involvement in athletics has proven to be in girls’ participant and success and how parental involvement for Black youth is acknowledged to significantly improve

participation in athletic and extracurricular activities, the relationships between Black girl athletes and their parent-coaches is worth further investigation, but is beyond the scope of this research.

In addition to the influence of parents, my participants also acknowledged how older siblings were involved in their introduction to basketball. Princess, a 31 year that played college basketball in the Mid-South region, credits her older sister recalling:

I started playing basketball seriously when I was 9. My mother was a single mother so that meant I had to hang with my older sister who's 9 years older than me. I had to go everywhere she went. She played basketball so I went to basketball practice with her...I thought she was, and still is, the greatest person in the world so naturally I wanted to play too. I actually changed my number in high school to her number and I wore it all through college as well. She played other sports too, but basketball was the sport she thought I would be best at...I would watch games with her sometimes and ask questions.

Princess began playing basketball because of the encouragement of her older sister whom she admired. In addition to her sister's encouragement, Princess also got to see her older sister play and practice. As a result, Princess was able to visualize herself as a player with her sister as an on-court role model. Another participant, Michelle, a 26 year old that played college basketball in the East region discusses how her desire to imitate her older brother initially drew her to basketball:

I started playing organized basketball when I was 9 however; I've been around basketball since about 5 or 6, playing at the neighborhood park with family and friends. My older brother played and my parents asked if I wanted to [play] and I said sure. It was nothing major at the time, just wanting to be a part. I followed everything my older brother did and he was so into ball that I didn't want to miss out on the fun. It was something we could get along over. Sometimes, older siblings don't want the younger ones around but, with basketball, he let me tag along.

Having older siblings who were hoopers influenced Princess and Michelle's decisions to play basketball differently than participants whose parents were former hoopers.

Whiteman, McHale & Crouter's research indicates that younger siblings' interest in sports is directly correlated to the interest of their older siblings and further that older sibling interest and participation in sports has an especially profound influence on girls' interest and participation in sports when compared to the interest held by girls with older siblings that did not play sports (2007). Participants like Brittney and Lauren discuss hearing stories of how their parents used to play but Princess and Michelle had the advantage having been shown what it meant to be a hooper. In addition to watching their older siblings play on the court, Princess and Michelle saw how they were treated in the community and how they carried themselves off the court as hoopers to paint a clearer picture of what the identity encompassed. Participants who only had stories about their parents being hoopers depended primarily on basketball experiences with peers on the court. In contrast, those with older siblings had not only role models, but also hands-on mentors. As younger siblings who imitated their older sibling's behaviors and mannerisms, Princess and Michelle were able to understand what it took to be hoopers even before they had the skills to be recognized as such for their playing ability. For Princess especially, seeing an older sister was empowering to her because it gave her reassurance that she could be a hooper because someone who looked like her was showing her it was possible and teaching her what she needed to do to be successful.

Roxanne, a 29 year old that played college basketball in the Midwest region, discussed how basketball not only allowed her to grow closer to her family but also helped her developed relationships with her peers in the neighborhood. She recalled:

My grandmother's ex-husband loved sports so as a kid I'd just sit around him when he watched baseball and basketball and one day he brought home a Nerf hoop and put it up in the apartment and challenged me every day. I'd be shooting on that thing for hours to try to beat him, and gradually I noticed I started getting better and better...I'd go into the rec center when they would have open gym and shot and do moves. I'd play against boys in the neighborhood on our little milk crate. I'd also play at neighborhood boys and girls club.

For Roxanne, although her initial interest was connected to being close to her then grandfather figure, her competitive drive increased and she began to focus on developing her basketball skills playing with her peers. While all of my participants identified how older family members introduced them to basketball, many also expressed how playing the sport was a way for them to define themselves as individuals aside from their familial relationships, as Jazmin, a 29 year old that played college basketball in the Midwest region, articulated:

I started playing basketball when I was 5 years old. I was enrolled in an after school program at the YMCA where we were allowed an hour or so of "free time" in the gym every day. I always chose to play with the boys while my female friends jumped rope. One day, one of the adult leaders, saw me shooting and told my mom she should sign me up for one of the teams there. My family was excited to know I was interested in playing, especially my mom who played in high school. I remember her teaching me how to dribble; shoot and other strategies that helped me learn and love the game. I was used to watching my parents and other family members play in different leagues around the city so I was excited to be on a "team" of my own. At that point it was actually just a co-ed fundamental league. I was the only girl in the league, which included all the YMCAs in the metro area! But I held my own.

For Jazmin, even though many of her family members played basketball and her mother, who played in high school, helped her with her fundamental skills, she saw basketball as

a way to have “her own” team. Jazmin wanted her basketball identity to extend beyond her familial connection and provide her the opportunity to measure her ability against her peers. Similarly to Roxanne, Jazmin’s competitiveness developed shortly after an older family member provided her the fundamentals. For my participants, this expressed competitiveness and desire to prove their skills were the first indications that they possessed qualities of hoopers, a term they will define later.

Using Erikson’s stages as a loose guide, I would consider my participants in stage 3 during their introductions to basketball. Even though they were not toddlers when they began playing basketball, I place them within stage 3 because they are developing their sense of ambition and purpose as it pertains to basketball. While 10,000s of girls are introduced to basketball between the ages of 5-8 via youth leagues like Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and local youth sports organizations, many of them decide not to continue playing the sport. Thus my participants’ decision to continue was an indication that they saw basketball as having potential to serve a purpose in facilitating their development. I also place my participants initial basketball experiences in stage 3 because immediate family members, the initial socializing group in this stage, introduced them to the sport. Many of my participants expressed their initial interest in basketball stemming not from their understanding of it, but rather understanding the value that family members placed on basketball participation.

Additionally and perhaps unintentionally, many of my participants’ initial experiences with basketball introduced them to what Stevens (1997) refers to as a cultural reference group with Black empowerment worldview. Although few of my

participants initially connected basketball to their racial identity, the court was a place where they were both exposed to positive, successful representations of Black men and women and supported in their pursuits to improve their skills. Later in this chapter, I will discuss specific ways in which basketball facilitated the development of this reference group and furthermore its impact on the development of my participants' identities as not only hoopers but also Black women. In addition to basketball facilitating the development of a Black empowerment cultural reference group, individual experiences also provided my participants opportunities to satisfy the need for self-determination and strength; one of the two primary factors in Black women's development of self-concept and self-esteem (Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha 2011; Stevens 1997; Shorter-Gooden and Washington 1996). The need for self-determination and strength are more clearly seen within the context of my participants being among the few girls that played basketball when they began.

### Playing With the Boys

All of my participants had older family members that introduced them to basketball and encouraged them to play. More significantly, many of my participants had older women in their families who played basketball and were involved in their fundamental development. Those among my participants who did not have women family members that played noted having women who encouraged and supported their playing. Seeing Black woman hoopers early in their basketball experiences allowed my



participants not to be deterred by the perspective that basketball as a boy's sport. Some of my participants like Britney never even saw basketball that way, she proclaims:

I didn't start out thinking that basketball was a boys sport because of my mother and aunties, it was just something that the women in my life did...I sort of grew up in the gym because my mother was a gym rat, she had me young and was still recreationally playing a lot and coaching for most of my early years. She was a single mom so that meant I was in the gym right with her.

Britney's experience reflects a minority of my participants because she began playing with girls and in an organized league on a team coached by her stepfather, as she discussed earlier. Because her initial experiences were not with boys, and because her mother and aunties were the first hoopers and coaches she was exposed to, it is understandable that she would not view basketball as a boy's sport. There were however, participants whose introduction to basketball was in a male dominated environment that still did not view basketball as a boy's sport. Kadijah, a 33 year old that played college basketball in the West region, exemplifies this perspective:

There weren't really any girls when I started playing ball. I was a tom boy so I played with the boys in the neighborhood, some were older but once I started playing competitively, I played with anybody who was at the park which would be older men sometimes...I never thought that basketball was a boy's sport because I played, and didn't care about anything other than basketball, that's all I cared about.

Because she was a girl playing basketball, Kadijah viewed her participation as proof that it was not a boy's sport. Kadijah's statement was spoken "matter-of-factly" within the context of her not caring about anything but basketball itself. For her, as long as she was allowed to play, basketball being considered a boys sport was insignificant. Kadijah's disregard of gender norms with regard to basketball was a reflection of the welcoming basketball environment in the neighborhood where she grew up. She mentions playing

with “anybody who was at the park” meaning that she was not discouraged from playing by her peers or even the adults who played. Acceptance from older hoopers made it easier for peer acceptance while my participants were developing the skills needed to validate them as potential hoopers.

Kadijah’s gender-neutral perspective on basketball came to her earlier than it did for some of my participants who did initially believe that basketball was a boy’s sport. These participants felt this way in part because of initial discouragement they received from boys their ages when they started to play. Instead of being deterred by this initial discouragement, my participants expressed more of an obligation to disprove the notion that girls could not or should not play basketball when they began. Felicia, a 27 year old that played college basketball in the Mid-South region, talked about having something to prove on the court as a girl:

I started playing ball at the age of 7. At the time, my elementary school was holding rec tryouts for the guys to come play but not the girls. I didn't understand why so I went to the principal to discuss it. I looked up and there were only 3 girls at the end of tryouts. That was the first time I ever touched a ball; going through tryouts made me practice more so I would be able to compete with the guys. That's how I developed my love for the game. It was hard at first because some of the guys didn't want the girls there. My thoughts were more like I can play this better than any guy in here. That's the mentality I had. I wanted to be better than the boys. I knew from that experience it would be a long and hard journey with basketball...so knowing that it was seen as a "boys sport" I wanted to prove it wasn't just a "boys sport" and girls were just as good, if not better.

Felicia, like many of my participants expressed initial exclusion from boy peers who did not feel she belonged on the basketball court because she was a girl. For many of my participants, these early experiences were their first ones with gender stereotypes and discrimination. Most of my participants talked about being the first or only girl playing

basketball but all of them described their initial experiences playing basketball with boys as beneficial to their skills both in terms of developing those specifically related to basketball and those like toughness and perseverance to overcome obstacles that proved helpful both on and off the court. Dominique, a 30 year old that played college basketball in the Midwest region, acknowledged that she was treated differently as a girl playing with the boys and recognizes the differences in the style of play between boys and girls:

I started playing with Boys. There weren't really any girls playing in my neighborhood, which was my sole experience before playing on my high school team. There's a difference in playing with boys because they want to take your head off, block all your shots or not guard you really at all because they are scared you might actually be good and they don't want to be that dude who gets hooped by a girl. Girls on the other hand are slower in general, shorter overall, and are more fundamentally sound. Guys can use their athleticism to mask or overcome fundamental deficiencies. Girls don't usually have that luxury.

Dominique discussed the differences between girls and boys in terms of increased competitiveness, skill development and athleticism and claimed that playing against boys helped her develop skills that most girls she played with and against later who did not grow up playing with boys lacked. My participants ability to "hold their own" as Jazmin articulated, served to make basketball a more gender-neutral sport for my participants because after the initial discrimination, they were welcomed on the court based on skill level irrespective of gender. As mentioned earlier, my participants did not give up playing because of early gender discrimination and connected their resilience and perseverance as part of what it means to be a Black woman with will be addressed in greater depth later. Right now though, it is important to acknowledge some of the traits that are considered valuable for Black women to possess in order to overcome obstacles

of living in a society that will marginalize them based on gender and race. In her article “Black Women: A Tradition of Self-Reliant Strength” Christine Renee Robins identifies these traits as self-reliance, independence, assertiveness, and strength are inherent characteristics of Black women and acknowledges that they are passed on to Black girls at an early age (1983, p. 137).

Loosely referring again to Erikson’s development stages, my participants at this time have now moved into stage 4 because were less concerned with appeasing their family members by playing basketball and more so with being acknowledged and recognized for their skills by important community members; within the basketball community these members include coaches and recognized hoopers. In addition to changing their significant relationships, stage 4 introduces a new conflict to my participants. During stage 3 they were developing their sense of initiative in wanting to pursue basketball, in stage 4, the conflict centers on developing skills necessary to be considered a hooper. The desire to improve skills was also driven by the need for self-determination and strength; one of the factors needed for development of positive self-concept for Black girls.

By playing with boys, my participants were also introduced to negative stereotypes of women’s athletic inferiority and sought out to disprove them and show that they, and other girls, could be just as skilled in basketball as any of the guys on the court. My participants acknowledge that breaking those stereotypes was often a motivating factor in their desire to be better on the basketball court. In this respect, basketball facilitated the development of positive self-concept and self-esteem for my

participants because it allowed them the opportunity to “prove themselves”. Because basketball is a relatively inexpensive sport to play, only requiring a ball because there are public courts with free access, my participants were able to devote as much time to improving their basketball skills, as often they wanted. By always being on the court, they began to gain the respect of hoopers because of their dedication to the sport. So even though my participants may have experienced initial gender based discrimination, they were ultimately valued by their skills on the court and later supported other community members to continue their pursuits. Through their experiences playing, my participants learned the lesson that hard work could overcome some initial negative stereotyping when individuals are allowed the opportunity to be judged by their abilities. My participants articulated that those experiences helped them develop their work ethic and perseverance against initial adversity and also gave them advantages when they played against girls who had not played with boys because they were used to playing a more athletic, intense style of play.

Even though my participants discussed experiencing negative stereotyping, they never discussed being prohibited from playing; this again provides support for viewing basketball as that Black women’s empowerment reference group because it was a space that encouraged my participants to take risks like trying new moves on offense or guard skillful players on defense. Not only did it encourage my participants to take skills necessary to develop and test their skills, but it provided support to cushion the blow of any failures and celebrated their successes to help build their confidence to continue working through obstacles. Another way that basketball served as this reference groups

was by providing positive representations specifically of Black women not just for Black girls like my participants but all members of the Black community.

### Impact of Increased Visibility of Black Woman Hoopers

Although the majority of my participants' initial experiences were with boys, they all acknowledged the importance of having Black woman hoopers to look up to as heroines. For some they were family members, for others they were older girls or women within their local communities. In addition to women hoopers in their families and communities who helped shape my participants' views of women as basketball players, they were also frequently exposed to Black woman hoopers playing college and professional basketball on television. Kadijah discussed how seeing women playing basketball on television was important in developing her confidence as a player:

I used to watch video of female basketball players or NBA teams. I patterned my game after Sheri Sam, Tamika Catchings or Monica Maxwell. I studied more female players than men I respected Jordan game but I didn't want to be Jordan, I wanted to be me, or Sheri Sam. I started watching women's hoops probably in 1995. Seeing women who played b-ball gave me something to look up to and the possibility to take my skills to College, it was great.

Kadijah discusses how seeing women college basketball players on television made her desire to play in college more tangible of a goal because she saw players with similar physiques, athleticism and skillsets playing at a high level. As a result, Kadijah believed she could realistically get to the same level if she worked hard enough. Many of my participants identified seeing women's basketball on television as a major influence in their decision to continue pursuing the sport after high school. A unique aspect of my participants' adolescence is witnessing the birth of the Women's National Basketball

Association (WNBA). For the first time since the early 1980s, women had an opportunity to play professional basketball in the United States. Lauren reflects on how that reality encouraged her to pursue basketball as a profession.

When I was growing up I felt like it was a boys' game because there were no female ball players. But when I watched the [Atlanta] Olympics...I'm not sure what year it was but all the future WNBA stars were playing. I think the following summer they had the inaugural WNBA season and I fell in love with Cynthia cooper, [Sheryl] Swoopes and Lisa Leslie tried to dunk in that first game against NY I think. She got hung, and it was kind of embarrassing, but it was cool to see a woman get up like that. She finally boomed one. I just think that whole time period made me really feel like not only could I play in college but there's a women's NBA out there, and they've got mad game. [Michael Jordan] was a beast but girls finally had women that they could want to be like and consider role models. I'm 5'7" so I'm never going to be able to fly in the air and dunk like [Jordan] did, but I could crossover and shoot this floater or jumper like Cynthia Cooper. It just gave me so much extra motivation to want to be better and get to that level.

Almost all of my participants admitted that watching the 1996 USA women's Olympic basketball team was one of the most influential experiences in their pursuit of playing basketball at a high level.

Because the 1996 Summer Olympic Games were held in Atlanta Georgia, more of the events were televised for American viewers. The dominance of that team as they won the gold medal increased the visibility of women's basketball; five of the players were even on the cover of the Sports Illustrated Olympic preview issue that contained an article about how the team had bonded over a 14-month international tour (Wolff 1996). Of additional significance to my participants, the team was predominately Black. This allowed my participants and other little Black girls to see Black women dominating at every position of the basketball court. Teresa Edwards, Ruthie Bolden, Venus Lacy, Lisa Leslie, Katrina McClain, Nikki McCray, Carla McGhee, Dawn Staley and Sheryl

Swoopes provided a wide representation of Black women in size, skin color and background, allowing for nearly every little Black girl to identify at least one to idolize. The success of that team carried over to the American Basketball League (ABL) and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) leagues that debuted a year later and shifted dreams of playing professional basketball into a reality for girls like my participants. My participants are a generation removed from struggles of pioneering women athletes after the passage of Title IX in 1979 and grew up during a time when those pioneering women's struggles were being rewarded by increased opportunities and visibility for women in sports at all levels. As a result, my participants were able to identify at least one Black woman hooper on television as a role model for them to pattern their own skills after and as proof that their dreams of playing professionally could come true.

As my participants began to play basketball more frequently, they acknowledged that the encouragement and support they received extended beyond their families to their local communities. Just as my participants recognized there were new college and professional opportunities available to women playing basketball, their families and communities acknowledged the potential of these new opportunities as well. The majority of my participants describe how playing basketball brought their communities together as they supported the local girls' basketball teams. For my participants, the basketball community became more than just a cultural reference groups with Black empowerment but more importantly one for Black women's empowerment. My participants repeatedly acknowledged how the presence of Black women college and



professional basketball players on television not only allowed them to see the potential for their basketball careers but also provided them with positive representations of Black women not seen elsewhere in mainstream media. Whereas elsewhere in mainstream media, Black women were primarily portrayed as stereotypes like welfare queens and sexual objects, basketball allowed Black women's skills strength and perseverance to be highlighted as WNBA and NCAA tournament games were broadcasted nationally. Many of my participants also mentioned the influence of local women hoopers in shaping their identities as Black women and hoopers simultaneously because, as explained earlier, they have overlapping characteristics.

Having Black woman hoopers in their lives as family members and coaches allowed my participants to see Black women not only as stars on the court but also as coaches and as supporters. My participants all reflected positively on the mentorship they received from older players as informal coaches that helped them improve their skills or picked them to play on their teams so they could get experience playing against older players. This presents basketball not only as a cultural reference group of Black women's empowerment but also as a supportive network providing mentorship from Black women who role modeled hooper conduct off the court and also directly helped Black girls develop their basketball skills and self-confidence through basketball as coaches. For my participants, as they will discuss later in detail, basketball provided them with sisterhood bonds that disproved the commonly held assumption that Black women, are always in competition with each other and incapable of working collectively.

### Positive Reactions to Black Girls' Hoop Dreams

For my participants, having community support as their love for basketball grew was a source of confidence for them and something that further endeared them to the sport. Going into detail about the family support from the time she began playing all the way up through high school, Princess reminisced:

My family was very supportive, especially my dad. This was about the time we got really close and I know basketball had something to do with that because he had a rep as a good player so it was like I was carrying on the name. My sister had moved out and was doing her own thing; my mom didn't have a car, so my dad had to take me to practice, games, tournaments, etc. He was glad I wasn't walking around in booty shorts chasing boys and such like my other friends. My mom just wanted me to make sure I combed my hair. Overall, they all were really excited that I was good at basketball more than anything. In high school my sisters would buy my shoes and sports bras when my parents couldn't afford to. In high school I also had extended family that would come to my games. It was really great. I really felt the love from them.

In addition to the family support, my participants also discussed how their communities supported them, Princess continues:

We got free food in the cafeteria, free stuff in the neighborhood. The amount of love we received from the community was crazy! If we were walking down the street with our letterman jacket on, people would stop and see if we needed anything. Looking back it was crazy...We were like the [community's] babies. At a time when there was so much crap going on in the city...gangs, drugs, that kind of stuff...and here was this group of young ladies that were straight getting it in on the court and in the classroom...we even had a billboard [at a main intersection in the neighborhood]...We also had a real box of cereal too! They sold it at the hood grocery store

Princess described how her family viewed basketball as a positive activity and how extended family chipped in to defer basketball related costs like uniforms, league or tournament fees, to help encourage her to keep playing despite economic hardships. Additionally, the community support for Princess's successful basketball team was a

source pride for members of a community that was at the time struggling to deal with a lot of gang violence and drug activity. Another participant, Tasha, belonged to a community with a strong girls' basketball tradition so the support she received reinforced community expectations of her success that matched those that she had for herself:

I think the community support for girls playing basketball always was good where I was raised. We had a good number of talented girl basketball players that came from my community and went on to play in college on some level. That also led to high expectations. I had some neighborhood friends who wanted me to come over and play instead of working out, but I had made my decision. I had found my passion and I wanted to get better. I enjoyed it. My family and friends never deterred me from playing basketball. It was actually encouraged.

Tasha mentions that the level of community support she received due in part the tradition of successful girls' hoopers from the community that came before her. Her decision to prioritize basketball over other activities hints at basketball identity commitment, which I will discuss in more detail later. In addition to the increased visibility of women's basketball that extended my participants goals beyond high school, the successful launch of the WNBA created career opportunities for women through basketball on and off the court. In addition to how seeing women play basketball at a professional level represented the realization of my participants' dreams, is allowed their supporters to adopt similar aspirations for them. As Roxanne expressed:

Around age 13 or 14 there was a Nike sponsored tournament and we won the championship, and so that game was at the [WNBA arena]. And I was like 'wow one day I want to play on this floor again'. The comments started around 8th grade from pretty much everyone that saw me play, my friends and family just knew I was headed straight to the WNBA.

Playing on a WNBA court motivated Roxanne work hard enough to possibly play professionally and the launch of the league caused friends and family to believe that because of her skills and devotion to the sport, she would achieve that goal. Further discussing how the existence of the WNBA increased the support for girls playing basketball in her neighborhood Yolanda, a 34 year old that played college basketball in the Southwest region recalled:

When the WNBA took off it was like people started asking you, you going to play D1, you going to play in the pros? Like before, if you said you wanted to be the first woman in the NBA, people would laugh but all a sudden they were pushing us just like they pushed the boys to try to “make it” playing ball. Crazy thing is that they jumped on us harder because it’s like, if you can hang with the boys you, you should be good enough to play pro with the women. I remember the first time little kids came asking for my autograph like I was some star but they really treated us like it. And it made us proud, like we rep’ed everywhere we went, like, every team we played we wanted to make the hood proud because they’d say you better not lose to no team from the other side of town or another city and you really better not lose to no white girls

Yolanda’s comments speak to how athletics has always been seen as a path toward upward mobility in the Black community. Basketball specifically, has been portrayed, especially in urban neighborhoods, as a way out of poverty as seen through documentaries like *Hoop Dreams* (James 1994). For previous generations, this path was reserved only for Black boys, but my participants acknowledge how the existence of the WNBA allowed them to be viewed as potential basketball stars in their communities. Yolanda’s comments also introduced a racial element suggesting that playing basketball served as a source of Black pride. I am asserting that basketball serves as a Black women’s empowerment reference group for Black girls by providing, not only them but, everyone in the community with positive representations of Black women being

recognized for their achievements and hard work not bound by Eurocentric views on womanhood. Much of this has to do with basketball being a highly visible component of contemporary urban Black cultural performance.

### Performing Blackness Through Basketball

Since the early 1990s writers like Nelson George and Michael Erick Dyson have analyzed basketball as Black urban cultural performance and specifically performance of Black masculinity (George 1992; Dyson 1993). For them and other writers, basketball is a metaphor for Black men's ability to succeed against racial oppression because since the integration of college basketball in the 1960s, they have dominated on that level. Additionally, Black participation and support is largely responsible for professional basketball's success as a revenue-producing sport beginning in the 1970s (George 1992; Graham 2006). Specifically in urban centers, these writers place basketball alongside music, fashion, and language as forms of Black cultural expression that reflect the conditions of socio-economic environments surrounding many basketball courts. More recent accounts have acknowledged that basketball in many Black communities is more than just a game but, also a matter of life and death for young Black men who recognized few other legal options for success (May 2008; Brooks 2009). As a result, basketball as Black cultural expression was characterized by not only the flash and flare that was highlighted through the popularization summer basketball leagues like those held in Harlem's Holcomb Rucker park, but also a tenacity, hustle and even desperation

that captured the desire of its players to use the sport as a way out of their impoverished communities.

Within this construct of basketball as Black cultural performance, there is an underlying theme of Black masculinity. My participants however, in part because of their gender-neutral perception of basketball, understood and embraced race pride that accompanied excelling at the sport. Yolanda discussed how playing basketball serves as a way to perform Blackness as a racial identity:

I wouldn't say basketball is a Black sport but there's like a Black style to playing. It's got more swag; the crossovers, the dunking, talking shit. Like, they'll say its undisciplined or whatever but it's just part of the game for us. Fast breaks and pressure defense are just how we play not zone defense and slowing down to run a set. So it's like, when you play a white team, it's whose style is better. So our coach would sometime slow the game down and we'd pick teams apart just to prove like, don't think that because we're black we can't run plays too.

Although Yolanda admitted that basketball is not a Black sport, she discussed the added flare used to perform various moves is indicative of a "Black" style. She also discussed how negative stereotypes associate flashy, freestyle moves of Black players with an inability to play with the perceived intellect and discipline needed to run predesigned plays and "zone" defense where everyone has a designated spot on the court to guard. She also discussed using basketball as an opportunity to disprove stereotypes by her coach having her team "run plays" and play the more organized style of basketball was more associated with white players. Tasha echoed Yolanda's sentiment about the connection between Blackness and basketball:

I never looked at basketball as simply a Black sport because when I first began playing, I attended a private school. Needless to say, majority of the players were white. It wasn't until after I became heavily involved in basketball within my

community that I became exposed to what some people may call “Black sport”. I think my beginnings helped me get over the stereotype of basketball being a “Black sport” and helped me in the long run because I had the ability to play both styles of basketball.

Tasha played informally in her neighborhood, but she began playing organized basketball with white players so she initially had no racialized view of the sport. She also expressed that the narrative of basketball being a “Black” sport was something she learned within her community and was more connected to style of play that was preferred. Tasha claimed that being able to understand and play styles connected with both Black and white players gave her an advantage. Lauren’s responses were similar to both Yolanda’s and Tasha’s; Yolanda’s in terms of understanding the negative stereotypes associated with Black players and Tasha’s in terms of not initially racializing basketball but becoming aware of other people’s racial framing of the sport:

I didn’t think it was a Black sport because on TV there were white and Black woman hoopers. I started playing on a traveling team with mostly country white girls. They thought just because I was Black that I would be real athletic with no jumper, or couldn’t play fundamental ball, and organized.

While Yolanda and Tasha’s’ understandings of basketball as a “Black sport” was viewed as a source of pride within her community, Lauren’s introduction to the concept came from white players and opponents and was coupled with negative racial stereotypes about her inability to play with any structure or have basic fundamentals.

Most of my participants did not believe that Black people had any ownership over the sport of basketball nor were they inherently athletically superior, they did however recognize that different skills and styles were attributed to Black and white players. This differs in from the research done with Black boys around basketball

primarily because Black boys comprise the majority of players therefore they generally view basketball as something inherently Black. For girls however, whites are still more active in sports, so when most of my participants began playing organized basketball, there were a lot of white players and coaches. This integrated orientation to basketball influences my participants' perception as to whether or not basketball is a "Black sport." While they did not view it as a Black sport, my participants did acknowledge how their integrated experiences did expose them to racial stereotypes. Many discussed how their athleticism was viewed as an inability to play "organized" basketball, which suggests intellectual inferiority; applying full court pressure to trap dribblers and force turnovers instead of playing half court player to player prevents defense and using one-on-one moves to score instead of limiting their options to those drawn up by a coach were viewed as an inability to do so. The racial stereotype of intellectual inferiority exemplifies not only my participants experience with mainstream society's Eurocentric views but also the devalued status of Blacks. Combined with the initial gender discrimination that many of them experienced while playing primarily with boys and the subsequent acceptance and support they experienced from the Black community for their perseverance and improved skill level it is evidence that basketball provides my participants with all three socialization experiences needed to synthesize coherent meaning to develop their identity as Black women. Fortunately, my participants did not internalize any of the negative stereotypes associated with their basketball skills and instead embraced Black basketball while simultaneously learning the aspects of "white basketball" to improve their overall skills



For my participants, basketball provided a Black women's empowerment reference frame that helped mitigate the potential negative influences of the devalued social status as both women and Blacks and those associated with their athleticism not fitting into Eurocentric views of womanhood. With self-determination and strength being characteristics of Black womanhood, the gendered and racial stereotypes that my participants faced as players served as an opportunity for them hone their perseverance, strength, work ethic, and build their supportive networks both on and off the court. With the basketball providing them with opportunities for positive identity development, it is understandable why my participants embraced the identity as hoopers.

### Becoming a Hooper

My participants were all very adamant about differentiating between a ball player/ hooper/ baller and just being someone who casually played the sport. They not only defined basketball identity but also discussed what signaled for them that they deserved the title and how they performed their identities. Kadijah spoke passionately about the difference between a "baller" and someone who plays for recreation:

I would call myself a baller, not to brag, but I had skills. [I fell in love with basketball] around 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It was something I was really good at and I got special treatment because I played basketball. A baller thinks and breathes basketball where as someone who just plays basketball, I think plays because they want some recreation in their life. A hooper aka baller studies the game day and night.

Kadijah, as well as many of my participants had an aspect of commitment to the sport in their definitions. Echoing Kadijah's sentiments, Britney added"

When you are a hooper, basketball is your life. You wake up thinking about it and go to sleep thinking about it. It consumes hours of your days and emotions. Hoopers always got shoes ready, always ready to play horse or 21, and no matter if you are a hooper or a former hooper, other people that played ball can readily identify you...perhaps even down to what level you played...Like there is a certain comfort ability I have when I enter a gym, and I had a complicated relationship with ball...but yeah...There is a confidence certainly.

Commitment to and sacrifice for basketball were common aspects of being a hooper among all my participants. Britney discussed how being a hooper influenced her actions and what she wore because she was always dressed to be prepared to play. Speaking more about how being a hooper had a stylistic element. Dominique added:

A Hooper is seen with a gym bag, stays in the gym, hangs around pick-up games trying to get on with the guys. Hoopers wear hoop shorts and t-shirts, hair up, athletic build that is noticeable. A hooper is [also] trying to master the craft not like a person who plays recreationally. I liked the feeling of schooling a guy and have others give me props for it, but even when it didn't happen I always enjoyed the feeling of having a great game, a good block even a great rebound. That's what made me feel like a hooper.

Dominique touched on not only the look of a basketball player including clothing hairstyle and athletic build. For my participants, looking like hoopers was more than just performance to validate their identity to others but it also served a function allowing them to be prepared to play a game at any time, thus meeting the expectations of a hooper. Dominique's comments also identified what actions made her feel like she was a hooper. All of my participants discussed the importance of validation for their identity as hoopers. My participants rejected the idea that an individual could "self-identify" as a hooper claiming that, you had to be recognized by hoopers to legitimately claim to be one. Many of my participants still remember the exact experience that validated their identities as hoopers, Jazmin recollected:

I feel like a hooper when I perform well and/or I'm recognized by other hoopers I'll never forget when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and was fortunate enough to be selected to play on the high school varsity team. This team was stacked with players that I looked up to and I had witnessed their success in previous years. We were scrimmaging in practice one day when I got the ball on a 2 on 1 fast break, where the offense had the advantage. Just before I go to the basket I passed the ball behind my back to my teammate. She scored the basket and the other point guard, a senior, high fived me and said, "Nice pass!" At that point, in my mind, I was an official hooper!

For Jazmin, it was recognition of her skills from players that she looked up to that solidified her status as a hooper. Many of my participants discussed moments on the court that validated them as hoopers, but others pointed out validation from coaches that solidified their identities. Lauren reflected on what it was for her and said:

When I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, a coach told me if I keep practicing I could have a chance to play in college. It became real when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and got a recruitment letter from the [state university]. It was a generic letter that they send out to everyone but at the time it was so cool to me...I think that letter helped make it official for me. It meant a lot for me to be a hooper. It's a different feeling when you walk around knowing you're good at something. Basketball was my thing and no one could take that from me.

In addition to the validation both from her coach and a university recruiter solidifying her status as a hooper, Lauren expressed ownership and a sense of happiness and accomplishment that she associated with playing basketball. All of my participants identified how being a hooper was an identity that helped build their confidence during adolescence. Mead discusses the importance of significant symbols in helping individuals perform desired identities (1934). For my participants, possession and recognition of one's basketball skills on the court, and commitment through dress and mannerisms off the court signified commitment to the hooper identity.

During this time my participants began understand what it meant to be a hooper

and were occupied with trying to perform accordingly. This signifies a transition into Erikson's stage 5 of identity development for my participants, with them reconciling the conflict of being dissatisfied in their performance. Their validation as hoopers from recognized players and coaches as well as other members in their community, the most influential group for individuals in stage 4, signify the resolution. In stage 5, the conflict of role and identity confusion becomes prevalent as peer relationships become most important to individuals. The biggest role/identity confusion with my participants that arose was that between their identities as basketball players and their sexuality.

#### Presumption of Women Hoopers as Lesbians

While my participants expressed overwhelming community support for being hoopers, they also admitted there were negative perceptions of its influence on their sexuality, Tasha recalled:

At times, I heard negative things about girls who played basketball. It wasn't until I was a little older, middle school or so that I really began to hear people speak negatively about girl hoopers. Girl basketball players are wannabe boys; girl hoopers are hard or rough; all girl basketball players are lesbians.

Echoing similar sentiments, Dominique remarked that, "[people] said all girls who play ball are gay and dykes and that girls get turned out by their teammates". The comments my participants discussed hearing about women's basketball players being lesbians were often associated with a negative perception of lesbianism. Dominique's comments about players getting "turned out" by their teammates speaks to an assumption that lesbians are predators, and Tasha's remark about women basketball players being "wannabe boys" indicated that they rejected femininity and desire to be men. Speaking more about the

assumptions of her sexuality because she played basketball, Felicia added:

People assumed I was gay. People looked at me funny and stuff. People had their own preconceived perceptions before hearing a word out my mouth... I think people automatically assumed lesbian... For some, the clothes, but I know some people that have this idea that all women players are lesbians... My aunt thought if I played basketball I would "turn gay"... I explain now that basketball had nothing to do with my choice to date women... it really didn't bother me. I was respectful of others and didn't care about other people's opinions or thoughts about me.

While Felicia's security in her sexuality prevented her from feeling hurt by the assumptions, she did discuss how she had to inform family members that her playing basketball and dating women were coincidence rather than cause and effect. While, Felicia wasn't bothered by the assumptions, Lauren, who identifies as straight, had an experience that evoked a different response when the assumption was made about her:

It hit me when a little girl came up to me after the game, it was at a tournament. I was a senior and she was in 8th grade. We were all chilling after the game talking having fun and all that, then she asked me if I was gay. It was so random and caught me off guard, I was like 'why' and she said her mom told her that I was good at b-ball so I was probably gay... She also said her parents didn't want her hooping because most girls that play ball are like that... I was pissed and offended. Not just because she asked that dumb question, but because her parents put that in her heads.

For Lauren, she was not offended by the suggestion that she was a lesbian but rather at the connection assumed between basketball skill and lesbianism. Lauren was also offended at the parents' decision not to allow their daughter to play because of the possibility of her being associated with lesbians or possibly becoming one. Lauren's experience again shows a commonly held negative perception of lesbians as pedophiles that are not safe for children to be around.

My participants all discussed being targets of these negative assumptions of their

sexuality because they play basketball but also included their thoughts as to motive behind these comments. Princess pinpointed a lack of knowledge:

The bad thing was being teased by the girls who were probably raised to think women are only good for making babies. This was around the time that Gayness was starting to rear its head into women's athletics and we were at the age where we were beginning to explore our sexuality. The number one used teasing technique was to call someone a "dyke" or a "Gaylord." I really didn't care one way or the other. I wasn't really into boys then, but I was pretty much sure I didn't like girls like that. I have Gay people in my family so I knew what it meant to be Gay. I don't think the other kids did.

Here Princess contextualized the gay slurs as adolescent teasing from youth that didn't fully understand what it meant to be gay but just understood it to be a hurtful comment. She also suggests that while she was secure in her own sexuality as being attracted to men, it was difficult to deal with that type of teasing during adolescence because questions of sexuality were already rising faster than they are being answered. While Princess provided her insight on the reason that her peers teased her and her teammates, Yolanda discussed why she felt her mother had concerns:

At the heart of it, I think is fear. Parents generally don't want their kids having to suffer because they're different. I don't think my mom would've rejected me if I were a lesbian but if she thought it was a choice; she'd want me to pick whatever would make life easier you know. Like if she thought basketball was going to lead me to make a bad choice, I'm sure she thought she was just protecting me from a hard time later in life. And then too, every mother wants her daughter to be pretty, to go to prom, to be a mom and do girly stuff, and I know my mom thought that me playing basketball as keeping me from I guess growing up to be a lady or whatever. Crazy thing though is that if you were a hooper, you got a pass for being a tomboy like people understood that you could play ball and still like guys and wear dresses. In high school I even remember learning for the first time that some guys were actually attracted to the fact that we could play ball so even though it was seen as 'acting like a guy' to people who didn't know ball, other hoopers understood and respected it.

Yolanda framed her mother's concerns about her playing basketball causing her to be a

lesbian within the context of parental protection. She discussed how her mother viewed homosexuality as a choice, and basketball as an activity that may influence a choice with negative repercussions in the future. Yolanda did however mention that she did not believe that her mother would disown her for being lesbian, but would be concerned for her wellbeing.

Yolanda's mother's claims are valid because it is acknowledged that lesbians of color experience not only extreme discrimination, but even physical brutality, especially those lesbians with a masculine gender performance because that performance is viewed as a threat to masculinity. Yolanda also touched briefly on how being a hooper allowed her to have, otherwise masculinized mannerisms without her femininity being questioned by people who were or understood what it meant to be hoopers. Because the significant symbols of being a hooper are related primarily to skill, it became a gender-neutral identity among hoopers. Because the traits like assertiveness and strength are valued both for Black women and hoopers, the identities become conflated for my participants and provide reasoning for the claim that women athletes resolve perceived identity conflicts because they do not feel that being athletes reduces their womanhood (Allison & Butler 1984). I refer to my participants as Black woman hoopers to signify the conflation of the category identities of race and gender with the role based athletic identity of being basketball players. For my participants, there is no need to arrange these identities into a salience hierarchy because they are performed simultaneously.

With basketball being so closely related to Black masculinity, Black woman hoopers are masculinized by those who outside of the basketball community. Patricia

Hill Collins articulates that Black women in athletics are not only masculinized as lesbians but also viewed outside of the mainstream construct of beauty that defines women (2005). My participants articulated how, among hoopers, there was an understanding that a girl being a hooper did not mean that she was a lesbian. However, because that understanding did not exist outside of the basketball community, all of my participants expressed having experienced sexuality based discrimination. As a result, many of them have become allies and advocates for equal treatment of individuals regardless of sexuality, thus extending the ways that basketball creates a cultural reference group of Black women's empowerment. Overwhelmingly, my participants' love of basketball and the community support they received outweighed being targets of people's negative associations between basketball and lesbianism. For some, it was a safe space for them to express their sexuality during a time they were questioning or had acknowledged an attraction to girls. In the way it was accepting to women regardless of their sexuality, being a hooper helped facilitate my participants' identity development as during adolescence as they transitioned from girls to young women.

### Being a Hooper during Adolescence

For many of my participants, being a hooper was the way they were most commonly recognized in their communities as adolescents and they expressed both pros and cons of the association. Princess recollects:

To be labeled as a hooper at a time when everyone is still trying to find their place as a hormonal adolescent was great. I was viewed as tough, strong, athletic, and independent. All adjectives I would still use to describe myself today, but it started with basketball. That label then, also meant I wasn't really getting any



hollers either. I was fine with that. While my girlfriends were chasing after boys I was chasing the ball...I remember feeling like I missed out on stuff at that age. My peers were hanging out at house parties, they had boyfriends, and they were going to the mall on the weekends when I had either practice or a game

For Princess, she recognized that being a hooper helped develop important characteristics of her identity that she still possesses today, but also that she did not get to enjoy some of the things that her peers did due to her commitment to the sport.

Speaking also about how basketball shaped her development, Dominique said:

Guys wanted to be my friend just like their guy friends, girls who were also athletes made up the majority of my friends. I think it was the one thing that helped me become a confident and independent woman. I mean I was a great student so I had other things to be proud of but being smart in school does not necessarily get you respect or decrease the amount of teasing you endure but playing a sport makes you a little less of a nerd, or so I felt and looking back if I were to take that part of my life out I think I would have turned out to be a different person.

Dominique here discusses how being a hooper allowed her to make friendships across genders without feeling any pressure to be sexually active. She also expressed that it allowed her to develop confidence and made her more socially acceptable among her peers than academic achievements allowed. These comments reflect research findings that suggest that Black youth are more likely to be supported and accepted for athletic skills than academic achievement. These comments also reflect how basketball fostered cross-gender friendships not based on sexualized gender roles but mutual admiration for skills in a common interest. Tasha, echoed similar sentiments about basketball facilitating confidence building:

In the midst of the bullying boom, one of my friends who also was an athlete and I were just discussing the likelihood of a hooper, or any top athlete for that matter, being bullied in school. I think being an athlete definitely helps in this arena, as we couldn't think of anyone we knew who dealt with this issue.

Tasha discussed how playing athletics was socially acceptable and prevented her from being bullied. Yolanda touched on the issue of bullying also:

I was always shy and stayed to myself so people would pick on me. I was also really little when I was younger and in my hood, if you let somebody pick on you they just kept doing it and then more people would do it to. But when I started getting respect as a basketball player, people wouldn't let me get picked on. If somebody tried, people I played ball with would be like, 'nah leave her alone she's cool.' I even had some of my teammates have my back in fights before like we were a team on the court and in the neighborhood so if you wanted to fight one of us; you had to fight us all.

For Yolanda, it was not only the social status of playing basketball that helped her avoid being bullied, but it was also the support of her teammates that deterred potential bullies from targeting her. While my participants had identified many positive aspects of being a hooper, other participants admitted the difficulties they had as hoopers in high school.

Speaking about the sacrifices she made to pursue basketball, Britney lamented:

I always had other interests, but they were starved while I was so devoted to basketball, mainly art of all kinds and mediums and literature...I was a tall black girl at a prep school, so being a jock was pretty much my identity in high school, the full sum of my identity really. I got a lot of respect and I am not quite sure if people thought I was there for basketball, but I think outside of ball there weren't too concerned with my other interests. In fact when people figure out that I was smart, I think they were kind of surprised 'cause I was a jock and jock aren't supposed to be smart, especially not black ones.

Britney admitted being exposed to stereotypes at her private school and how she felt that her focus on basketball prevented her from pursuing other interests as a teenager. She goes on to discuss some of the pressures of playing at such a highly competitive level:

My high school was a pretty strong basketball school when I was there. In the 3 full seasons that I played, we went to state every year and my sophomore year we won...I was on varsity from 8th onward and my teammates were pretty awful to me. As the years passed and other girls my age joined the team, I started to enjoy

my teammates more, but I still hated playing for my high school team, mainly because of my coach. He allowed my other teammates to harass me when I was young and didn't give me many opportunities to shine...but playing with older girl so young made me a hell of a lot better than other girls my age. And I was a lot stronger too, mentally and emotionally, so I suppose it wasn't all bad.

Even though Britney admits that she did not enjoy playing basketball for her high school team, she did acknowledge that it made her stronger. Many of my participants discussed how their challenges as Black female hoopers made them stronger and taught them life lessons. Kadajah discussed how playing basketball helped her understand the importance of marketing her talents:

I wasn't highly recruited because the previous years I went to a [small religious] school, which nobody has ever heard of so once I went to [more recognized high school] I had to start really thinking about how basketball is politics...basketball in high school is about who you know and who can sell your talents. I would see people who I was better than get the notoriety because of who they knew or what AAU team they was even if they were a bench warmer. Don't get me wrong, basketball is about talent but some people got special treatment...frustrating but high school is where I first learned about politics. It actually made me work harder because you were going to judge me on my talents, which still to this day I work by the same tactics...I always thought of myself as the underdog because I came out of nowhere and nobody knew who I was in high school but knew I was really good. I would play in tournaments, leagues all around the [area] so people knew who I was by the time I was a senior.

For participants like Kadajah, high school basketball was an early lesson in how to market their skills. The pioneering generation of women hoopers who ushered in Title IX changes, they were in demand as universities were scurrying to find talented players to fill roster spots for newly created women's athletic programs (Wushanley 2004; Grundy & Shakelford 2005). As women's basketball became more popular during my participants' adolescence, the college recruiting process became more competitive because players had to catch the attention of college coaches amidst the other 10,000s of

equally skilled players. Kadijah also discussed how this competition conditioned her to work hard because she was viewed as an “underdog”. Her discussion of basketball “politics” reflects an understanding that being successful was not as simple as working hard. While Kadijah expressed how she was unprepared to strategically use basketball in high school, Michelle discussed how she was able to use being a hooper to get benefits off the court

My basketball title helped to do things and accomplish many things in my life that I wouldn't have been able to do but it also gave me platform to let my other abilities shine, so without basketball I'm not sure if I would've the same chance...I wasn't a terrible student, but I became a more diligent and focused student when I started playing... playing opened doors to meet people from all walks of life that I can honestly thought me a lot ...opportunities to volunteer, to travel, to direct my future, to attend events and talk on different topics.

Michelle discussed how being a hooper provided her with opportunities beyond basketball and how it pushed her to focus more on her academics in order to fully capitalize on some of the opportunities that playing basketball could provide. Again, referring to Erickson's stages, my participants were in stage 5 during their adolescence; their most significant relationships are with their peers and their central conflict is caused by confusion in their identities and roles.

All of my participants articulated how being a hooper provided them with a highly respected identity during a time where many of their peers were trying to make friends and gain social acceptance. For my participants that went to school in their own communities, the respect they were given for being hoopers allowed them to avoid being bullied and to develop relationships with their male peer without pressure to engage in sexual activity. For my participants that attended private schools where they were racial

minorities, they recalled assumptions that playing basketball was the sole reason they attended the schools and recalled the surprise or apprehension from classmates, teachers and coaches when they attempted to pursue interests off the basketball court.

For participants that attended the elite college preparatory high schools experienced environments that not only provided them with college level academics but also exposed them to mainstream society's Eurocentric views and allowed them early opportunities to develop coping strategies they would need in college at predominately white institutions. However, because their earlier experiences with basketball framed it as a space where they could develop self-determination and strength as they sought to overcome oppression and the presence of stereotypical images, they were able to draw from community support to help them navigate their high school experiences.

During High school, my participants fully committed to their identity as hoopers, they dressed and behaved in ways they understood to be expected by as hoopers. In addition to committing to their identities as hoopers, they also began viewing basketball as a vehicle to get them to college.

### Committing to Being a College Hooper

All of participants grew up in communities that encouraged them to pursue basketball as a career and many of the expressed having their own aspirations of playing professional basketball after the WNBA was created. Tasha expressed how playing in college would bring her closer to that goal:

From day one of me finding out I actually loved the sport, playing basketball in college was always an expectation. It wasn't a dream...I was determined that it

would happen one day. I knew that it was a major step in getting to the professional level, which at the time was my ultimate goal. Division 1 basketball was always the goal. As I continued to grow, I had the talent and potential play at the collegiate level and had the work ethic to do it.

For participants like Tasha, basketball was a stepping-stone to the ultimate goal of playing professionally. Unlike with men's basketball during the time, women were not allowed to go straight into the WNBA after high school the way players like Kevin Garnett had done in the men's game. They were also not allowed to leave college early as was becoming the trend amongst men's Division I basketball players. The WNBA has more strict regulations, not allowing players to enter the WNBA draft until they have been out of high school for at least four years ([www.wnba.com](http://www.wnba.com)). One justification for these regulations is to prevent players from prioritizing dreams of professional stardom over the attainment of a college education considering that WNBA athletes do not get million dollar contracts. As a result, my participants' college choices involved other factors.

Some of my participants, with desires to play professionally, admitted that it was not the primary factor in them deciding where to pursue playing basketball in college.

Michelle admitted:

At first I was like I'll go anywhere, but my parents weren't having that. I mean I'm sure they would've gone with whatever I wanted but yea they let me know that I should stay [close to home]...once my senior year came around and talking to all of my friends I realized I really didn't want to go too far, but I didn't want to go to a backyard local school either...Academics was very important to me. Although I knew that I wanted to play professionally afterwards, I knew that there was a possibility that I may not. Also, the schools presence, like if the team was simply a team, or a program that was family that I would be proud to say that I was a part of...I think my AAU coaches would've preferred me to go to more of a "footlocker" name brand school, but the school I chose was always consistently top 25 school and they played in [my hometown] every season at

least once so I knew I had the opportunity for people to come out and watch which was very important to me.

Michelle discussed not only what was important to her choosing the college to attend, but also acknowledged that she had family and coaches whose views she considered in making her decision. Her decision revolved primarily around trying to create a positive basketball experience. Even though she acknowledged that academics were important, the most important things for her included: having a family atmosphere in the program, the school's national basketball ranking, and the ability for her supporters to see her play occasionally. While Michelle and Tasha's responses reflect the views of participants seeking to play professionally, some of my participants equally examined the basketball and academic opportunities at the schools they were recruited by. Jazmin admitted:

Honestly, I knew that playing college basketball was a great was to get a free education! I was planning on attending college anyway so, I figure why not go to school for free and be able to play the game I love at the same time?!...I was looking a school that was not too far from home but far enough that I could actually be on my own. I knew nothing about the school when they started recruiting me. I did some research and found out that they had one of the top Education programs in the country and I knew I wanted to be a teacher.

While participants like Jazmin looked forward to being able to pursue both their athletic passion and their desired career path, other participants admitted that their passion for basketball was subsiding as they were completing high school but they still decided to play in college. Britney reflected:

There is the social status that comes with being an athlete, and I would be lying if I said I didn't enjoy that...So before I knew it, I looked up and realized that at the tender age of 13, and 14, basketball had become my job and it seemed like everyone else was having a great time playing ball all day and all night all year. So I figured that me lacking that passion signaled some abnormality in myself. I ignored it and trudged ahead with a scholarship and acceptance as the goal, payoff I suppose. I wanted to go to a an elite university and I knew that getting

recruited by them for basketball would make that process way smoother. I was smart, but on paper what made me stand out as a potential admit was certainly the fact that I was an athlete. I had pretty good grades and some other things on my resume that would make me stand out, but not like basketball would. So basketball had a lot to do with me ensuring that I got into the school of my choice.

For Britney and participants like her, a basketball scholarship was a reward for all of the hard work she put into the sport as an adolescent. Here, Britney discusses the process of falling out of love with basketball, due in part to the negative experiences she had playing on her high school team, as she articulated earlier. My participants expressed both extremes in terms of reasons to play basketball; one extreme being playing in college as a path to the WNBA and the other being using basketball to improve academic opportunities even though basketball was no longer a primary passion. In addition, my participants discussed other important aspects of their decision to play at the school they chose.

One common theme among my participants was distance. Most of my participants expressed how important it was for them to have friends and family see them play. My participants repeatedly discussed how the support of family, friends and community were essential to their success as hoopsters so having their continued support in college was one of the most important factors in choosing a school to attend as a student athlete. While many participants listed distance as a primary concern, Tasha's response was a bit different:

I wanted it to be somewhere where I would actually play. I didn't want to go to a school to sit the bench. I also wanted to go somewhere that was far enough away from home that I couldn't run home every time I thought about it; it forced me to be independent. On the other hand it also kept my parents from running up to campus every second they could. Secondly, I wanted to like the team and also



feel comfortable with the coaching staff. Ideally, I wanted to go somewhere warm, but that would've been too far away for my family and they never would've been able to see me play.

Here, in addition to the proximity of the school from her neighborhood, and the ability for supporters to see her play, Tasha admitted that her concern over the likelihood that she would have playing time weighed into her university choice. She mentioned earlier that she wanted to play in the WNBA, so for her, the amount of playing time she could expect was the first thing she mentioned. She also mentioned striking a balance between both athletics and academics as well as a balance between being far enough to feel independent but close enough to still receive support were important.

While some participants discussed being very intentional about choosing a school, others admitted that they underestimated the importance of their decision. A few of my participants played at junior colleges before transferring to a Division I university and Kadijah admitted that she did not fully weigh her options before making her decision:

After high school I went on to play for a [local junior college] which I was awarded a scholarship to a D1 school, which was the worst D1 school to play for but I chose them because I believe in loyalty, and I had a thing whoever comes first. After I signed, [one of the best programs in the country called].

Echoing Kadijah's sentiment about loyalty Roxanne admitted:

I picked the school I did because it was close to home and free that was it, and I knew someone on the team. I was very uneducated about the [recruiting] process because it wasn't introduced to me until 12th grade so I was too late to be picky in a sense and too impatient to gamble because I [verbally committed] but still had an AAU tourney and I turned the tournament out and got about 2 or 3 DI offers and maybe 5 DII [offers] so I just didn't have much guidance and so the first team that wanted me I wanted them. I just wish I would have went to play for a black coach but kind of got caught up in the politics as well we had a coaching change before I even got there that I didn't even know about. My

playing style was street, that's where I learned, that was what I was given the freedom...[so I figure] a black or more urban experienced coach would have known how to enhance my game instead of a system where I felt I had no place sometimes unless I changed.

Here Roxanne discusses how her lack of knowledge about the recruiting process caused her to make a decision without understanding or weighing all possible options. She also discussed an element of loyalty that influenced her decision because she chose the school that made the first offer.

As mentioned earlier, my participants were adolescents as women's basketball was becoming more popular so many of them did not fully understand the complexity of the college recruiting process. As women's basketball became more popular and potentially profitable to universities and media outlets, recruiting tactics became more similar to those used in boy's prep sports. Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams with coaches with university connections and clothing and equipment sponsorships provided players with college ambitions the opportunities to travel all across the nation to showcase their skills for college recruiters against other top talent. For my participants who either played for highly respected AAU teams or had primary reasons other than basketball for attending college, they were able to make more informed decisions as to where to complete their college basketball careers and pursue their degrees.

Signing a letter of intent to accept a Division I scholarship for many of my participants officially solidified their identities as hoopers. Whereas many people played basketball on a recreational level, being recognized as skilled enough for a college to offer to cover the cost of an education was something that only few accomplished.

Keeping in line with Erikson's stages of identity development, my participants' decision

to play college basketball symbolized a commitment to their identity as hoopers and a resolution of the conflict of stage 5.

For some participants, playing college basketball was the next step in achieving their ultimate goal of playing professional basketball, and for others who were becoming increasingly disengaged from the sport, it served as a reward for the hard work and dedication they showed since they began playing. Because my participants played as women's college basketball popularity grew exponentially, their recruiting experiences also introduced them to the politics of the sport that resulted from it being viewed as potentially the revenue-producing women's sport. Thus players had to "market" themselves to universities looking for not only the best players but also those that would fit into certain perceptions of women's basketball players that their athletic programs and universities were trying to promote. While my participants were realizing that college basketball was about more than basketball skills, their understanding of basketball changed and they viewed playing in college as more than a passion or a pastime but as a vehicle to take them into careers even after they stopped playing.

### Conclusion

For my participants, the process of becoming a hooper began with their first experiences and was solidified by their decision to play basketball in college. My participants discussed how understandings of gender, sexuality and race helped frame not only their understanding of basketball but also how to act as hoopers. While primarily, being a hooper was determined by one's desire to improve their skills and

their prioritizing of the sport over most other things, there were visual performances including clothing and demeanor that my participants acknowledged helped to bolster the validity of their identity. They also discussed how they connect what they learned on the basketball court to their character as Black women.

Throughout their childhood and adolescence, what Erickson would identify as developmental stages 3-5; my participants' experiences with basketball facilitated the development of their identities as Black women. Black women played a role in introducing all of my participants to basketball; whether it was something as simple as purchasing them their first basketball or hoop, signing them up for recreational leagues, having them tag along to the gyms where they played or even being their first coaches. In addition to the direct involvement of Black women in the development of my participants' basketball skills the exposure to Black woman hoopers on television at a high level also provided them with representations of Black women succeeding as professional basketball players. In addition to providing my participants with role models, the visibility of Black women in basketball during my participants' adolescence fueled by the 1996 US. Olympic gold medal winning team and the subsequent ABL and WNBA professional leagues increased the respect that women received publically in the basketball community.

In the Black community where Basketball has a cultural significance connected to the ability to overcome racial oppression and dominate previously prohibited arenas, my participants are arguably among the first generation of Black women whose basketball accomplishments were celebrated at levels similar to their male peers in part

because of the increased visibility of Black woman hoopsters playing on television. Research indicated that the combination of hypervisibility of Black male professional athletes and the lack of apparent Role Models, position Black boys to not only view professional Basketball players as role models, but also to pursue professional basketball as a primary career path (May 2009). Whereas with Black boys, community support often results in a channeling that results in privileging of athletic pursuits over academics, my participants experienced did not reflect this channeling because basketball is not as lucrative career for women as it is for men. Most of my participants viewed playing basketball in college as a way get their college education paid for. This use of basketball as a tool to further their education mandated that they do well in school and contributed to my participants focusing both on their athletic and academic pursuits. As a result, basketball not only provided a cultural reference group for Black empowerment for my participants, but specifically Black women's empowerment as community members rallied around their basketball teams and supported their on and off the court endeavors. While my participants acknowledged experiencing questions about their sexuality from family and other community members because they played basketball, the support they received outweighed it. This support allowed my participants to overcome some of the racial and gendered marginalization and stereotyping they faced because it also fostered a sense of sisterhood among players. Whether they were on the same high school team or just from the same neighborhood, my participants discussed how they bonded as hoopsters because they had similar experiences.

Because Black women do not dominate basketball in terms of participants similarly to the way Black men do, many of my participants had integrated experiences playing basketball. As a result, basketball also exposed them to racial stereotypes that equated their athleticism with an intellectual inferiority. In these experiences, basketball provided them a space to develop and exhibit self-determination and strength, two characteristics that have been identified as important to Black women's positive self-identity development, by persevering through this adversity and taking pride in the aspects of their basketball skills that were considered inherently Black. Positive racial and gender self-concept became increasingly important for my participants as they pursued basketball as Division I student-athletes at various Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). While this chapter focused on the ways that basketball influenced my participants' identity development as Black women during adolescence. The next chapter will focus on highlighting ways that they negotiated their gender and racial identities within the context of playing college basketball.

## CHAPTER V

### DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL EXPERIENCES FOR BLACK WOMAN HOOPERS

#### Chapter Organization

The decision to play basketball at a Division I university symbolized my participants' commitment to their identity as hoopers. For some it was the beginning of the end of their love affair with basketball, for others it was another step towards their goals of playing professionally, and many viewed it as an opportunity to use their passion to pursue career paths off the court. The previous chapter followed the journey of my participants from being introduced to basketball to developing identities as hoopers, highlighting ways that becoming a hooper provided experiences and socialization factors necessary for Black girls to develop positive self-concept as Black women and asserting that the Black basketball community provides a cultural reference group of Black Women's empowerment for all members. This chapter elucidates the Division I college basketball experiences of Black woman hoopers acknowledging that, for them, being a hooper is a conflation of race, gender, sexuality and athletic identity. Specifically, this chapter examines how their experiences as college student athletes influenced the way they navigated and further developed their identity as Black women outside basketball. This chapter explores the ways that the culture of Division I women's college basketball provides a cultural reference group for Black women's empowerment in similar and different ways than the communities that shaped my

participants' identities as Black woman hoopers during their adolescence. It is important to acknowledge again that all of my participants attended Predominately White Institutions (PWI) because of the wide array of literature pertaining to how Black students cope with experiences of racial discrimination at these institutions. In evaluating women's Division I basketball as a Black women's empowerment reference group, I am specifically investigating if being a college hooper allows Black women individually and collectively enhances their ability to cope with racial and gender based discrimination they experience on PWI campuses and prepares them for similar discrimination beyond graduation.

#### Experiences of Black Female Student Athletes

Although there is not as much research about Black female student athletes as there is about both their Black male and white female counterparts, there are some studies that provide important insight into various aspects of their experiences that inform my research. Patricia Hill Collins discusses how Black female athletes are viewed differently than Black male and white female athletes; the athleticism that Black male athletes are praised for is seen as a hindrance to Black women because it is still largely viewed as antithetical to traditional characteristics of womanhood. Furthermore, since white women are made to be the standard of femininity, they are more likely to be chosen as spokeswomen for products and services capitalizing on any popularity of women's athletics (Collins 2005). Additionally, Susan K. Cahn acknowledges that the already existing stereotypes of Black women as "deficient in femininity" are simply



applied to sports in which they primarily participate (e.g. basketball, track and field) and used to reinforce the view that Black women are inherently more masculine than white women (Cahn 1994, p. 138).

Aside from the masculinized constructions of Black women athletes, Black student-athletes at the collegiate level have to deal with discrimination based on negative stereotypes about their academic abilities and social skills. For many Black women student-athletes, these negative assumptions result in greater surveillance and intrusion into their lives both on and off of the court in attempts to re-socialize them into more appropriate performances of womanhood that it is believed that they would not be able to develop without the intervention of athletic department staff and highly structured schedules (Foster 2003). Acknowledging that Black women college student athletes face multiple forms discrimination, research has been done to better understand the coping strategies that they use.

Research on the coping strategies of Black women college student athletes shows that they are more likely to use avoidance coping strategies instead of more confrontational coping responses because of the alienation and isolation they experience on Predominately White Institution campuses (Hawkins and Carter 2011). In addition to affecting the coping strategies of Black female college student athletes, the alienation and isolation they experience results in the marginalization of their voices. Because they are less likely to speak up against the discrimination they face, Black women student athlete concerns receive minimal attention. The “silencing” of Black women’s athletic experiences is viewed as an extension of the silence of Black women’s voices in any

white and male dominated institutions. Specifically within the context of college athletics however, the process of silencing Black women student athletes voices occurs both directly due to a dismissive university athletic departmental culture and indirectly through the media that public perception of Black women student athletes (Bruening, Armstrong, and Pastore 2005). Silencing from individuals in the university athletic department, specifically athletic administrators, coaches and other student athletes, occurs primarily by these individuals interacting with Black women student athletes based on negative or exploitive perceptions of them: administrators and coaches most often hold perceptions of Black women student athletes being socially immature and academically remedial and male student athletes often sexualized Black women student athletes because of the physical attractiveness based on the assumption that they are sexual objects available and willing to fulfill male sexual desires (Collins 2005; Bruening, Armstrong and Pastore 2005). Whereas most negative stereotypes of Black women student athlete masculinize them, this research shows that they are also reduced to sexual objects of male athletes. This objectification applies most likely to track and volleyball athletes in part because the uniforms they wear expose their athletic physiques in ways attractive to the male gaze and because those sports are traditionally viewed as appropriate for women. To the extent that Black woman Hoopers experience this objectification from male athletes, it shows that within the athletic community, they are less likely to be masculinized.

The most common explanation for why the incidences of discrimination against Black women student athletes go unacknowledged and unaddressed is the low aggregate

numbers of Black women playing collegiate athletics. Black women comprise less than 10% of all NCAA athletes across divisions I, II and III in comparison to white women who comprise 76% (Lapchick, Harrison & Buckstein 2012). Because Black women are such a minority of college athletes, early research done involving them relied on comparisons between them and either Black male or white female student athletes (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997). Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas' study concluded that Black women student athlete experiences are more similar to the experiences of Black female non-athlete students than either Black male or white female student athletes (1997). More recent studies acknowledged that the experiences of Black women student athletes reflect the unique "outsider-within" position that Black woman occupy and therefore should be studied apart from Black men and white women student athletes.

My project seeks to continue centering the voices of Black women student athletes to combat the traditional silencing they have received in literature with the hopes that it offers suggestions to combat the silence they experience within their university athletic departments. My project differs from previous similar studies in my assertion that the dynamics of NCAA Division I women's basketball are so different from other sports that the experiences of Black women college hoopsters should be researched apart from those of Black female athletes in other sports. Other studies like to understand Black women student athletes as a group combining data from players across many NCAA sports (Bruening 2005; Harmon 2009; Carter & Hart 2010; Hawkins & Carter 2011). These studies expose the minority experiences of Black woman college student athletes but are unable to combat continued invisibility in practice that is justified by

those claiming that Black woman college student athletes' concerns are addressed proportionately to others based on their percentage of participation. With NCAA Division I women's basketball however, Black women comprise nearly half of the players so it demands that their experience be acknowledged and better understood because of the way the aforementioned discrimination negatively affects so many players and subsequently the programs and university athletic departments they choose to attend as student athletes.

### Becoming a Team

Previous research has acknowledged that student athletes express feelings of isolation because their academic and social schedules are organized to accommodate the athletic expectations of their coaches (Adler and Adler 1987). As a result of this isolation, teammates become surrogate family member for most student athletes because of the amount of time they spend together. My participants discussed the composition of their team and went into detail about which commonalities allowed them to bond and which differences made it difficult. First I will provide their responses about the off-court experiences with their teammates and then I will move to discuss the on court dynamics; analyzing both within the context of how these experiences reinforce or change the ways they perform their identities as Black woman hoopers.

### ***Off the court dynamics***

I decided to focus first on the off court dynamics because basketball is a winter sport beginning officially in Mid-October with "Midnight Madness" celebrations that

signify the first day that the NCAA allows teams to formally practice. With classes starting in August and many student athletes enrolling in classes the summer preceding fall semester of their freshman years, teammates are required to bond off the court before they play together. The racial composition of the team was an important factor in determining my participants' ability to develop trusting relationships with their teammates. My participants that played on teams with a majority of Black players discussed having a higher level of comfort and developing deeper bonds with their teammates off the court: Michelle explained:

My [college] team was majority Black and lord knows my hair was thankful because I didn't have to worry about who was going to do it...[my Black teammates] told me 'don't come out of your room with your hair looking all types of crazy'. My AAU team was split down the middle with equal Black and white players and my high school team was mostly white... so after those experiences I enjoyed being around people that look like me...I don't know if I would've been as confident of myself as a Black woman...learning that there are still obstacles and adversities that you'll have to go through but having a daily example of how to conduct yourself was very helpful, and [I had] teammates and coaches to go to if I had a [personal] issue...I don't think I could have done that with an all-white team or coaching staff.

Here, Michelle discusses the importance in having older Black women as teammates and coaches to role model resilience for her and inform her of the obstacles she would face. Not only did Michelle's Black teammates and coaches role model behaviors and coping strategies she could use to be successful socially and academically, but they also allowed her to vent about personal issues providing psychosocial support. Because Michelle identified their experiences as similar to hers, she felt comfortable opening up to them in ways she did not think she would not able to had they been white. Carter and Hart conclude that mentorship is especially important for Black female student athletes

because in addition to being among an underrepresented group in academia, they are marginalized, isolated and alienated leaving them alone to manage the stress caused both academic and athletic demands (2010). These researchers further articulate that mentorship is crucial in helping these young women develop the skills necessary to succeed in college and after they graduate.

While Carter and Hart's research asserted that traditionally, Black women student athletes have to seek out multiple mentors to guide them in the areas of academics, athletic and psychosocial needs, Michelle, and other players on Black teams and especially those with Black women on the coaching staff, have the advantage of getting total mentorship all within the context of their basketball team. Michelle mentioned how seemingly trivial things like hair care maintenance did not become stressful issues because her teammates either were able to do it, help her do it, or knew of somewhere she could have it done. Additionally, the importance that was placed on Michelle's appearance as 'presentable' on campus was stressed by the Black women on the team who mentored, was most likely an attempt to mitigate the effects of negative stereotyping she would experience about Black women's class and hygiene. Not only did Michelle's older teammates and coaches inform her of the discrimination she would face but they also provided her with ways to combat it by providing necessary resources. For Black students at predominately white institutions, the cultural differences can provide additional stressors when few or no options are available to address their unique needs with basic practical matters.

My participants who played on teams that were predominately Black had similar narratives of teammates helping ease their transition to the campus and the new environment by showing them where to get their non-basketball related needs met, including but not limited to hygienic and cosmetic needs and recreational and entertainment outlets. Besides providing mentorship and helping new players get acclimated to the college campus environment, Tasha talked about how she and her teammates bonded off the court over similar interests:

We all liked music and liked to dance. We were creative and always made beats and freestyled. We went to a ton of parties together. This was my crew. We loved each other like sisters: fought like blood, but also protected like it too... I hung with my teammates more as a freshman, sophomore, and junior. By the time I hit my senior year, I was more or less focused on basketball and graduating and didn't hang out that much...by the time I graduated, the team was about 50/50, Black and white. Now the team is majority Black.

Tasha described the bond between her and her teammates as being similar to blood relatives in terms of the intensity of emotion that existed within the relationship dynamics. She admits that they did not always agree but even though they fought amongst each other, they protected each other against everyone else. For Tasha, as her focus shifted more to her academics, she saw herself spending less and less time with her teammates but she did acknowledge knowing that she had their support if she needed to vent or needed support to handle an issue. Tasha describes her team as racially mixed and acknowledged that she was able to bond off the court with the majority of her teammates, not just the Black ones, because they shared similar interests. Research shows that in some cases, slightly heterogeneous teams can be more successful because they are able to resist pressure to succumb to groupthink (Aamodt, Kimborough &

Alexander 1983). This study however is very limiting because it makes assumptions about racial heterogeneity itself having some effect on team cohesion and success when it more likely attributed to cultural factors that are racially located. In Tasha's response she discussed beat making and freestyling, two artistic elements of Hip Hop, a culture whose ethos is similar to that of many Black basketball players. As my participants mentioned in the last chapter, Basketball is not a "Black sport" but it has a style that is influenced by Black culture. Hip Hop, a globally recognized Black culture (Rose 1994; Mitchell 2002; Chang 2005; Basu & Lemelle 2006), was created by Blacks in the South Bronx in the 1970s just as street basketball tournaments were drawing huge crowds in the same area; Hip Hop music became the soundtrack for many of those tournaments and both basketball players and Hip Hop artists shared similar fashion sense and mannerisms (Boyd 2002). These similarities allowed Tasha to bond with her teammates through elements of Hip Hop culture off the court but in a way that would translate to respect on the court because of its similar cultural values.

While my participants with Black teammates and coaches articulated the benefits of mentorship and being able to develop bonds based on cultural similarities, my participants who played on majorly white teams, they had different experiences. Dominique discussed how she dealt with being the only Black girl, not only on the team but also in the entire women's basketball program:

For the first two years I was the only Black person dealing with the program so that includes: players, coaches, administrative staff, athletic trainers and strength coaches. ...[so] we mostly bonded over the college experience, being away from home, playing basketball, working out hard core, traveling. But that was essentially as far as it went with most of my teammates. However...I formed a



pretty tight bond with another freshman...who was also Christian and we added the Black recruit my junior year to our little group who was also a Christian.

Dominique did not attempt to bond with her teammates over common interests; instead she focused on the basketball related commonalities they had. The one non-basketball related aspect Dominique bonded with anyone from her team over was religion.

Research highlights the use of religion as a coping strategy for Black women especially when they are developing their identities or have limited control over their personal lives (Carter & Hawkins 2011; Ellison & Taylor 1996). Considering the imposed control over players personal lives and the identity conflicts that arise due to transitioning from an all-Black community to being the only Black person in her basketball program in college, it is understandable that Dominique would default to religion not only as a way to bond with teammates and coaches but also as a way to cope with isolation and alienation she experienced off the court. Similar to Dominique, Princess expressed not having much in common with her white teammates. Unlike Dominique however, Princess tried to find ways she could bond with them:

My college teammates were from different backgrounds. There were a few of us that were from low-income families. Mostly everyone was middle to upper middle class, two parent folks...mostly White girls too. There were only three Black girls on the team, I went from being the majority to minority, all Black with one White girl [in high school] to mostly White in college...the Black girls and I bonded immediately, with everyone else, it took a little time to really get to know them ...The team was really really really girly though... I mean, let's get all dressed up and go to this party girlie, let's go shopping girlie, let's go chase after these boys girlie...I didn't mind the dressing up part. I like that, but they went ham with it. Everything was tight and short...They liked to go out and drink every weekend and I wasn't on that. One of my roommates was the other freshmen on the team...she was White and she also asked the most questions. She told me she had never had a Black person so close to her before... It was a very new experience for her to go from no contact with Black people to sharing a bathroom with one. That was my girl though...I am planning on naming my

daughter, whenever that happens, after her... We were like glue! She would want to go out and drink so I would go only to make sure everyone got back home ok.

For Princess, although she did not enjoy the same activities like “being girly”, partying and drinking, she still went out with some of her teammates make sure they made it home safely. Although she did not join them in their activities, her concern for their wellbeing was a show of camaraderie that facilitated trusting relationships both on and off the court and ultimately allowed her to develop a lifelong friendship with one of her white teammates. Whereas Princess extended herself to her teammates even though they did not share common interests, other participants were not so willing to make the effort.

Yolanda discusses how she felt alienated even within her own team:

It was eye opening for me in so many ways because first off I was the only Black player and even though some of my teammates had been around Black people, they mostly just saw us as stereotypes, but I expected that. The biggest shock for me was how they weren't as focused on basketball or school. They would go out partying every night, hooking up with different guys and that just wasn't me. I was there to play ball and to get my education so I didn't even hang out with them because, they didn't have to deal with stereotypes and I didn't want people seeing me as a party girl. I always felt uncomfortable being the only Black person in a group of white people because if something goes wrong you get singled out, so I stayed to myself or got in with the other Black students on campus but I didn't hang with my teammates much.

Yolanda, unlike Princess, was skeptical about going out with her teammates so her self-imposed isolation was also an act of self-preservation because she feared suffering harsher consequences or retaliation if her teammates got into any trouble because she was a minority. In addition to the fear of retaliation, Yolanda did not want to be perceived negatively either as a hooper so she wanted to maintain the focus and commitment to basketball and schoolwork that defined her understanding of a hooper.

In the previous chapter, one criterion for being a hooper according my participants was

the commitment to the sport. Many participants talked about how they sacrificed spending time with their friends to dedicate themselves to improving their basketball skills. Most of my participants articulated that their white teammates were not hoopers because they lacked the commitment to basketball that was required. Whereas Princess and Yolanda's lives and social activities revolved around playing basketball and doing well in their classes, their teammates were more focused on taking advantage of the social opportunities that unsupervised campus life provided; hanging out, going to parties, meeting new people.

Another obstacle my participants acknowledged in building bonds with their white teammates mentioned by Yolanda was realizing that their teammates viewed Black people through the lenses of negative stereotypes. She continued:

It was also the first time I had actually lived with white people and for my roommates it was the first time they lived with Black people so they had questions about everything. My hair, food, my clothes, my body, where I grew up...It was like Black Life 101. I kind of got tired of it but it was like, I'd rather tell them truth instead of them get stereotypes.

Yolanda admitted how tiring it was to try to clarify the many negative stereotypes that her white teammates had of Black people but admitted that she was glad they someone clarified the difference between the stereotype and the reality to them. Roxanne recalled some specific racial incidents that caused tension between her and some of her teammates:

I even had an incident where my teammate was driving me somewhere and she cut someone off and she started laughing and I asked what's funny and she said oh we do that back home all the time and it's called a 'nigger swipe' and I was so shocked and had a convo with her about it... I just explained to her that if that's what they do back home I have no control over that but in my presence I find that word very disrespectful and would appreciate it if she kept comments like that to

herself and she apologized... that same teammate tried complimenting me but failed miserably stating that 'I talk good to be a black girl'...so they thought I was supposed to be this ghetto hood chick I guess that likes big black men and hears gun shots 24/7 and that eats chicken for breakfast lunch and dinner...I immediately felt left out because...they talked a little different around me and it got played out like, I'm Black but I'm smart enough to hold an intelligent convo, please stop with your slang for dummies.

Where Roxanne's situation differs from Yolanda, is how the negative stereotypes were used in her teammates' treatment of her. Whereas most of my participant recalled how their white teammates bombarded them with questions, Roxanne's teammates initially treated her according to the negative stereotypes of Black people they had adopted instead of asking her for clarification. As a result, she had to be the one to initiate the conversations about race with her teammates and to avoid more situations similar to the ones described here; she distanced herself from her teammates outside of the requirements for basketball. Kadijah echoes similar experiences to Yolanda and Roxanne but her approach to being the representative of Blackness to her white teammate differed:

I had teammates who seem like they never played with Black girls and their only perception of Black people was watching BET show Cita...That was when I had a life lesson. They believed in stereotypes, wanted to touch my hair.... I just played basketball and tried to break their perceptions of black people or what they thought black people was by being myself... some of my teammates was told me that I didn't act like a black person. my response was what does a black person act like, which could have offended some people but I thought God put me there to educate some people... they just asked a lot of questions.

Kadijah invoked religiosity, embracing her divine mission to provide the education for her teammates so they would know the difference between the reality and the stereotypes they had seen and adopted. As a result, instead of expressing how draining the exchanges were like other participants did, Kadijah felt obligated and fortunate to be in a

position to educate her teammates about racial differences. Common in Yolanda, Roxanne and Kadijah's experiences were their position as the not only the sole representations of Black women for many of their teammates but also their teammates' educators about racial issues. The drain they expressed, even when framed within a divinely ordained privilege, are evidence of what literature refers to as "racial battle fatigue":

The result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural and emotional coping with racial micro aggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments, campus or otherwise. African Americans experience mundane environmental stressors as physiological, psychological and emotional burdens (Feagin, Vera, & Imani 1996; Evans 2013).

For my participants that were minorities on majority white teams, they are more likely to experience racial battle fatigue because they were constantly bombarded with questions they were expected to graciously answer while simultaneously being targets of their teammates' negative stereotypes. Because the necessity to build strong team cohesion, they are forced to interact intimately with whites on a daily basis thus making them more susceptible to experience this fatigue than non-athlete Black college students at PWIs (Smith, Allen & Danley 2007).

The differences in how my participants bonded off the court with their teammates were clearly influenced by the racial composition of the team. For my participants with Black players and teammates, it was easier for them to bond because older teammates provided mentorships and their cohorts came from similar backgrounds and had similar understandings of what it meant to be a hooper. Within this context, Black womanhood was performed through mentorship and camaraderie in attempts to

help each other cope with similar marginalization. For participants with white teammates, the initial obstacle was clearing up their teammates stereotypes and for most it provided a large initial barrier that was difficult to overcome off the court. As a result, my participants used a number of coping strategies, most often avoidance but also religiosity. In this context, Black womanhood was performed through accommodation or avoidance. Participants either avoided unnecessary interactions with their teammates or risked suffering racial battle fatigue by extending their support to teammates and educating them about their stereotypical viewpoints. One notably absent coping mechanism among my participants was basketball. For many of my participants, basketball itself had not only been a part of their identities but a stress relieving activity that they defaulted to using to address the problems of adolescence. When my participants got into college however, basketball in some ways became a primary source of stress and they were left searching for alternative coping methods in attempts to prevent the off court stressors from spilling over to negatively affect team cohesion on the court. Although there were some off court aspects that influenced how my participants and their teammates played with each other there were also very unique dynamics to the way teammate and team/coach relationships developed around basketball.

### ***On the court dynamics***

In addition to trying to bond with teammates off the court because they lived together, my participants also had to learn how to build trusting on court relationships with their teammates in the hopes of being able to work together to win games. In many ways, the on court interactions my participants had with their teammates and coaches

mimicked the dynamics established off the court. While previously, Michelle discussed the benefits of having Black teammates and coaches off the court, Lauren expressed similar sentiments about the relationships she had with Black teammates on the court:

Having Black teammates, it's hard to explain, but some stuff just doesn't have to be said and you can still get it...like if me and this [other Black player] were on the court together I could curse her out or look at her in a way like 'let's get it', and she would take it and be ready to bust some ass. If I said the same thing to a white teammate she might not have responded the same way.

Lauren expressed how having Black teammates allowed her to have unspoken communication or use seemingly derogatory language in ways that would motivate them both to play harder. Although Lauren did not have many white teammates, she doubted whether she would have been able to have the same intense unspoken connections with them because of the different backgrounds. In addition to Lauren and her teammates being Black, they had similar basketball experiences, a common understanding of what it meant to be a hooper and similar playing styles so when she said "let's get it" that phrase had a common meaning pertaining to what her and her teammates needed to do to play better. My participants repeatedly expressed a reverence for and seriousness about basketball that they admitted that many of their white teammates lacked. The different level of commitment to basketball caused conflict between my participants and some of their teammates, Tasha expressed her frustration:

For the most part, I got along pretty well with my teammates. College definitely opened my eyes up to a side of women's basketball that I had not previously been exposed to. Females will carry their tension onto the court against their own teammates... I always had the mentality that I wanted to win more than I wanted the fame. I was a competitor, and that wasn't necessarily the same point of view that my teammate who I had issues with had. It was the first time that I had been on a losing team, and that wasn't something that I could get used to. I would say

that this was the biggest difference. To most of them, losing was okay and it just didn't sit well with me.

Similarly to Yolanda's frustration with her teammates partying, Tasha had difficulty accepting her teammates' lack of dedication to winning and their inability to put aside any off court conflicts for the best interest of the team. For Tasha, basketball was more about on court performance and her teammates did not view it with the same importance so it caused tension on the court. Speaking about the on court dynamics, Yolanda discussed how some of the racial assumptions her teammates had of her off the court translated to basketball and ultimately caused a rift into bonds that they were initially developing during pre-season workouts:

All the other freshmen I came in with, started off tight because we were all going through everything for the first time together. All the tough practices and getting cursed out and everything, we went through together because we also lived together in the dorms and all our other teammates lived off campus. It was weird for me because I was highly recruited so the coaches were so much harder on me. So some of my teammates felt bad for me for everything I went through so they would support me when I wanted to quit. Even though we didn't really hang out off the court, they had my back on the court because it was like us against the coaches so we'd all make sure we all looked good in practice. But then there were others that were like; 'if she's so good she should be able to take it'. So it was tough because I had to act like nothing was wrong.

Despite being the only Black player among them, Yolanda's recruiting class initially bonded because they were all struggling to adjust to the rigors and demands of college basketball. They were also isolated on campus so they did not have access to older teammates who lived off campus to ask for support. However, Yolanda was further alienated even by the other freshmen because they thought she would be more equipped to handle the coaches' demands and abuse because she came in more highly recruited. This reasoning of Yolanda's teammates reflects the dehumanizing stereotypes of Black



women's superhuman strength that is used to deny them space to express vulnerability, or ask for help with handling even the most insurmountable task (Wallace 1979; Morgan 1999; Mataka 2001; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009). As a result Yolanda discussed how she stopped expressing her feelings and looking to her teammates for support, using avoidance method of coping that Blacks use in situations where they feel there is nobody that would extend them any support. The potential damage to Black women that results from internalizing, what Michele Wallace describes as the myth of the superwoman (1979) includes emotional, psychological and even physical health problems (Wallace 1979; Morgan 1999; Mataka 2001; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009). Those symptoms, when added to the physical and psychological demands of college athletics combine for participants like Yolanda, taking basketball from the primary stress reliever and cultural reference group for Black women's empowerment, to a main source of stress and space where Black women are viewed and interacted with through a stereotypical lens.

While my participants have identified positive coping strategies like religiosity and seeking support outside the athletic department and other studies indicates that strong family relationships are also frequently used by Black women college student athletes, the frequency of avoidance used by my participants can lead to additional problems. Research indicates that student athletes are more likely to abuse alcohol to cope with sport-related stress (Yusko, Buckman, White & Pandina 2008). Although this study is not specific to Black woman hoopers, it coupled with my research, show how they may have additional risk factors to develop alcohol abuse problems than either their Black male or white female counterparts. In addition to being more likely to drink

alcohol, they are least likely to report any of their problems. For student athletes like my participants, who are often alienated by their own teammates, it is less likely that someone else will notice their behavior and intervene before serious damage occurs. Again, my participants did not express using negative coping methods, in part because they had developed positive coping mechanisms through basketball during adolescence but further investigation into Black women athletes' risk factors for developing negative coping mechanisms for sport related stress would be helpful. Ultimately, dealing with alienation from their teammates prevented my participants from building strong relationships with their teammates and resulted in additional stress because they worried that the unfamiliarity may have had negative effects on their on-court chemistry and possibly their playing time.

In discussing on court dynamics, competition for playing time was addressed by most of my participants their experiences change drastically depending on the racial composition of players. Brittney, who played on a racially diverse college team, explained how she dealt with a conflict with a teammate during practice:

There was a little competition between teammates. I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but it was what it was, I approached [basketball] more as a job, like any group of people working closely together there were conflicts...there was one chick who was particularly stank towards me. I think she viewed me as her competition, despite the fact that when on the court, and we played different positions. One day I had to stop practice and explain to her that we were teammates and any attempts and trying to physically hurt me were detrimental to the team on the whole.

Brittney was unsure if the altercation with her teammate was racially motivated but hints at how there was no other reason for the teammate to view her as a threat because they did not play the same position and they were both getting playing time. Whereas

Yolanda felt alienated and isolated because she could not confront her teammates when they did not support her when she was abused by her coaches. Brittney felt comfortable addressing the conflict with her teammate in a very public forum without fearing any consequences. While Brittney only suggests that the conflict was motivated by racial hostility, she did acknowledge that having a team culture that appreciated and valued racial diversity likely allowed her to feel confident enough to advocate for herself and seek out a resolution instead of relying on avoidance coping strategies.

In addition to both perceived and experienced racially motivated discrimination on the court, my participants additionally had to worry about performing well because there were no guaranteed positions. Many participants addressed how the team dynamics that may have initially been smooth, changed once the season started and there was competition for playing time, Felicia recalled:

I was close with the girls I came in with and we stuck together but everyone else, I was like ‘fuck them’. Like, it just didn’t feel like a team vibe. The dynamics of the team was divided and once the freshmen took some of the starting positions it was crazy. That first year was rough, very rough because I just wanted to play...It was just one girl at first and she didn’t like the fact that the girl on the team that she once liked was hanging with me, not even trying to get sexy, but just being friendly to the freshmen.

Similarly to Yolanda, Felicia bonded primarily with the teammates in her same recruiting class. For Felicia, who was not the only Black player, she was able to build stronger with them than Yolanda. In part because she and other members of her recruiting class were inserted into the starting lineup, there was an “us against them” dynamic within the team among freshmen and upper classmen that brought Felicia’s cohort even closer together. Felicia, who identifies as lesbian, also discussed having

some initial conflict with teammates, not because of, but unique to her sexuality because of potential attraction and romantic relationships among teammates. As Tasha had expressed earlier, one of the most difficult things to overcome was when off court tension spilled on to the court and disrupted the team chemistry. Felicia experienced retribution on the court from a teammate due to an off-court jealousy over a perceived romantic connection.

Though not a major theme in my research, the consequences of romantic relationships among teammates and how it disrupted team chemistry was addressed. Research indicates that intimate relationships with teammates are often the driving force between closeted or questioning queer women student athletes “coming out” (Stoelting 2011). Because the relationships become difficult to hide, players make the announcement to eliminate any speculation that may cause distractions to their teammates. The common narrative was that, after seeing how a romantic relationship between two teammates could be detrimental to the team’s success on the court, my participants, regardless of sexuality, supported their coaches no fraternization policies. My participants adamantly insisted that their support of coach anti-dating policies were not at all to be discriminatory to queer players but to maintain a positive team atmosphere. Furthermore, my queer and straight identified participants expressed how among teammates, there was not simply tolerance or acceptance for lesbian players but also a support and solidarity that existed. Lauren discussed how she accepted their lesbian teammates:

My teammate who dressed like a dude, people accepted her for the most part...she always had long hair, but then one day she randomly cut it off and

started growing dreads. People joked with her about that, but I think everyone just kind of knew what was up and respected her for being open and not caring what people thought.

For Lauren, she and her teammates could joke about the issue with a teammate who was changing her appearance to express her sexuality, but they still respected her courage to express herself and not be concerned with how people would receive the changes she was making. Lauren discussed how her teammate did not have to explicitly state her sexuality as lesbian but it was understood by the players because of the change in the their teammate's hair, clothing style and mannerisms.

Although not always an indication of queer identity, wearing short natural hairstyles like dreadlocks (locs) for Black women is often viewed as a rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards that present long, processed hair as the standard for femininity. Thus, women who reject these, and other, Eurocentric standards of beauty are often viewed deviant not only in their gender performance but also their sexuality. As discussed in the previous chapter, dressing in athletic clothing was described as an indication of a hooper for my participants. Consequently, that same clothing served as the basis of assumptions of lesbianism. Because all of my participants have been subjected to the stereotype that being a Black woman hooper is synonymous with being a lesbian, they understand how dehumanizing discrimination based on perceived sexuality can be to its targets. I believe this empathy among Black woman hoopers has facilitated the development of a queer safe space not just within teams, but also within the community at large. As Lauren mentioned, her teammate did not have to officially have to “come out” to garner support to deal with discrimination based on sexuality

because all Black woman hoopers are assumed to need it at some point. Research indicates that the close friendships lesbian college athletes develop with their teammates are influential in their decisions to publically proclaim their sexuality (Stoelting 2011). Some of my participants expressed needing to mobilize support against their own coaches, who harbored homophobic sentiments against some of their teammates. I will address this in further detail when discussing player/coach relationships. Aside from the important revelation about the influence of sexuality on team dynamics, Felicia's experience revealed team division based on age and tenure for players. In her case, the division resulted initially because her and the other freshmen threatened the playing time of older players. For Felicia, only one older teammate reached out for support and it exposed the jealousy of another player and ultimately resulted in backlash on the court for Felicia and some of the other freshmen.

Some of my participants however, expressed how older teammates were overwhelmingly supportive of them. Earlier Michelle who played on a majority Black team; mentioned how, the older players mentored her off the court. Roxanne had similar experiences with the upper classmen teammates on the court even through her team was majority white:

My team was mostly white and there was me and another Black girl my freshman year...But it was cool. There were only 3 freshmen and definitely we knew right away we were at the bottom in terms of pecking order. But, there was never a time where I felt our seniors or upper class treated us unfair. They protected us because at first we were really silly. They helped us balance it so it was fun and I actually looked up to my seniors that first year.

Roxanne's experience shows that off court dynamics do not always affect on the court cohesion. Off the court, Roxanne expressed how some of her teammates were racially

naïve and held negative stereotypical images of Black people. On the court however, they were still good teammates to Roxanne and the other freshmen when it came to basketball related issues like taking practice seriously and helping them learn to balance the demands of college basketball with the fulfillment it could bring.

There is a common narrative about the ability of athletics to break down racial barriers. This narrative is enhanced through Disney dramatizations of actual events in movies like *Remember the Titans*, and *Glory Road* that present sports as a commonality that allows individuals to put aside their racial prejudices in the best interest of their sports teams. Although this narrative neglects to acknowledge the realities of systematic racism within the institution of athletics that often employs negative stereotypes coupling Black athletic superiority with intellectual inferiority, experiences like Roxanne's show how sports can facilitate integrated contact among peers that can provide an environment where negative stereotypes of Blacks are disproved and respectful bonds can be built across racial lines.

Ultimately, in recollecting their on the court experiences with their teammates, all of my participants discussed how they encountered the most difficulties during their freshman year because they were making multiple transitions; from living with their parents to living autonomously in dorms and from high school to college level academics and athletics. Additionally, for participants like Princess, they were shifting from being in predominately Black communities and on predominantly Black teams to being the minority both on the team and on their college campuses. For other participants, like Tasha, playing in college was their first time playing on a losing team.

All of these new experiences not only shaped my participants' experiences with their teammates but also their coaches, who largely influenced many of my participants' university choices.

### ***Player/coach dynamics***

Coaches are a college student athlete's first point of personal contact with a university athletic program. In the previous chapter, many of my participants expressed how receiving their first college recruitment letter began the validation process of their identity as hoopers. The relationship that develops between high school players and college coaches during the recruiting process is often a primary factor in the teenager's decision to attend a specific school (Becker 2002). Players often articulate how excited they are to be playing for the coach they'd developed relationship with over the recent couple years. In the previous chapter, my participants Roxanne and Kadijah spoke of how loyalty to the coaches that recruited them played a factor in their decision to attend the schools they did, even when they had better options.

With coaches being the adult authority figure over their players, it is important to investigate the player/coach relationships my participants developed and how they impacted their experiences both on and off the basketball court. Felicia discussed how her supportive her coaches were of her and her lifestyle:

I can only speak for myself but my coaches were very supportive of the things I did. I knew I represented not only myself but the school I was playing for so no, I didn't hang my pants to my ankles but I did wear hats. My coaching staff knew [that I was attracted to women] and they were cool with it. If I wore a du-rag I had a hat on because that was my preference. I got tattoos when I wanted and it was never an issue. I think I was the host when we had recruits that they assumed were gay, but it was because I was cool and helped them feel comfortable. The school was cool and didn't really get involved with my preferences. So all in all I



had a great experience with that. No disciplining me for wearing what I wanted or anything like that.

Felicia expressed that not only were her coaches non-judgmental but that they were actually supportive of her freedom of expression. They did not try to police her dress or monitor her personal life. She also acknowledged that she understood that she was representing the university and attempted to act responsibly while expressing herself in a way that she felt very comfortable. Eventually, she helped the team recruit other possibly queer players by showing them that they would not be discriminated against because of their sexuality. One comment of note is that Felicia said she was chosen to host players that were thought to be lesbians to show them that they would be accepted and treated fairly if they chose to join the team. As mentioned earlier, for the majority of my participants, whose performance is predicated on their desire to be identified as hoopers, they are more likely to be perceived as masculine, and along with that come assumptions of homosexuality that is often the basis of discrimination.

In the wake of reputed coach Rene Portland being fired as head coach at Penn State University after a lawsuit was filed accusing her of dismissing a player from her team because of the player's perceived sexuality (Newhall and Buzuvis 2008), and WNBA and former Baylor University star Brittney Griner admitting that there was pressure to conceal her sexuality by the university and coaching staff ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)), the treatment of queer players in women's college basketball has become an important topic. Since Black woman hoopers are masculinized because they are athletes playing a sport many consider to be a "man's game" and because they are Black women, it is important to understand how not only queerness, but simply the

assumption of queerness, influences their experiences and identity performances. While Felicia discussed how her coaches were supportive of her sexuality, other participants noticed that their coaches sometimes treated some of their teammates differently based on their sexuality. Princess recalled:

There was only one openly Gay girl on the team. It was very obvious that she was super Gay too, she had the short boy haircut and she dressed very masculine; never wore dresses or skirts...No one except the [head] coach really cared. He didn't like us dating but he really didn't like girls with girls.

As Princess expressed earlier, she had had openly lesbian teammates in high school so she was very accepting of peoples' sexualities as were her college teammates. There was only one coach, the head coach, who had an issue with a player's sexuality and it created awkwardness for all of the players. Even though the peer support that participants like Princess and Lauren gave to their openly lesbian teammates was appreciated, the relationship a player has with their coach has a power dynamic in it that often requires players to behave in attempts satisfy the coach in order to get playing time or even be treated fairly. Princess mentioned that there was only one openly lesbian player, but she could have had teammates who were in the closet during their collegiate experiences or were unresolved in their sexuality at the time. Knowing that their coaches may disapprove of their sexuality, players may curtail their sexual exploration or expression out of fear of negative consequences. Knowing also that the suspicion of being lesbians may result in this discrimination, players may attempt to perform in ways more in line with traditional feminine performance even if they are uncomfortable doing so.

My participants discussed how coaches' perception and negative beliefs about a player's sexuality was one thing that caused player coach conflict. Another conflict my participants had with their coaches was the preferential treatment. Lauren discussed her frustration in how her coaches treated players differently based on performance expectations:

Our coaches treated each person different. I wasn't a fan of that, but it's what they did. You can't curse me out because I'm a point guard and you feel that I need to be mentally tough but then baby someone else...I know not everyone can handle certain things, but we were grown, no babies on the court.

Lauren's frustration stemmed from her feeling that her coaches were treating her more harshly than her teammates, not necessarily because they felt that she could handle it but because they felt that she needed to be able to handle it for the team to be successful.

Lauren admitted that she understood that the coaches should recognize the personality differences, but she had an expectation that everyone on the team would have the same level of toughness at the collegiate level and not require coaxing to meet performance expectations on the court. Lauren's expectations reflect her understanding of what it means to be a hooper; for her, there is an aspect of mental toughness that is expected so she was frustrated to see that it was not present in some of her teammates. Although Lauren felt that the treatment was unfair to her and others who were "cursed out", it reflects the coaches' understanding that players have different personalities, emotional stability and respond to different types motivational and disciplinary tactics. This individualizing of player relationships by coaches is said to facilitate positive relationships and potentially improve team success on the court.

Other participants articulated how their coaches were intentional not only about the treatment of individuals but the makeup of the team itself. Brittney expressed:

My class was the first to be recruited by my coach, and diversity was a priority for him...actually when I joined the team it was pretty diverse...There were 5 black girls, and 3 Asian girls, the rest were white. It was kind of an ongoing joke how the recruits were a melting pot of women that reflected the campus' makeup as a whole...My college coach had a far more laid back coaching style [than my high school coach] and to this day he remains one of the nicest men I have ever met.

Brittney's team diversity was a result of intentional recruiting by the coach in an attempt to reflect the racial and ethnic mixture of the urban university's campus. Where many student athletes expressed feelings of isolation because their schedules required them to live apart from the rest of the student population, Brittney's coaches' focus on diversity seemed to allow players to feel more like part of the larger university community.

Brittney mentions elsewhere in her interview where she had non-athlete roommates, which again speaks to her coaches' attempt to allow players to be better integrated into the larger university student community and not be isolated as athletes. While Brittney focused primarily on her relationship with the head coach, Princess, admitted that the relationship she had with the head coach and assistant coaches was different:

Well, my first year we had 4 coaches. Our head coach was really family oriented and he had all daughters so he was really understanding, so was our first assistant. They really didn't know us as people though. The last two coaches were the ones that got to know us the best. My first year, all the coaches were White. The next year we got a Black assistant coach. She was really cool. We are actually Facebook friends now. She really bonded well with the Black girls on the team; let us know we had someone to talk to.

For Princess, different members of the coaching staff developed distinct relationships with the players; some focused more on basic needs and on court activities while others

took the time to get to know the players better and offer psychosocial support that extended beyond basketball. Princess acknowledged that not only Black coaches, but also coaches with daughters were able to better connect with her and her teammates. Other participants echoed Princess' sentiment about coaches with daughters being more sympathetic to their players' concerns. For coaches, especially male coaches without daughters, participants, like Dominique had different experiences developing relationships:

I did not feel comfortable talking about personal issues with my male coaches because they didn't understand but, I did talk to my female, white assistant coach because we bonded over our faith. She led a women's Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) bible study. Additionally once the Black female assistant coach was hired we bonded over Christianity and being Black at an all-white school, which was her alma mater, and I talked to her about personal issues... also would have liked to see how my skills would have developed if I would have played for a program with more black women

Although Dominique did not feel comfortable addressing any personal issues with her male coaches, she was able to bond with her white female coaches over her faith similarly to the way she bonded with other teammates. Additionally, Dominique bonded with a Black female coach not only because they shared the same religious beliefs but because the Black female coach had also played basketball at a PWI and offered Dominique advice about getting through the experience. The mentorship Dominique received from her Black female coach made her question how different her college basketball experience would have been with more Black coaches and teammates. Dominique's comments reveal a feeling that she missed out on some potentially meaningful relationships because she did not have more Black women to bond with during her time as a college athlete. Recognizing the benefits of playing with Black

teammates and for Black coaches is likely to influence high school players' choices to play for certain programs.

At the time when my participants played college basketball there were very few Black women who were head basketball coaches at a Division I level, most notably: Marian Washington who was the head coach at Kansas University 1973-2004; C. Vivian Stringer, currently at Rutgers University; Carolyn Peck who became the only Black head coach of an NCAA Division I women's national championship team with Purdue University in 1999 and later coached the University of Florida 2002-2007; Dana "Pokey" Chatman who was the head coach of LSU from 2004-2007 and Coquese Washington the current head coach at Penn State University who began in 2007 . Although the numbers have grown considerably since 2007, Black women still only make up 10% of head coaches of women's college basketball at a Division I level as compared to 48% of the players (Lapchick Harrison & Buckstein 2012). Of course, when we consider how many of those coaches are concentrated at HBCUs and compare it with the amount of Black players attending PWIs the need to increase the amount of Black women coaches to better reflect the racial composition of the players is clear, especially with my participants expressing how valuable it was to have Black women coaches as mentors. Specifically articulating the difficulty she had developing relationships with her white coaches, Yolanda expressed:

I didn't get along with any of them, that's the main reason I left. They were really into mind games, one day you get praised for something and then you get yelled at for the same thing the next day. They turned some of the other players against me and they almost made me hate basketball. I was going through so much just being away from home and feeling like nobody understood me because there's specific stuff just around being Black and suddenly being around

all white people that I didn't have anyone to talk to about because I didn't want them to think I was using anything as an excuse because it would've just made everything worse.

Yolanda expressed how she did not want to speak to her coaches about the race related issues because she did not want to be accused of playing the 'race card'; using perceived, but unproven racial discrimination to explain her failure to perform up to her coaches' on court expectations. Books written that question the validity of Black peoples claims of race based discrimination in the workplace and admonish political opportunists for using racially charged issues to advance their personal careers have created confusion among Blacks as to how to deal with race based discrimination (Elder 2008; Ford 2008). Unfortunately, many Blacks, especially Black women default to avoidance coping strategies because they feel powerless to bring about change and fear retaliation from those they indict. For Yolanda, the treatment she received from her coaches was enough to make her leave the school because she not only felt mistreated by the coaching staff but also by teammates influenced by the coaches' portrayal of her. The experience made her question her love for basketball, which Yolanda describes as her first love.

For participants like Yolanda who view being 'strong' as a primary trait of Black womanhood, the decision to quit a basketball team may be viewed initially as a failure, because they were unable to overcome the abuse or hostility from their coaches. But, as Tamar Beauboeuf-Lafontant writes, a necessary part of Black women developing their voices and transcending the archetype of superhuman strength is "privilege[ing] experience over expectations and refus[ing] to allow strength to displace their humanity

(2009, p. 146). In assessing what was most important to her, Yolanda chose to leave the hostile situation she had with her coaches instead of being “tough” and continuing to play the rest of her college career at that school. Although some may view Yolanda as a quitter, her decision to consider her own wellbeing, especially within the context of Black women’s need to reframe the expectations that accompany the strength they are credited for having, Yolanda’s decision should be viewed as courageous. Through spaces like this research, her experience is acknowledged and has the potential to empower other Black woman hoopers to leave abusive basketball environments. Exposing the abuse she experienced from her coaches can also combat the historical silence that Black women college student athletes experience. While Yolanda was given the opportunity to make her own decision pertaining to how she dealt with conflicts with her coaches, Kadijah’s coach did not allow her the same agency:

One of my coaches was a Mormon and she was mean to some of my teammates because they were gay and she didn’t believe in that type of lifestyle. She was mean to them, really mean, and said mean things to them and they had to work extra hard...She tried to impose her beliefs on us even down to who we should vote for in the presidential election. She was a big Bush supporter so as a person I didn’t like her and she’s the reason I stopped playing basketball. She kicked me off of the team because of her own insecurities but then she was fired and then the Athletic Director came to me and asked why I never came to talk to them about the situation and I said I was done with basketball...my love for basketball turned into hatred because of what I experienced.

Kadijah’s recollection is an example of how coaches attempt to extend their authority beyond the basketball court and to impose their personal beliefs onto their players. One of the primary areas where coaches attempted to regulate players’ lives was with their dating/sexual activity and whereas, some of my participants agreed that dating among teammates could disrupt team chemistry, coaches’ motives for prohibiting players from



dating often stemmed from personal beliefs against homosexual behavior. Again, because all of my participants have experienced discrimination based on a presumption of them being lesbians, they not only provided support for queer teammates but they also lost respect for coaches who discriminated against queer players. Because Kadijah openly expressed her disgust with her coach's treatment of queer teammates, the coach kicked her off the team.

Another important aspect of Kadijah's situation is how she made no complaint. Although she provided support for her teammates, she did not take formal action against her coach. After her coach was fired, the school's athletic director asked why she hadn't complained and she expressed that that she was so drained from the experience that she no longer wanted to play basketball. Common in both Yolanda and Kadijah's experiences was the change in dynamics of basketball that caused them to lose the love they initially had for the sport. With basketball initially being such an empowering activity; one that gave them confidence in their abilities as Black women, facilitated sisterhood bonds and a safe space for personal expression for them and their teammates, and fostered community support that centered women's abilities aside from being sexual objects, it was disheartening for them to experience discrimination based on race or sexuality from teammates and coaches.

My participants who expressed having difficulties with teammates made efforts to resolve their conflicts by taking the time to dispel negative stereotypes against Black people off the court and publicly confronting teammates in practice who were playing maliciously. Conflicts with coaches however, were dealt with quite differently. For

some of my participants like Dominique, the conflicts were resolved when new coaches were hired that were more supportive to their needs, for others however like Yolanda, the conflicts with her coaches caused them to transfer and with Kadajah, she was actually kicked off of the team by a coach who was later fired. Notably absent from all of my participants recollections is any reporting of their coaches to athletic directors or other university administrators. My participants' comments were made in a defeatist tone and accompanied by common responses that they did not think that anyone would do anything about their concerns with the coach. This shows the importance of increased presence of Black women in college basketball not only as head coaches but also as administrators. Still, for other participants like Felicia, their coaches supported their sexuality and expression and used them to show recruits that the team environment was a safe space for queer players. Participants with Black assistant coaches were especially grateful for the mentorship they received both on and off the court and believe those relationships to be instrumental in them developing as Black women.

The wide array of player/coach dynamics expressed through my participants' responses indicates a necessity for young players to thoroughly investigate the coaches they plan to play for in college in attempts to insure that basketball remains a cultural reference group for their empowerment and development through the end of their adolescence. While my participants discussed how in some ways playing college basketball allowed them to develop sisterhood bonds with their teammates and be mentored by their coaches, they also expressed how conflicts with teammates and coaches could be severe enough to turn them away from basketball completely. What

exacerbated the experiences of my participants is the level of isolation that student athletes have from the larger student body because of the demands of their athletic schedule. As a result, most of my participants sought out support from other student athletes with similar schedules and possibly similar struggles.

### Bonding With Other Student Athletes

While some of my participants may have felt powerless against their coaches or discouraged because of conflicts with their teammates, many found support within the larger community of student athletes at their universities. Tasha recollected on her experiences with other student athletes:

I got along really well with other student athletes at my school. We shared a commonality that no one else could understand. When we were the only kids on campus during the summer, that's when we all bonded the most. We really supported each other...you'd always see a large group of athletes at each team's game, match, meet, etcetera.

Tasha discussed the commonality among student athletes that was related directly to them facing similar isolation from the majority of the student body; often required to be on campus during the summer by their coaches while most students went back to their hometowns, travelled, or worked away from campus. In addition to being on campus during the summer, Tasha acknowledged that the unique experiences of athletes are difficult to articulate to non-athletes. Conflicts with teammates and coaches, trying to balance academics athletics and a social life and making the transition from high school to college, and self-doubt in one's ability to succeed both academically and athletically

were commonalities amongst them that allowed them to bond. Out of these bonds, came support, often in the form of attending other teams' games.

Though they had the support of other athletes, the isolation from the larger university community for college athletes is a stark contrast from their high school experiences where being an athlete elevated them to celebrity status within their schools and local communities. All of participants grew up with support throughout the community in part because of their athletic participation, in college; however, the communitywide support for athletes, especially women athletes was minimal. Yolanda discussed how it was her connection to the players on the men's basketball team that helped her find support on campus and in the local community:

The other athletes were great, that's where I met the other Black students on campus, most times through other athletes, especially the older ones because they'd be in organizations or frats or sororities and they'd let me tag along and that's how I got to meet people not just other black students but I actually got into the Black community in the city outside of the school which ended up being a support system for me. And the guys on the guys' team became like brothers and I even dated one because me and him were both freshmen who were going through a lot both on and off the court, so we just kind of were there for each other. We didn't have to explain the issues because we knew and, it's crazy because as much as we loved ball, we rarely talked about basketball. After a hard practice we'd just meet somewhere and listen to music, play video games watch movies study; everything that kind of helped us balance out playing ball. And then when we'd have home games they'd be in the stands and that was like the best feeling.

Yolanda, similarly to Tasha expressed how happy it made her feel when other athletes would come to her games to show support. For Yolanda and other participants who attended universities far from home, other student athletes were often the only supporters they had at home games. Furthermore, Yolanda mentioned the romantic bonds that developed from having other individuals who were not only going through similar

experiences but shared similar interests. Speaking specifically about the other Black student athletes, they provided Yolanda a gateway into the larger Black community in the city where the university was located. For many of my participants, although they admitted the demands of college athletics, they also emphasized the need to have interests and outlets outside of sports and even outside of the campus to allow them to maintain balance needed to cope with the academic and athletic demands placed on them not only by their coaches but often times by family members and communities in the hometowns where they were raised.

### Interacting With the Student Body

For male student athletes, though they are not integrated into the general student body population, they are often held in high regard because of their status as athletes. They are often on billboards around campus, and often because of their stature, stand out amongst their peers. Women athletes are rarely given that much publicity around the school and often go unrecognized as athletes by their classmates. Comparing the support for the women's basketball program to the men's program at her school Jazmin explained:

There was a lot of support for our guys...our guys played in something [similar to a professional arena] we played in something that was at college but it was a multi-purpose floor with the volleyball lines. We'd have shoot-around late at night after a hockey game so we'd be freezing...the guys would sell out nearly every game and we would get maybe a few hundred in our gym that only seats maybe five thousand and that's including our parents or our classmates and professors that loved us... It's a crappy feeling because you know how hard you work to get there especially, you feel like this is division I ball, we're busting our butts, we got all this promo we have to do to get people to come when [our men's team has] shuttles taking people from campus to downtown where the guys games are and we have extra tickets and we're

handing them out at the mall like, 'come to our game please' so it's hard...but I do think we have more true sports fans and athletes that come to our games because they understand it's basketball; not girls basketball or guys basketball but just good basketball.

Jazmin expressed her disappointment at the lack of support for women's athletics at her college in comparison with the men's team because she felt that she and her teammates worked just as hard, if not harder, than the men's team but did not receive a fraction of the support, not only from students and fans but also from the administration in terms of providing them with accommodations that would allow them to perform to their greatest potential or have greater fan support. After the passing of Title IX in 1979 universities were required to set aside funds to develop women's collegiate athletic programs.

Rarely however, were women's programs provided accommodations on par with their male counterparts (Wushanley 2004). Even though Jazmin expressed her disappointment she did mention that she got support not only from family but classmates and professors who offered support. Adding a bit of insight to a possible reason for the lack of support for women's basketball related to the university culture, Princess added:

My college was pretty small and most people commuted from somewhere so most people didn't know who the athletes were... People were mostly apathetic. We weren't selling out the arena or anything, but we had fans... The Black population really supported the team because of the Black people on the team... They would come to games and stuff, cheering all loud in the crowds... they would make sure we knew where the party was that weekend.

Princess admitted that the dynamics on her campus were not centered around athletics because many students commuted to campus and were focused more on their academics. She also acknowledged that there was specific support from the Black students to not only attend the games, but to make sure that their support was seen and heard by the

players. Similar to Yolanda's experiences, Princess discussed how Black student support extended beyond just coming to her games and also helped to integrate her into the larger Black student and local Black communities. Admittedly, Jazmin and Princess did not attend highly ranked programs like some of my other participants so their experience might reflect the perceived quality of the program. For other participants who played on top 25 ranked teams, they provided different experiences about student support. Michelle proudly recollected:

[The students were] very supportive...A couple of years ago we were recognized as the winningest program out of all sports in the area. But now since the team hasn't been winning there's been way less attention and support. Not to say that there was enormous support to start out with but you can tell it's a huge difference.

Michelle, attended the university in a metropolitan area with more than 5 other NCAA Division I athletic programs in the area of which hers was the most successful. She admitted that the support generally depended on how well the team was doing. Having a similar experience, Lauren discussed how the success of the team determined how she was treated:

At my school in general they kind of put athletes on a pedestal down there, so students give you love regardless just because you're an athlete. At the same time, it wasn't like anyone was happy to be sitting next to me in class those first 2 years when we weren't that good, most people didn't even know who I was...Junior year though, when we were winning, we had so many bandwagon fans that we experienced some of the celeb status. [There's a college tradition that they normally do for the football team] when they win a big game and when we beat one of our biggest rivals, they did it for us so that was pretty cool.

Similar to Michelle, Lauren acknowledged that the support for women's basketball depended on the success of the team. While she claimed that athletes at her school were generally regarded in high esteem by the student body she admitted that she went

unnoticed by her classmates when the team was performing poorly. In addition to discussing the amount of support they received on the court, my participants also discussed how they were treated individually around campus as student athletes. Whereas Lauren and Jazmin were a bit frustrated at the lack of student support their team received, Brittney commented on her ability to integrate into the student body outside of basketball while still being recognized around campus as an athlete:

In my classes, I was just a member of the student body not necessarily a student athlete but a student, but around campus was pretty visible. Many people in the Dean's office and other students who followed basketball knew who I was and to a certain extent treated me a little differently I suppose. This never really entailed any perks or extra privilege, just more recognition I'd say.

Earlier, Brittney discussed her coach's attempt to integrate them into the university community as much as possible and Brittney expressed that she did feel like a student in her classes while also being recognized as an athlete around campus. One of the most widely recognized conflicts among college student athletes is managing expectations of both roles (Adler & Adler 1987). For Black student athletes especially, research shows that being identified as a student-athlete has higher potential to prime negative stereotypes that can sabotage their academic performance: for Black student athletes in particular they are affected by both dumb jock stereotypes and stereotypes assuming Black students to be intellectually inferior to whites (Stone, Harrison & Mottley 2012). Roxanne, added comments about how the relationships they had with the male student athletes got them more recognition on campus but had some negative consequences:

We were accepted more through associating with the men's team so if we sat with them in the cafe or student center and they introduced us to people they knew immediately and then later that person would see you on campus another time and say 'hey you're on the women's team right? What's up?' But, because



the guys treated us like sisters and the other girls on campus felt threatened by that at times...so of course that's when we heard the negative stereotypes, like all girls that played bball had to be gay.

Roxanne and her teammates received recognition on campus primarily after being introduced by players on the men's team. She also discussed how the closeness with the men's athletes created some animosity between the women's basketball team and many of the female students and how it resulted in the spread of rumors that they were all lesbians. Although they were often perceived as a threat to girls wanting to have romantic relationships with male athletes my participants were close to, dating was difficult for the majority of my participants.

In addition to the assumption that all Black woman hoopers are lesbians, the rigorous schedule they were required to follow often left little time for romance. Earlier, Yolanda mentioned how a relationship developed with her and a member of the men's team because they had similar experiences as student athletes. Other participants like Lauren discussed how dating was difficult:

Dating was hard because we had not time, and if you're with someone who doesn't play a sport they didn't always understand how time consuming being a student athlete can be and it gets frustrating to try to find time. If you're dating another athlete you also deal with the fact that other people will be coming at whoever you're with because of their status. It can be a tough balance but most people eventually figure it out or at least try.

As mentioned earlier, most of my participants played for coaches who restricted or even prohibited dating so any relationships they did attempt had to occur during the off season or be kept discreet as so not to be punished by their coaches. As a result, many of my participants developed close relationships with guys at their universities but were rarely

in official relationships. For some participants, like Dominique, it was not their coaches' restrictions that prevented them from dating:

I didn't date anyone while I was in college. I don't know if that had to do with being a basketball player or not. It might have but the truth is that there also were not very many Black males on campus and even less that I was actually attracted to.

For Dominique who mentioned earlier that she was the only Black woman in the whole program, there were not many prospects for her dating because there were not many Black men on her campus and she was not interested in interracial dating. Dominique touches on both the disparity between Black men and women on college campuses, and the effect of interracial dating limiting her options. Department of education statistics show that Black women still outnumber Black men in terms of enrollment at the 4 year collegiate level ([www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov)). Furthermore, at some universities Black women comprise 70% of Black students ([www.jbhe.com](http://www.jbhe.com)). Research findings also indicate that Black women college students view their Black classmates who engage in interracial relationships, especially with white women, as lacking qualities they desire in potential romantic partners (Wilkins 2012). Earlier, some of my participants admitted that their coaches discriminated against some of their queer teammates. Many of my participants also played in states that are conservative in terms of accepting homosexuality; more than half of them played at universities in states where same sex marriage is banned ([www.gaymarriage.procon.com](http://www.gaymarriage.procon.com)). These two factors would provide additional difficulties for queer Black woman hoopers seeking romantic relationships in a homophobic climate. Further research should be conducted to elucidate the unique experiences of these women.

In addition to limiting the dating opportunities for my participants, basketball commitments also restricted their ability to participate in other activities. Because the experiences of student athletes is unique in part because of their regimented schedules, it is important to understand what my participants had to balance to be successful in athletics and the pursuit of their degrees and to what extent they were able to participate in other unique opportunities only provided during college.

### Balancing the Demands of Division I Basketball and College Life

#### ***Daily routines***

Because of how regimented player's schedules are and the many restrictions placed on their social lives and the expectations placed on them to consistently perform athletically, many college athletes describe playing as a full time job. My participants discussed in detail the demands placed on them by recalling their daily schedules. For some of my participants like Jazmin, the days were long and demanding:

So pre seasons, three days a week we had weights, and or conditioning at 7am. I usually had class as early as 9 o'clock after that and then I would have class all day until about 2pm. Then we'd come back for our second, either individual work outs shooting or something like that at 3 or 4 and then study table when I was done with that and hopefully home by 7, 8 o'clock after I got some dinner. And do it again the next day...In season, we had some early morning practices but most of the time our schedules would have us...so everybody would be out of class by 1 or 2 o'clock so we could practice at 3pm or sometimes 4...and then we'd practice from 3-5 or like 3-5:30pm. If we had weights and then study table and after that grab food and get home by 9pm depending on how much time we had to spend in study table because we had to get a certain amount of hours every week, which broke down to a certain amount of time every day. Whether or not you were studying you just had to be in there. It was hard to get any studying done because it was the same time for all the athletes in the program so it was mostly just a time for us to socialize.

Jazmin's schedule started and ended with basketball during the off seasons with a small midday block available for classes. During the evenings after practice, players had mandatory "study table" which is an NCAA requirement for athletic programs to set aside a certain number of hours every week for players to study even though Jazmin admitted that there was rarely any studying going on. Other participants like Tasha had different schedules but they were just as demanding, and she and her teammates were required to fit their classes around the practice schedules:

Every semester our practice block changed, so depending on whether or not we had practice in the morning, midday, or evening would determine my classes and free time. Most of the time we had a midday practice which meant that I would go to class in the morning, arrive to the arena around 11am or so and practice 12pm-3pm. After practice if it was a lift day, we would lift, and then I would head home, get cleaned up and be off to class again for the rest of the night. Pre- and post-season schedules were always crazier with 6am conditioning, lifting 4 days a week and individuals, everything was so scattered...for instance you may have three different things to attend on a specific day all at different times of the day.

For Tasha, her practice time changed depending on the schedule her coaches had arranged with other teams that used the same practice facility. As a result, she was limited in the classes she was able to take because she had to make sure there were no conflicts with practice, workouts or other team related obligations. Tasha also expressed that things were more hectic during the off-season because there were more team obligations. Because players tend to get disengaged during off-seasons, many coaches require players to do more during that time to keep them in shape and focused on basketball. My participants all expressed disappointment at how much their schedules revolved around basketball because they had gone to college not only to play but also to

pursue their degrees. In the attempts to balance these two primary responsibilities, many of them sacrificed their social lives.

### ***Participating in non-basketball related activities***

My participants knew that playing basketball in college was going to be demanding but for some of them, they admit that they feel they missed out on some college experiences they had looked forward to. Kadijah talked about the adjustment process not only to the rigors of college athletics but also college academics:

College is a beast... I think in college I learned a lot about life... you have to learn to be an adult and be on your own or a glimpse at being an adult so any decisions you make are what you have to live with. The people are more focused in college...I was used to getting by, in college, I actually had to study...which was hard in itself because I had practice, conditioning or weight training so I didn't have much of a social life when I was in college because at the time my major was being a basketball player...no time for any activities while playing basketball. Afterwards I joined the Black Student Union...I focused more on my academics after basketball so I reached out to teachers more for advice. I would have loved to join a sorority in college but I was busy with basketball.

In college Kadijah not only had to learn how to balance her basketball commitments with classwork but she also had to improve her study skills with little time and even less guidance from the athletic department. Although studies indicate that Black women student athletes perform better academically than their Black male counterparts (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997; [www.diverseeducation.com](http://www.diverseeducation.com)), all of my participants expressed the difficulties they had adjusting to the academic demands of their universities. Because my participants all went to college with the ultimate goal of obtaining a degree even if they did desire to play basketball professionally, they were more invested in succeeding academically than men's college players who often only attend college because NBA regulations now prohibit players from entering the NBA

Draft immediately after graduating high school. Because school and basketball were primary focuses, my participants expressed difficulty finding time for anything else. It was not until after she was kicked off of the basketball team that she was able to focus on her academics and get involved with student organizations. When Tasha spoke about the limitations on her student involvement due to basketball admitted:

There were times when I felt like being a student athlete prevented me from doing other things...like having a month off from school and going home. There were other sports that still got that time, but since we played basketball over the break, we were at school. On the positive side, it kept me from having student loans. I didn't have to pay one penny for my college education and that is truly a blessing from God.

Tasha, like many of my participants, had made the decision to play college basketball partially because it gave them access to a quality college education without having to spend thousands of dollars and accrue debt into order to obtain their degree. Placing basketball within that context made the hard work and sacrifices worth the degrees they eventually earned. Although many of my participants felt limited by the demands of college athletics, some of my participants like Dominique had very active social lives:

I couldn't go on any spring break trips, nor any long term winter break trips or time with family... The schedule meant I missed out on a lot of regular college experiences and I didn't like being forced to spend so much time with some people that I probably would not interact with under normal circumstances...I am a busybody though so I was still heavily involved on campus. I was Vice President of the African American Student Association, [a member of the Honors Fraternity and a Black sorority. I was also a member of the Christian student association and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and student association related to my major].

Somehow, despite her basketball commitments, Dominique was still able to be a very active college student. She admitted earlier that she did not befriend many of her teammates so the majority of her limited free time was spent away from the team, which

allowed her to participate in so many other campus activities. Dominique was in the minority of my participants able to participate in multiple activities and still be successful on the basketball court. In addition to the athletic and social commitments and obligations, my participants also had to make sure they were doing well in the classroom; not only to stay eligible, but since the majority of my participants planned to go into careers outside of playing basketball that required a college degree, they understood the importance of performing just as well or even better in the classroom than they did on the basketball.

### ***Classroom experiences***

With the majority of my participants prioritizing getting their degree over any desire to play professional basketball, they expressed being excited to take classes and start making strides towards their eventual careers. Unfortunately, many of them were met with negative assumptions about their intelligence and academic abilities because they were Black and because they were student athletes. Dominique recalled some of her early experiences:

I chose my school for academics to start with so that realm of my life I felt like I was better at and in more control of than basketball...In some entry level freshman classes the teachers already had a pre-conceived notion that I was not a good student, would miss class a lot and academically undeserving to [be at the school].

For Dominique, some of her professors thought that her status as an athlete would cause her to miss class and that she possibly had gotten into the academically demanding school primarily because of her basketball abilities and not her intelligence.

Experiencing similar assumptions about academic entitlement, Felicia remarked:

Classroom was more a shocker for me... Like there would be 200 people in a class and I would be the only shade of color sitting down... Some professors would be extremely hard on me; for example when it was time to travel. If I had an away game the professor would inform me that the exam was a certain day and it would not be changed because I was an athlete. Some professors were excited about me being an athlete and others not so much... Some students thought I was just there to play and others thought it was cool that I was doing both. If anything, it had more to do with me being an athlete than my race or gender.

Many of my participants expressed similar sentiments about the discrimination they experience based on the belief that they would not take their academics seriously and would be poorly prepared for college level coursework because they were athletes. Similarly to the way my participants had to prove themselves on the basketball court when they began playing, they had similar challenges in their college classrooms to show their professors that they were seriously invested in their academics. Lauren discussed how her coaches attempted to help players avoid these conflicts with professors:

We tried to choose the [professors] that were athlete friendly when we made our schedules...so if they ever thought anything negative about me it was because I didn't go to class or put forth much effort. Every now and then I would have a class with a random person who would say stuff about how athletes don't earn their degrees like regular students...Usually everyone was cool and I got fair treatment.

Lauren and her coaches tried to be proactive in order to avoid scheduling players with professors who had negative perceptions of athletes. Lauren herself even admitted that some of the treatment she received from professors was warranted because she was unfocused at times academically. Whereas Lauren's coach's proactive approach helped her and some of her teammates succeed academically, intervention by Yolanda's coaches was a detriment to her academics:



I love learning so I was always participating in class and I've always been smart so I think I dispelled some ideas about athletes being dumb or arrogant so people opened up to me and some of my classmates actually came to the games. Especially after I gave this speech in class about how much I loved basketball, people really kind of understood that it was more than just a game for me and they respected that... Teachers were cool because we gave them that paper at the beginning of the semester that said when we would be absent for road games. I didn't ever try to use being gone as an excuse so they worked with me. What messed me up the most is when my coaches tried to pick my schedule because they picked it around our practice and film schedule and I ended up in some classes that I did horribly in and I didn't know why but it was that I never took any of the prerequisites so I didn't have the background information. It kind of made my confidence go down because they were telling me I might not be eligible.

Yolanda, like many of my other participants, enjoyed school and put as much into it as they did their athletics. Their class participation helped them gain respect of their classmates and professors as a student and not just a dumb jock. For Yolanda, unfortunately, her coaches' decision to choose her classes to accommodate the team's practice schedule resulted in her taking classes that she was unprepared for. While the majority of my participants linked the unfair treatment they received to being an athlete, it should be acknowledged that athletic stereotypes of Blacks combine athletic superiority with intellectual inferiority. Michelle expressed the racial discrimination she experienced in her classes:

I think there was discrimination against Black women athletes and just Black students in general...I didn't know this prior to going to the school but when you get there and look around, mostly everybody is white; the faculty, the students, the only group that was Black were the maintenance people. As a result, it was always a feeling that we didn't belong; that we weren't expected to do well in the classroom because we were really only there for sports. Like classmates and teachers being surprised when you said something smart in class or did well on an assignment or test.

Michelle describes the academic climate on a PWI campus as being alienating and expressed that she was viewed as athletically inferior because she was Black and because she was an athlete. Additionally, depending on their major, my participants in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, were subjected to additional assumptions of their intellectual inferiority because they are women. Though studies indicate that my participants would be most likely to suffer from stereotype threat (Schmander, Johns & Forbes 2008), the conflation of category based identities like race gender and sexuality with role based identities like student athlete, allowed my participants to avoid those negative impacts. The construction of Black woman hooper identity not only mandates that my participants be committed to basketball but also to their academic pursuits because they all admitted using the opportunity to play college basketball to obtain their college degrees.

### Conclusion

Whether their college basketball careers were cut short before they completed their degrees, they used their years on athletic scholarship to obtain degrees, or are currently pursuing careers as professional basketball players my participants all discussed how their experiences shaped the characteristics that allow them to be successful. My participants' with majorly white teammates expressed how racial stereotypes made it difficult for them to build trusting relationships both on and off the court. Their responses to their teammates' stereotypes ranged from annoyance at their ignorance to excitement at the opportunity to eradicate their stereotypical beliefs but all

my participants admitted that the task of being, sometimes, the sole representative of Black women to their teammates was draining. They were ultimately able to resolve conflicts with teammates or at least limit the extent to which the conflicts negatively affected their performance on the basketball court. Conflicts my participants had with their coaches were not so easily resolved.

Coaches singling out players and demeaning them was a primary cause of challenges in the player-coach relationship. Some participants disliked the homophobic treatment of queer teammates by coaches. While others suffered punitive punishment of them for not fulfilling coaches' expectations that their teammates were not held to. Few of my participants who played on majority white team and had white coaches developed deep personal bonds with their coaches because they believed that the coaches would be insensitive to their race specific concerns. My participants who played on teams with Black teammates and coaches had different responses. They expressed appreciation for the older teammates and coaches who mentored them both on and off the court to help them navigate only the transition to college campuses but also the better acclimate themselves to being racial minorities. My participants discussed how invaluable it was to have the support of other Black students because they felt isolated not only as student athletes but racial minorities on campus. These bonds facilitated their racial identity development through their participation in Black sororities and Black professional and student organizations on their campuses. Having support not only from Black teammates and coaches but also Black student outside of their teams gave participants with that experience an increased level of confidence enabled them to directly address

team conflicts instead of using avoidance coping strategies. Although the racial dynamics of the coaches and players had significant impact on my participants' basketball related experiences, the narratives about their classroom experiences were similar to Black non-athletes at predominately white campuses. Receiving discrimination from members of all three role sets; academic, athletic and social, facilitated my participants' conflation of their identities into one of a Black woman hooper and forced them to seek out support and developing coping strategies that would help address the unique ways that they were marginalized and attacked because of their combined category and role based identities. In this way, women's college basketball becomes a contested terrain where Black woman hoopers experiences range from those allowing them to be celebrated and encouraged to perform Black womanhood in a way the rejects Eurocentric standards of femininity and beauty to those where they experience multiple jeopardies in multiple spaces as they are marginalized by their teammates and coaches as well as their classmates and professors.

In reflecting on their experiences as college athletes, my participants were able to acknowledge that the positive and negative experiences they had as college athletes helped them develop skills they knew would be important for them to possess as Black women in whatever professional fields they wanted to enter. Characteristics like strength and resilience came directly from playing sports with difficult workouts and recovering from tough losses. Communication skills and conflict resolution came as a result of working within a team and trying to get individuals with different personalities and values to work together towards the common goal of winning games. College

basketball also created, for my participants who played on majority Black teams, continued to be a reference group for Black women's empowerment because as a space for them that encouraged and supported freedom of expression, facilitated solidarity between straight and queer players and celebrated a wide array of representations of Black womanhood.

The next chapter will further examine my participants' reflections on the impact that playing basketball in college has had on their development as Black women. Using the Don Imus incident, I elucidate my participants understanding of negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers, how they dealt with them as players and how those experiences equipped them to deal with similar discrimination away from basketball in their careers.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONNECTING BASKETBALL EXPERIENCES TO BLACK WOMANHOOD

#### Chapter Organization

When determining the timeframe of college careers for my participants, I used 1997-2007 for multiple reasons. In chapter IV I asserted that my participants being a generation removed from Title IX legislation positively affected their basketball experiences. Not only did they grow up in communities where resources were set aside for their athletic teams but the increased visibility of Black woman hoopers provided them with role models both within their local communities and nationally on television. The viewership of women's basketball increased throughout the 1990s and but increased number of young girls playing at amateur levels increased the competition for Division I scholarship opportunities (Becker 2002; Baker 2008). This time period also marks the first decade of the WNBA that began in 1997 and has been making dreams of playing professional basketball a reality for thousands of young women for nearly 20 years. The first 10 years are so monumental because no other professional women's basketball league in the United State was able experience the longevity of the WNBA. While 2007 was a year to celebrate WNBA growth and success it also highlighted the negative stereotypes that are uniquely applied Black woman hoopers who comprise the majority of players in the league with Don Imus' gendered racist attack on the Rutgers University women's basketball team after the NCAA women's Division I national Championship game played on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. This chapter uses the Imus incident to elucidate important

realities about my participants' awareness of and responses to negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers. Additionally, it allows them to reflect on the ways that being hooper equipped them with strategies to cope with and skills to overcome the stereotypes applied to Black women areas outside basketball.

I begin with my participants' reactions and the Rutgers University and larger Black community responses to Imus' comments. I move then to discuss my participants' understanding of the source of the stereotypes underlying Imus' comments. Next I discuss the coping strategies used while they were playing and finally I discuss how they translate the skills and strategies their lives after basketball.

#### Reactions to Don Imus' "Nappy Headed ho's" Comment

At no other time were the negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers made more apparent than after the 2007 NCAA Division I women's basketball championship game when radio show host Don Imus referred to Rutgers University players as "nappy headed ho's". My participants shared their initial reactions and also reflected on emotions around the incident. Tasha focused on what Imus' comments exposed about his racial views:

I thought [his comments] were completely ignorant. I think it showed his true colors, that he was able to keep under wraps for a number of years in his profession. He saw a predominately Black team that was excelling at the college level, and he slipped, but I truly believe that he said what he had been thinking for a number of years... I thought Rutgers handled it with class. To me they came out of the situation better than ever, but I am very glad that someone took notice to the ignorance that Don Imus showed when he made those comments.

Although, she does not call Imus a racist, she does acknowledge that his comments were made to detract from the accomplishments of a Black team. She suggests that seeing Rutgers' success made Imus unable to hold back his true feelings about Black women in that moment. In claiming that Imus "slipped" in making his public comments, Tasha is describing what is referred to as an "accidental shift", where whites express racist comments forgetting that they are in a public frontstage where people of color can hear the comments that are usually reserved for all white backstage spaces where these comments are welcomed because no people of color are allowed (Picca & Feagin 2007). Tasha and other participants expressed suspicion that many whites held racist sentiments about them in private but were more careful not to speak or act in ways to expose themselves. Tasha also praised the Rutgers team and their response for addressing the situation so well. Later, I further analyze the significance of Rutgers' reactions and its impact on the larger community of Black woman hoopers.

In addition to commenting on how the Imus incident impacted the community of Black woman hoopers, my participants also discussed how the incident triggered memories of their interactions with people expressing similar sentiments to those of Imus. Discussing how Imus' comments reminded her of personal experiences, Lauren added:

[The University of Tennessee women's Basketball team has] always been known as that kind of team; those chicks hoop in makeup, and [even one of their players] Candace Parker models, so of course if u see her in makeup, sew in [weave] and looking her best, and chicks from the other team with braids and maybe not all dolled up... I could see how someone could compare the two... [but] he was just stupid for saying what he said... I felt bad for them, especially after it happened to me... There was a girl on the opposite team who looked like a Barbie doll. She wore the same number as me, so perverted fans said 'their



player [with the number] looked better than ours and made some comments. I laughed ...I know I'll never have long blond hair that flows like the wind, and I don't want it...we won the game so that was enough.

Many of my participants discussed how the comments Imus made were personal because they had heard similar things said about them or their teammates. Lauren had an experience where she was compared to a player from another team based on perceived beauty standards and not at all because of her playing ability. As mentioned previously, Black women are viewed as less feminine and beautiful when directly compared to white women. She referred to the white women as a "Barbie doll" indicating most likely long blond hair and blue eyes. In this situation, Eurocentric beauty standards were imposed as an attempt to minimize Lauren's skills on the basketball court; where success is not at all dependent on Black women conforming to those standards. In Lauren's recollection, the incident presented as an opportunity for her to reject Eurocentric beauty standards and embrace her skills as a hooper as representation of her womanhood. Winning the game against the team whose fan made the comment validated Lauren's womanhood as a hooper and placed it above the Eurocentric beauty standard used in an attempt to devalue her. Many of my participants recalled incidents where they used being a hooper as their performance of womanhood in response to attempts to present them as less feminine.

While Tasha commented on Imus racist slip and hinted at the strong symbolic message sent by Rutgers' collective team response, and Lauren related it to her personal experiences, another participant, Felicia discussed how the comments were not only hurtful not only to her but to her loved ones:

‘What the fuck’ was my first reaction. I kept saying it like ‘what the fuck, are you serious?’ I was very upset... disappointed and very upset. My mom was hurt by it because in her eyes he was talking about me and my friends that played. First, people say that female athletes are too glamorous therefore we don't take it serious. Then, we just go out and play ball and it's still a problem. We can hoop and then dress it up and what not. Would he have said that about Gonzaga? Hell, that's a majority white team but they also wear ponytails to the back, baggy shorts, and whatever else.

Felicia's mother recognized that Imus' comments were not only directed at Rutgers' players but All Black woman hoopers including her daughter. This shows that the reach of negative stereotyping of Black woman hoopers extends beyond them directly to include their loved ones because it reinforces the reality that Black women, no matter how successful they are, will not be able to fully escape the controlling images that are used to define them. Support for Black woman hoopers is so strong in part because there is a communal understanding that Black girls are constantly subjected to Imus like attacks daily and need constant support.

Earlier I asserted that basketball provides a cultural reference group for Black women's empowerment not only by helping Black girls develop self-confidence but also because it presents positive images of Black women throughout the Black community. The response of Black men to stand up to express their outrage over the attacks of the Rutgers players is evidence of this community support. Community activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton both spoke out against Imus and protested to insure not only his removal but also a push towards better media representations of Black women ([www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)). Then presidential candidate and Illinois state senator, Barack Obama even spoke about the initial two-week suspension of Imus for the comments, telling ABC News:

I understand that MSNBC has suspended Mr. Imus, but I would also say that there's nobody on my staff who would still be working for me if they made a comment like that about anybody of any ethnic group...he didn't just cross the line, he fed into some of the worst stereotypes that my two young daughters are having to deal with today in America. ([www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org))

Obama connecting Imus' attacks of Rutgers' women's basketball players to stereotypes that would be applied to his own daughters showed that there was community wide support for not only the Rutgers' players but for Black girls and their humanity. Within the Black community there is always a critique of political movements for the centering of Black men's issues and the lack of support to address the specific gendered racism that Black women experience. The community wide response not only condemning Don Imus but also offering support to the young women playing for Rutgers' University showed the community centering Black women's issues and rallying around them to push for equality.

Felicia's comments also expressed frustration with the contradictory messages that women athletes receive about balancing the aggression and toughness related to athletics with the passiveness and daintiness that are often equated to femininity and womanhood. As mentioned earlier, as the visibility of women's basketball increased, it became increasingly important that players not only be skilled but also marketable to potential sponsors. As a result, Black women, who are always constructed as inherently less feminine than white women, are often conflicted as to whether they should continue performing as hoopsters the way they understand the identity or shift their appearance to reflect public opinion of traditional femininity. Felicia also spoke specifically about the racial element that further complicates the issue when she rhetorically asked whether

those similar comments would have been made about a predominately white women's basketball team like Gonzaga. Felicia's response indicated awareness that despite how white players dressed or looked on the court they would not be subjected to the same negative stereotyping. In making this statement, Felicia is showing her awareness that attempts to fit into Eurocentric standards are futile for Black woman hoopers.

Reflecting on the implications Imus' comments had on all Black woman hoopers who heard the comment, Princess expressed:

'Nappy Headed Hos'. What Black female basketball player of coherent age will ever forget that shit? For those of us that were old enough to have already dealt with the stigma of beauty, femininity, and athletics especially basketball, I think it brought out a lot of those feelings and emotions of what it means to be a Black female basketball player and what they look like, we look like... I was pissed! I was thinking, who the fuck is this old ass white fucker that thinks in order to be a baller, we have to have nappy hair and be hoes. I thought about what I look like and had to reassess my athletic ability. I am neither nappy headed, nor a hoe and I believe I am quite talented on the court. So where he got this perception from as well as where he got the balls to say something like that bewildered me.

Princess expressed not only her outrage at Imus' perception and his bravado to state them on the air but she also reflected on how much not meeting the standards of femininity and beauty may weigh on Black women, especially those that play basketball. She reassessed her own image and then questioned where Imus even made the connection between Black women playing basketball and them being nappy headed, in a derogatory sense, and ho's. While the majority of my participants pointed out Imus' ignorance and boldness in making the derogatory comments, one of my participants Kadijah indicted him for having racial hostility towards Black women specifically:

He [is] a racist...white man... I didn't take it as [him making the comments] because they were [Black women basketball players], I took it [him saying it

because] they were Black women and that is how some people think about African Americans.

Kadijah pointed out that even though Imus' comments were directed specifically to Black women playing basketball, they are used to describe Black women everywhere. While my participants were clear about their outrage, hurt and even confusion over Imus' attacks, they also expressed how proud they were with the way Rutgers dealt with the issue, Jazmin commented

I think they, and coach Stringer handled it in a very professional and classy way. I can only imagine at home how she reacted but who's to say...because when she got in front of the media she did a great job of accepting the apology and having some of the players speak about how it made them feel.

Jazmin credited Rutgers head coach C. Vivian Stringer for the way she and her players handled the situation. Coach Stringer has always been admired as a great role model for Black women in basketball as one the NCAAs most successful and respected coaches. Jazmin also discussed how important it was for Rutgers' players, to speak not only to Imus but also to the nation to help dispel the stereotypes and show people they do not fit the image Imus comments used to define them.

On April 10, 2007, a week after the NCAA Women's Division I national championship basketball game, the Rutgers University Women's Basketball team responded to Imus comments with a national press conference. During that press conference, Head Coach C. Vivian Stringer and players expressed how Imus' comments robbed them the opportunity to celebrate the unparalleled success of that season. Although the team did not win the championship, their shorthanded team of only 10 players played in the university's first NCAA women's basketball National

Championship game. Team Captain Essence Carson admitted that initially she thought to “let the comment slide,” but Coach Stringer and her players decided it was necessary to hold the the press conference and put a “human face” on the women who Imus had broadly labeled as “nappy-headed hos” ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) )

In her initial statement regarding the situation, Coach Stringer said that “To serve as a joke of Mr. Imus in such an insensitive manner creates a wedge and makes light of the efforts of these classy individuals, both as women and as women of color” ([www.nbcsports.msnbc.com](http://www.nbcsports.msnbc.com)). She reiterated those statements during the press conference and added that:

Less than 24 hours after they had accomplished so much, they came back to this. We have all been physically, mentally and emotionally spent – so hurt by the remarks uttered by Mr. Imus... While they worked so hard in the classroom and accomplished so much and used their gifts and talents, you know, to bring the smiles and the pride within this state to so many people, we had to experience racist and sexist remarks that are deplorable, despicable and abominable and unconscionable. It hurts me ([www.nbcsports.msnbc.com](http://www.nbcsports.msnbc.com)).

The effort to “humanize” Rutgers players and their coach worked as they were thoughtful and articulate in expressing their emotional responses of hurt, anger, outrage, disappointment, and confusion at Imus’ comments. The Women’s Sports Foundation President Aimee Mullins expressed that “[The Rutgers players] spoke with such dignity, as the decent, respectable, upstanding student-athletes they are... They showed the ability to be bigger than their attacker. That was uplifting” ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)). The dignity and maturity with which they handled the incident was described as a historical moment within the context of both Black women in the media and women in sports.

Many of my participants shifted their outrage over Imus comments to a moment of pride at the way that Rutgers players and their coach C. Vivian Stringer responded to the incident because it completely disproved all the assumptions Imus' comments made about them and thus Black women as a group. Many of my participants also acknowledged that they had not given much thought to the larger implications or underlying stereotypes of his comments before the interview and were thankful for the opportunity to analyze and express their feelings about the situation.

#### Sources of Negative Stereotypes of Black Women

In acknowledging that Imus' comments were not only about Rutgers' women's basketball team but reflected feelings about all Black woman hoopers and in many ways, feelings about Black women in general, my participants commented on their origins.

Speaking about how gendered and racial stereotypes combine, Dominique commented:

There have always been stereotypes in [American] culture with women doing what [was] previously considered manly activities, from being a pilot to working outside of the home and right on down to sports. So a woman regardless of race is generally stereotyped into the hardcore, manly, ugly box. However, add this on top of the black American stereotypes of violent, aggressive, dark etcetera and now you have the names listed above. It is the combination of the two; being a woman and being Black that elicited these feelings and statements.

Dominique acknowledged that there are gendered stereotypes that view women who participate in activities traditionally reserved for men as manly and ugly. She also recognized that there are separate stereotypes of Blacks as being aggressive. Thus comments like Imus' are created out of viewing Black women as members of both negatively stereotyped groups. Agreeing with Dominique's views about athletic women

but adding an element about gendered stereotypes specifically applied to Black women

Jazmin recalled:

Sports in general started off as masculine so women [are expected to] cheer for sports and date athletes so when people seeing women doing something that men are doing, they come off as masculine...[In addition], somehow Black women got this perception of being intimidating anyway as far as, we have these attitudes and can't speak properly. So, when you add that to being masculine it's like you're a Black female athlete...oh you got all kind of issues, you want to be a man and you're going to yell and want to fight so it all goes together.

In addition to acknowledging the masculinization that female athletes experience,

Jazmin also pointed to specific stereotypes of Black women about their lack of

intelligence and class that are added when people view Black women athletes. Speaking

more specifically about what Imus' comments say about Black womanhood in regard to

beauty standards, Felicia remarked:

I think the image comes from the perception of how others view African American hair. I have 'locs but I bet a million dollars those I work around think I have "nappy hair" because it's not curly or straight or wavy...They don't know that I like my hair like it is and don't see anything negative about it...It's definitely an outside image.

In addressing how Imus' comment showed his use of Eurocentric beauty standard to

value Black women's hair, Felicia acknowledged that she liked wearing her hair in a

natural style even though it may make her more susceptible to stereotypes based on the

perception that curly or "nappy" hair could not be beautiful. Imus' reference to the

Rutgers' women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos" reflects a number of various

stereotypes of Black women that have existed since slavery. In her book *Black Feminist*

*Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins refers to a set of gender four specific racial stereotypes as

controlling images because of the way they are used to manipulate the understanding of



Black womanhood and to justify oppression of Black women (Collins 2000). Collins designates the stereotypes in her book as the mammy/matriarch, the welfare mother/queen, the Black lady and the jezebel/whore/hoochie. Although she acknowledges these as distinct stereotypes, she asserts that characteristics of multiple stereotypes may be applied to one Black woman or a group of Black women as it best fits into the oppressive structure of a particular situation.

### ***The Mammy and the Matriarch***

The Mammy is the representation of the Black mother in the public sector among whites. She is presented as the “good” Black mother because of her loyalty and devotion to the whites she works for, caring for their household and children more than she does her own. The Matriarch represents the Black mother in the private sector with her own family. The Matriarch is “bad” because she neglects her family and works outside of the home. It is her work outside the home that makes the Mammy/Matriarch not only a racial but also a gendered stereotype. The Mammy, as a subordinate to her white employers reaffirms Blacks’ low position on the racial hierarchy, and the Matriarch’s neglect of her own family by working outside the home present her as a failure of femininity that is confined to homemaking.

While the Mammy is held responsible for the domestic work necessary to maintain white households, including cooking, cleaning and raising children, she remains invisible while the white woman’s domesticity is held up as a staple of womanhood (Collins 2000). The Matriarch, while not invisible or asexual like the Mammy, has her femininity completely negated because she works outside of her own

home and thus does not uphold her domestic responsibilities to her own household.

While the Mammy and Matriarch are different aspects of the same stereotype, the image of the Matriarch has been used more than the Mammy since integration as Black women's domestic work in white households decreased. The characterization of the Matriarch was also used to influence policy due to a document entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Collins 2000).

In his report, Moynihan blamed the problems of Black civil society on Black women's failure to fulfill their traditional "womanly" duties in the home (Collins 2000). Moynihan argued that because they were forced to work outside the home Black mothers could not properly supervise their children. He further asserted that this lack of supervision was the major contributor to their children's failure in school. Moynihan's analysis ignores the institutional racism that Black children experienced in recently segregated school systems that largely still operated under Jim Crow policies that denied equal educational access to non-whites. He also dismissed the communal raising that exists in Black communities that encourages family members and fictive kin to support the upbringing of a community's youth because their biological parents are unable to. Moynihan also characterized the matriarch as overly aggressive, unfeminine and emasculating of her male partners thus driving them away from responsibilities as her husband and father to their children (Moynihan 1965). Black women's critiques of Moynihan asserted that the values and traits associated with Black womanhood are not the same as Eurocentric standards. They further assert that Black men build loving

relationships because of the distinct aspects of Black womanhood and how it differs from Eurocentric femininity, not in spite of it. Collins asserts that the Matriarch stereotype is used as a scapegoat by systems of oppression in the United States that excluded Black men from the workplace and inadequately educated Black children by blaming any dysfunction resulting from that oppression on Black women who work outside the home (Collins 2000). The characteristics associated with the Matriarch are those traditionally associated with Black women athletes. As mentioned earlier though, controlling images may be simultaneously applied to a Black women or group of women, which is evident with Imus' comments reflect the Matriarch when he referred to them as rough, and pointed out their tattoos a symbol of their masculinization. His infamous 'nappy-headed ho's' comment combined the characteristics associated with the Matriarch to another one of Collins' controlling images, the Welfare Mother/Queen.

### ***The Welfare Mother/Queen and the Black Lady***

The controlling image of the Welfare Mother/Queen is viewed as an updated version of the "breeder woman" stereotype of Black women during slavery that was used to justify the rape of Black women to increase the slave population and benefit the plantation economy (Collins 2000). The Welfare Mother, or "Welfare Queen" as Ronald Reagan and members of his administration referred to Black women during his presidency, is characterized by immorality and laziness. The Welfare Queen is immoral because she has many children with no husband and she is considered lazy because she does not have a job (Lubiano 1992). In addition to these negative characteristics, the Welfare Queen is highly materialistic and manipulative in her use of "hard earned tax-

payer money” to live a life of luxury without having to get a job (Collins 2000).

Although the Welfare Queen lives in subsidized and often substandard housing, she is viewed as living a life of luxury because she wears designer fashion and has amenities in her home that she should not have money to purchase. The image of the Welfare Queen and her purported manipulation of government funds are used to justify massive cuts in social services by referring to them as “hand-outs” to unworthy recipients and suggesting that eliminating them will force the Welfare Queen to get a job and become a productive member of society

Whereas the Welfare Queen was used to represent low-income Black women, the controlling image of the Black Lady was used to characterize professional Black women. Like the Matriarch, the Black Lady is criticized for working outside of the home, however, instead of neglecting her family like the Matriarch, the Black lady is so devoted to her career that she is unable to sustain any romantic relationships with Black men and is always single. The Black Lady is too assertive and competitive with men and thus not feminine enough to be considered for marriage (Collins 2000). The image of the Black Lady is used to curb Black women’s career progress by associating their professional career development with neglect of their communities and emasculation of Black men. Simultaneously, the Black Lady is used to condition Black men to view professionally successful Black women not as a potential mates but as a threat to their manhood. Though these images are not applied directly to the Rutgers’ women’s basketball team with Imus’ comments, those of them that come from low income communities will always be targets of the Welfare Mother/Queen image and because

they are college students pursuing professional careers, it is likely that they will be viewed as Black Ladies after graduation.

### ***The Jezebel/Whore/Hoochie***

The last controlling image mentioned by Collins is the Jezebel/Whore/Hoochie; an image targeted specifically at manipulating the perception of Black women's sexuality (Collins 2000). The Jezebel/Whore/Hoochie represents Black female sexuality as deviant, aggressive and perverse. This image was first used to justify the sexual assault of Black women, by white men by blaming the Black woman's Jezebel powers of seduction which made her irresistible to white men (Collins 2000). While the Jezebel/Whore image was primarily used as a justification for white men's sexual assault of Black women, Black Popular culture in the 1990s used many characteristics of the Jezebel/Whore to describe the Hoochie.

Regardless of the name, this image is used to characterize Black women's sexuality as deviant. The Jezebel/Whore/Hoochie's sexuality is deviant because sexual appetite and aggression are characteristics reserved for men. Women's sexuality ideally constructed is docile and submissive, thus Black women's sexuality is presented as unfeminine. The Jezebel/Whore/Hoochie image presents Black women as unworthy of being a man's romantic partner and justifies the use of them as disposable sex objects (Collins 2000). In Imus' reference to the Rutgers players as ho's he is invoking this image and suggesting that these women are sexual deviants who do not deserve respect.

### ***Conflating images***

Collins discusses the controlling images in terms of distinct behaviors but also acknowledges that they are visually represented by negatively presented exaggerations of African features (large lips, wide nose, dark skin, curly “nappy” hair, full figured bodies, etc.) (Collins 2000). She further asserts that the oppressive standards of beauty claim that no matter how intelligent, educated or beautiful a Black woman might be, the presence of African features automatically casts her as inferior and places her into one or more of these stereotypical images that are presented as the opposite of Eurocentric feminine beauty (Collins 2000).

The controlling images of Black women discussed by Collins have intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality that can be summarized by Imus’ reference to Rutgers’ women’s basketball team as “Nappy Headed Ho’s”. The reference to their nappy hair identified the women failing to meet Eurocentric beauty standards and the designation of them as ho’s identifies them as non-respectable and deviant sexual objects. Though Collins traces these images back to slavery, Imus’ use of them shows that they still exist as a frame of reference for all black women. Recognizing that assumptions based on race, class, gender, and sexuality were often combined in the creation of controlling images of Black women since slavery, writers have been working just as long to facilitate the acknowledgement the interaction of identity categories for women and how this interaction often exacerbates their oppression focusing often on how media representations of Black women perpetuate these images.

### ***Influence of media representations on controlling images of Black woman hoopers***

Earlier, Felicia claimed that the stereotypes Imus used did not originate in the Black community, which is exactly what Imus claimed on a Today Show interview when he asserted:

That phrase didn't originate in the White Community. That phrase originated in the Black community....Young Black women all through that society are demeaned and disparaged and disrespected by their own Black men, and they are called that name (www.youtube.com).

Many scholars have acknowledged that, while controlling images of Black women are present in mainstream representations of Hip Hop culture, they were originated by whites during slavery to justify racial oppression by creating and perpetuating dehumanizing depictions of Blacks (Collins 2000; Rose 2008). Members of the Hip Hop community also responded to Imus likening his comments to the lyrics in their songs. Snoop Lion differentiated by his comments and Imus' by stating:

It's a completely different scenario. Rappers are not talking about no collegiate basketball girls who have made it to the next level and education and sports. We're talking about hoes that in the 'hood that ain't doin' shit, that's trying to get a nigga for his money. These are two separate things....I will not let these muthafuckas say we in the same league as him. (Rose 2008, p. 178)

Although Imus was unsuccessful in his attempts to blame Hip Hop for his comments, the way that Black women are represented through mainstream media is important in understanding Imus' comments. Discussing how media portrayals of Black women may contribute to people adopting Imus' expressed view of Black women, Kadijah claimed:

Black people are not shown in positive light on TV a lot in the US, with shows like First 48, BET Uncut, Cops... and I think it was built from his family history ... because I doubt he was walking down the streets and saw a whole bunch of Black, nappy headed hoes walking around because I haven't... When I was in college people thought black people act liked Cita until they met me and my

other Black teammates...Imus probably never been around a Black person more than he had too he never was around them to learn from them so he said that based on the stereotypes he sees on TV.

Kadijah admitted that the majority of representations of Black people on television are full of stereotypes. She named programs like *Cops* and *The First 48* that highlight Black criminal activity and contribute to perceptions that Black people are responsible for the majority of violent crime committed in this country. She also indicted Black Entertainment Television (BET) for contributing to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Black women. She specifically indicts the late night music video show *Uncut* that aired rap music videos with sexually and violently explicit lyrics and images at 2:00am, with a viewer discretion advisory because they were not fit for children. The ? also brings up the fictionalized character Cita, from the show *Cita's World*. Cita was a digitally animated host who embodied many negative stereotypes of Black women including her mannerisms, dialect and the topics she discussed on her show. Both *Uncut* and *Cita's World* contain stereotypical images of Black women under the guise of Hip Hop aesthetics. Many scholars have spoken out about the way that mainstream Hip Hop song lyrics and music video images objectify and dehumanize Black women in ways that are destructive to Black youth because it results in Black boys adopting misogyny as a necessary aspect of manhood and results in Black girls internalizing and normalizing the dehumanization (Morgan 1999; Rose 2008; Rough, Durham, Raimist & Richardson, Eds., 2007). Furthermore, these and other scholars claim that this destruction is counterintuitive to Hip Hop's purpose as an empowering space to develop resistance for marginalized communities. The scholars remind us that certain Hip Hop



images are highlighted in mainstream media because of the way they perpetuate negative stereotypes of Blacks to validate white's "racial frame" (hooks 1992, 1996; Vera & Gordon 2003; Feagin 2006). This frame is important to understand as Kadijah further suggests that people like Imus and those who she went to college with have very few personal experiences with Black people and therefore resort to the stereotypical images they see on television to form their opinions and shape their behavior towards Blacks. Understanding that mainstream media representations of Blacks are used to perpetuate controlling images situated within a white racial frame illustrates how difficult it is for Black woman hoopers who are targeted based on intersecting negative stereotypes of race gender and sexuality. Lauren discussed how the increased media visibility of Black women has increased the attacks and how she feels it is difficult to navigate:

I think we're easier targets... there's more Black women especially the higher up you go...in hoops...some people can find negativity in anything like, she can hoop, but she looks like a dude. But then, people saw Candace Parker in the ESPN body issue. I thought she looked beautiful and rep'd women, especially Black women well, but there were people that said she's too muscular or too tall. And then, there's people who will say she's too concerned with beauty to be taken seriously as an athlete, it's just annoying.

Lauren discussed how Black woman hoopers a dichotomy of being hyper masculinized or being considered too feminine to be taken seriously as athletes. Going into further detail about the annoyance of the dichotomy that Lauren pointed out, Princess lamented:

Man, that is hard because they think you have only two different types of Black women basketball players, the boy girls and the pretty girls and it's hard to ride the grey area in there, it's almost like you have to choose a side; either you are going to be like Brittney Griner or Candace Parker. Maya Moore is kind of in the middle, but people keep trying to put her in a box Depends on the age I think. When I think about my little sister's high school team, I think they do try to make sure they're not mistaken for lesbians, they all are pretty girls so they wear the make-up and have the hair flowing and stuff. When I think about my league team

of adults we just want to play. We don't care how we look during versus after game; we know you could look like a totally different person

Princess uses openly lesbian WNBA player Brittney Griner and Wife/Mother/model WNBA player Candace Parker to exemplify the dichotomy in representations of Black woman hoopsters that are prevalent in mainstream media. She also mentioned WNBA player Maya Moore whose performance is considered androgynous and how, as a result, questions swirl around her pertaining to her sexuality that take attention away from her amazing skills as a basketball player. For Princess, the way the WNBA portrays Black hoopsters in some ways contributes to this dichotomy. Princess also addressed how younger players often attempt to dress and act differently on the court to highlight their femininity in attempts not to be mislabeled as a lesbian. Discussing the negative connotation of being a lesbian applied to Black women's basketball players, Yolanda comments:

The crazy part is that there isn't anything wrong with being a lesbian, we don't discriminate against lesbians as players, but they make it seem like if you're a lesbian, you're a bad person. It takes away from us as women because it tries to box us because whatever you like, that doesn't make your personality. You can be a lesbian and really feminine or you could be straight but still kind of be a tomboy. Like, you can like to wear baggy clothes and still make a nice home cooked meal. These stereotypes make it all one or the other.

Yolanda admits that within the culture of women's basketball among players, there is not discrimination but acknowledges that outsiders view lesbianism as deviant. She also points out that a person's sexuality does not always indicate a specific gender performance. Ultimately she viewed it as dehumanizing because the stereotypes have a very narrow view of what it means to be feminine and what it means to be a woman. All of my participants discussed how the perception of masculinity was synonymous with an

assumption of lesbianism, which added an additional attack on their womanhood. Even though they expressed that they were accepting of all sexualities and often supported teammates' decisions to come out, they discussed frustration in the assumption that they were all lesbians. Accompanying the lesbian stereotypes are assumptions that they are incapable of performing traditionally feminine domestic tasks, simply because they were Black and played basketball.

In revisiting the Imus incident, my participants exposed their experiences with negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers, expressed feelings of shared empowerment by Rutgers' team and the Black community's response, analyzed why these stereotypes exist and revealed the additional burden placed on them as Black woman hoopers.

#### Combatting Negative Stereotypes of Black Woman Hoopers

Although Imus' comments were not directed at any of my participants, they all acknowledged that he was expressing the way many people viewed them as Black woman hoopers and discussed how they dealt with people interacting who shared Imus' views.

As my participants shared their experiences they expressed how basketball was important in teaching them vital skills and coping mechanisms considered important for Black women to possess in order to develop high self-esteem and be able to overcome the obstacles that accompany the "Double Jeopardy" of being a Black woman.

Acknowledging the extra pressure placed on Black women basketball players, Princess discussed:

There's extra pressure on black women as athletes to always "break the stereotype" by not appearing too manly but still show you could hoop. We played in a tournament two weeks ago and this also happened last year...Every time we played we had a gang of "fans" watching us. We thought it was because we were killing, but we later found out that the "fans" thought that a few of us were nice to look at and then stayed and watched because we could really play...I think it is just a reflection of society. I feel like things are changing, but people still look at you differently and judge your athletic ability depending on how you look physically...Yes. Talent wins games, but pretty sells tickets... I also think there are some programs that don't mind if that game is being won by a pretty face.

Princess not only acknowledged the extra pressure placed on Black women athletes but she acknowledged the reality that at the collegiate and professional levels, there is a need to "sell" women's basketball and with women, beauty sells. She differentiated between the quality of play and the marketability concluding that to have both skills and meet a standard of feminine beauty is the best combination.

### ***Positive media representations of Black woman hoopers***

Speaking about how the representations of Black woman hoopers influences the way player present themselves, Jazmin commented:

Sanaa [Lathan] set us up real nice...they kept her super feminine but she was still a competitor so it wasn't all cute but the scenes where she wasn't on the court, her hair was nice, she had some make up on. The WNBA plays a huge role in how young girls view the game of basketball for women in general and since there are a lot of African American women that play it's a big way. They do a lot of photo shoots with women off the court, they used to do it a lot more of getting them in dressier clothes but the just past draft there were so many women in vests and pants suits and button ups and hair pulled back and its cool but it makes it hard to change the perception. And not that we need to go back to wearing dresses but just showing that you can be a female athlete and be feminine because sexuality doesn't have anything to do with it because Sheryl Swoops was feminine and married with a son so when she came out it was like it could be

anyone. And then you start wearing makeup and getting your nails done for games just to prove something...So it's like what can you do to show you're a woman even though you're an athlete...at the end of the day with ball, none of it matters because you got to get strong to play, you can't be weak so there's a difference in looking manly and looking like an athlete but people can't tell.

Jazmin used the example of Sanaa Lathan's character in the 2000 released movie *Love & Basketball*, a coming of age story about a young Black girl in Los Angeles who loved basketball and through sharing that love with a childhood male friend, developed a relationship. The movie ended with the main character, Monica and her childhood best friend Quincy being married with a daughter and Monica becoming a WNBA player. In the movie Monica's character deals with her mother's assumptions that she may be a lesbian and her friends claiming that "Spalding" was her date to the dance, in reference to the basketball brand by the same name. These are common experiences expressed by my participants; both the assumption of lesbianism and the commitment to basketball allowing for comments about them being in relationships with the sport. As Jazmin points out, the portrayal of Monica's character helped to show that Black women basketball players could be tough competitors on the court and still be beautiful, loving and even vulnerable off the court. The casting of Sanaa Lathan, a Black actress respected for her acting and physical beauty, helped to soften the masculinized image of Black woman hoopers in the eyes of the mainstream audience. For my participants, this movie debuted during the time they were embracing their identities as hoopers and first being exposed to the negative assumptions that accompanied the identity. Many of my participants mentioned the way the portrayal of Black woman hoopers in *Love & Basketball* gave them additional confidence. This is an example how much of an impact

positive representations can have on public perception, especially of a marginalized community that is rarely represented outside of negative stereotypes.

Spike Lee, producer of *Love & Basketball* also produced a Nike commercial that showed Dawn Staley, Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoops engaged in playground basketball games against men. In the commercial, the women are viewed as equal in skill to the men they are playing against by camera angles showing them executing athletic and flashy moves generally attributed to men. At the end of the commercial, Spike Lee as the narrator proclaims “This isn’t a fairy tale, so they didn’t beat every guy. But they beat enough to say basketball is basketball, athletes are athletes” (Goldman & Papson 1998, p 140). These commercials aired after the US Women’s Olympic basketball team won gold in the 1996 summer games and continued to air through the first season of both ABL and WNBA inaugural seasons. With those commercials, Nike capitalized on the increased popularity of women’s basketball to sell more athletic apparel with each woman in the commercial having a signature shoe. They also helped develop a culture of respect for the competitive nature and ability of women athletes, specifically Black woman hoopers that helped shape my participants’ confidence in their potential to be professional athletes. Most recently, Nike revisited their celebration of women athletes with a commercial that began airing in 2012 with athletes including Lisa Leslie and Diana Taurasi narrating their experiences with basketball and ending with a young Black girl standing on a basketball court proclaiming “I just want to play ball” ([www.youtube.com/user/NikeWomen](http://www.youtube.com/user/NikeWomen)). Nike specifically, using both college and professional women’s athletes has worked to provide positive representations of women

athletes. Even if their underlying motive is to market athletic equipment to young girls to capture a greater percentage of the market, their images provide positive representations that help, to break down the negative stereotypes of women athletes.

***Influence of negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers on their behavior***

In further discussing the importance of the WNBA and how the media presents Black women basketball players, Jazmin's comments acknowledged how there were initially more attempts to feminize players but that has subsided and now there are more openly lesbian players in the league. The backlash, according to Jazmin is the pressure for women who are not queer to try to do things considered feminine to distinguish themselves since they are often stereotyped as lesbians. Ultimately though, Jazmin concluded that, because strength and athleticism are needed to be successful as basketball players, there are always going to be people who make assumptions about the sexuality of athletic women. Discussing how self-conscious she was of her appearance, Lauren recollected:

I know when I play I check my appearance, but I know I'll never hoop in make up because it will come right off...My family and whoever I'm dating are the only opinions that could even affect me...sometimes not reacting is the best thing you can do...I guess because I don't care. I've also been pretty lucky to not have to deal with too much B.S. the support and approval of my family is all I need. They've helped get me this far so I think it's my job to overcome any other obstacles that come my way. It's a lot easier said than done though.

Lauren admitted that sometimes she does check her appearance when she plays but ultimately admitted that the only people whose views on her appearance she cares about are her loved ones. She discusses how their support has helped her overcome the hurt that initially accompanied the constant attacks on her appearance and admitted that it

was difficult to simply ignore the negative stereotypes. This again shows how basketball provides not only a cultural reference group for Black women's empowerment but also a community of support for Black women when they are faced with negative stereotypes.

Discussing specifically how she deals with the stereotypes, Dominique expressed:

I try to do my best not to internalize them or allow them to change how I feel about myself. I don't go above and beyond to disprove them. I just try to be myself and show people multiple sides of my personality. I'm not just an athlete; I'm also a professional and a sorority member. I don't mind dressing up etc., etc.... I hope that people see who I am and associate my characteristics with a presentation of an athlete. The higher the quantity of differing representations of a stereotyped role the less people will see you as the stereotype.

For Dominique, she tries to make sure that people do not limit her simply to a basketball player. Knowing that other roles in her life may not carry the same negative stereotypes, she seeks to show multiple roles she plays to help people see multiple sides of her. She also discusses how she doesn't intentionally try to change anyone's perception. My participants repeatedly discussed how they defined themselves outside of the stereotype. In this way, they are able to avoid role conflict between being a woman and being an athlete similar to the ways suggested by Allison & Butler (1984). Not only do Black woman hoopers reject Eurocentric beauty and femininity standards but they further expand the ways in which Black womanhood traits like strength, perseverance, assertiveness, solidarity etc. are performed. Acknowledging this, Dominique's response to the stereotypes was to show multiple sides of herself and of other Black woman hoopers so the stereotype will no longer fit. Comparing the way she deals with opponents on the basketball court to the way she deals with negative stereotypes, Tasha explained:



I try really hard not to pay attention to stereotypes and, instead deal with the person based on what I see. On the court, that's how I approached a player in a scouting report. I paid attention to the scout, but I went more off of what I saw...used more instinct than anything. Off the court, I try to approach everyone the same, because someone may have an issue with someone else that they don't have with me. Who am I to judge them before I even really get to know them?...I don't know if what I do and how I carry myself will change the way that people see all Black basketball-playing women, but I do think that it can mess with their psyche a little because in me they have a Black woman who plays basketball but absolutely loves being a woman...the lines, I'm a hooper, but off of the court I am a lady and hold myself to the highest standards regardless of who I'm standing next to. That can sometimes throw people off, and that's not just with me...that's with any Black basketball player who's the same way.

Similarly to Dominique, Tasha did not feel the need to specifically disprove any stereotypes but admitted that her expressions of femininity can provide an alternate representation to anyone who views Black women basketball players as masculine. She also provides an example of how skills she learned on the court equipped her to deal with the negative stereotypes against Black woman hoopers. Tasha also mentioned holding herself to high standards just as a Black woman because there are stereotypes that exist based on that alone.

My participants discussed how they felt no need to try to change people's negative perceptions of Black women basketball players but all sought to provide positive representations. They also admitted that many of the things that shaped their identities as Black women were learned through their basketball playing experiences.

### How Being Black Woman Hooper Contributes to the Development of Womanhood

When asked to reflect on how being a hooper helped them developed the character to succeed in other aspects of their lives, Tasha discussed how her basketball experiences correlate directly to how she behaves in her current career:

Basketball for me instilled so many characteristics and skills that I need in order to excel in the working world, such as teamwork, how to deal with people, decision-making, discipline, hard work ethic. I honestly feel that characteristics that players have on the court carry over when they get a full time job. The biggest gain was learning how to deal with so many different types of people. In all of the years that I played basketball, I came across thousands of players and coaches, and dealing with so many personalities could've only helped me in the long run.

Tasha discussed how playing basketball helped her develop strong communication skills and a strong work ethic. She expressed how the team dynamic of the sport really prepared her to deal with co-workers and managers in her current career. Also talking about how basketball helps her perform at her workplace, Kadijah commented:

I apply things that I learned by playing ball to work... believing in yourself, working hard, because you are always at a disadvantage because of the color of your skin... so we have to work 10 times as hard... if I didn't play basketball, I don't think I would be where I am all the experiences that I had playing basketball has put me to where I am today. So I think basketball give women confidence and they can learn a lot the farther they get into basketball.

Kadijah discussed how the barriers she faces in the workplace being a Black woman are similar to those she faced playing basketball and credits basketball for equipping her with the skills to succeed professionally. Overall she suggested that basketball helps girls develop self-confidence. Whereas Kadijah only mentioned confidence, Jazmin focused on it:

Number one is that God made you the way you are to be who you are and its perfect and there's nothing anybody or anything can do to change that and so you

got to embrace it and love it...to be confident in it. I've been called cocky so many times in my life but my parents did a great job of building me up so I can be that confident in myself, even if I fail I tried it and I'm going to give it all I got because I know I have the ability to try because I want my children to have that confidence level because being black it's so important for life because there are so many people that are going to tell you that because of the way you looks, you can't do something or shouldn't say these things or go to these places. The biggest but the most silent struggle I had was when I decided to go natural when I started my locs, and people asked why would you do that...and that's a big struggle we have. So to have the confidence to say I don't care what anybody else thinks and I'm hoping that my daughter says mommy did this, I can do anything too. Everything stems from having confidence in yourself. It fit in the same way because basketball just helps it build that confidence. It is a great environment to build that confidence that's so important to have and it carries even more in basketball because you realize that its hard work, everything is hard work and overcoming stuff. I busted my but for whatever I got.

For Jazmin, basketball was not where she initially learned confidence but it provided a supportive environment for her confidence to grow. She discussed how she has been considered arrogant or cocky off the court but acknowledges that to be successful on the court you have to be confident in yourself. She also talked about the need for Black women to embrace their natural beauty, their hair, skin tone and physical attributes. For her, basketball was a place where all of those traits were appreciated and celebrated so it gave her confidence to exhibit them off the court even when she suffered negative consequences. She also discussed how hard work and being able to overcome obstacles on the basketball court helped her build resilience that helped her in other aspects of her life. As a mother, Jazmin expressed how she would encourage her daughter to play basketball because of the positive influence it has had in her life.

Basketball for Jazmin was an arena where the values and traits she was taught at home were appreciated and valued. For other participants like Dominique basketball

was the catalyst that helped them develop the confidence in their abilities of strength and perseverance and establish lifelong friendships.

Friendships and developing the ability to work hard and work through challenges ...It has made me strong. Not just physically but spiritually and emotionally. It has helped me compare difficult life situations especially those I encounter just by being Black to hard workouts and challenges that I faced and conquered in the basketball arena. It has helped me to know that my limits are much much further than I ever thought because playing sports competitively at a D1 school pushes you to the brink. And because I know that I always can go a little further than I think, it helps me to push through other situations.

In addition to basketball helping Dominique develop her confidence and resilience, she also mentioned briefly the friendships she established; Princess discusses the bonds more explicitly:

I also kind of picked up supportive friends along the way. Mainly my girlfriends that I played other sports with...basketball reminded me, as it should other people that Black women come in all different shapes, sizes, personalities and abilities. To try put us in a box so you don't feel threatened or limited by your own cultures' lack of culture or originality should be a wakeup call for the opportunity to address your own personal disappointments as a group. Leave us the hell alone. We are more evolved than any other racial group...we got this.

Princess discussed the sister-like bonds she developed with other Black women through basketball. Even though she and her friends did not play the same teams in college, they bonded through similar experiences as Black woman hoopers. She also mentioned the how basketball provided wider variety of representations of Black women than anywhere else. Earlier, Princess discussed the attempts to place Black woman hoopers into boxes of either extreme masculinity or femininity but she asserts that they are so dynamic they should be viewed and respected as such. Adding to Princess' comments about the wide range of representations of Black women that exist within basketball, Felicia discussed how playing basketball allowed her to be herself:

I still have my locs, I still wear baggy shorts, and I've learned others will always have a preconceived thoughts, opinions, etc.... I think my locs and baggy shorts is my way of saying f-u I'm going to have the image that I'm comfortable with, and you don't have to like it or accept it. I'm a woman and if locs and baggy shorts is what I like, that's my bobby brown... Yes, society feels like women should be in dresses, heels, fitted clothing and what not, but I'm the complete opposite. I can put on my power suit and put men to shame, hell have them taking a second look. When is it not going to be about that though? When will black female athletes not be called "nappy head hoes" because they like baggy shorts and not makeup while playing? When will lesbians stopped being judged for loving another female. When will we be seen as student athletes and not only as, "she plays basketball so that's why they're here at school"? I mean there is a rack of questions, when will, what if, etc.... I think most players just want to play. I don't think too much time is spent on caring if another jerk comes out and makes another ignorant statement. Players that want to wear makeup while playing do so. Players that have as many tats as Allen Iverson love it. Let players be players regardless of this "norm" that everyone wants to abide by. Most players are like f-u, shit I am. I think players are more determined to be them and that's it.

Felicia asserted how she refused to conform to standards of femininity that are often imposed on Black woman hoopers. She also suggested that her, and other players', rejection of these standards is welcomed and supported in women's basketball. Felicia expressed that ultimately, most players just want to play and be left alone and she happily claimed that in her experience, Black woman hoopers are generally afforded the freedom to be whoever they want to be both on and off of the court.

### Conclusion

This chapter used the Imus incident to elucidate my participants' larger understandings of negative stereotypes of Black woman hoopers and discuss ways that they address and overcome these stereotypes using basketball. They saw playing basketball as a way to reaffirm and celebrate the aspects of Black womanhood they had

been taught were important and resist pressure to conform to Eurocentric standards. They identified physical, mental and emotional strength, confidence, perseverance, strong work ethic, among others as the skills they developed as hoopers. They also mentioned the interpersonal skills they developed; sisterhood bonds, conflict resolution and mediation skills. Ultimately, my participants believed that, because there are so many Black woman hoopers, there is a wide array of representations that exist at the college and professional levels. Even though Black women were aware of the qualities as important in the development of their womanhood, they also recognized that the expression of them often resulted in negative consequences (Winkle-Wagner 2008). Thus, many Black women learn to suppress these characteristics to be successful. With basketball however, my participants were celebrated for exhibiting and encouraged to develop these skills. Through basketball they also learned how to balance their understanding of being a Black woman hooper within the context of the stereotypically ways they are viewed.

For the last chapter I will explicitly show the many ways that college basketball has the potential to provide a space for Black womanhood to thrive outside of the confines of traditional Eurocentric expectations of femininity. It allows Black women a space to be celebrated for their skills and abilities and provides a wide array of representations of Black women that transcend the typical controlling images that mainstream media has reserved for them. In addition, this concluding chapter will summarize the major findings of my research, acknowledge its limitations and make suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### Research Summary and Chapter Organization

The purpose of this project was to investigate the experiences of Black woman hoopers; to learn more about the development of their identity during adolescence and elucidate ways their identity influences their experiences as Division I basketball players at PWIs throughout the United States, in both rural and urban locations. Recruiting Black women who played Division I basketball 1997-2007, the first decade of the WNBA as participants, I made assertions about the way that the growing culture of women's basketball during this time period provided my participants with positive basketball experiences. After gaining a better understanding of how, during adolescence, my participants developed their identities as hoopers and how those identities were performed and received within their communities, I moved to examine their experiences in college. My assertion here was that, because Black woman hoopers comprise nearly half of Division I women's basketball players, their experiences are different from Black women college student athletes in sports where they are a small minority.

Because my participants were interviewed after their college experiences, they were able to reflect on ways that certain circumstances and situations made a lasting impact on their lives since their college playing careers ended. Using the Don Imus 2007 attacks on Rutgers University women's basketball team as a reference point, my

participants shared their understanding awareness of the negative perceptions held of Black women and ways that being a hooper adds additional challenges. Through their responses, my participants also provided ways the individually and collectively addressed those challenges. This chapter acknowledges issues presented that are beyond the scope of this project and makes suggestions for future research. It ends with the discussion of the project's most important themes and their social implications.

#### Issues Beyond the Scope of This Project and Suggestions for Future Research

Although my research highlighted some very important aspects of my participants' experiences, there are some that were briefly mentioned that deserve further investigation. One aspect of the research that I was unable to more thoroughly investigate is to what extent the geographical location and university culture influenced my participants' experiences. Participants only hinted on how the climate of their environment shaped their experiences. Further research in this area would be advantageous to better understand the criteria for environments most likely to provide supportive environment for Black woman hoopers in a way that may influence the decision of high school recruits. This information can also be used by athletic departments to help improve the climate of their campus to be more inviting in order to better attract elite players to their schools.

Another limitation of my research is the lack of professional basketball players in my sample. None of my participants are WNBA players, though some of them have played in the league or are currently professional players internationally. Having the



perspective of women still actively playing basketball here in the United States may have exposed comparative dynamics between college and professional experiences; how the climate of one influences the other. Research similar to mine that included more WNBA players should be conducted in the future to include more narratives to the conversation.

I would have also liked to have participants that attended HBCUs. While it is important to present basketball as a brave space for Black woman hoopers on PWI campuses, how women's basketball functions in a predominately Black atmosphere may provide suggestions for how to better establish community support for Black woman hoopers on PWI campuses. It may also elucidate differences in identity negotiation and performance in an environment where a wide variety of Black women are constantly represented.

While the limitations of my project provide opportunities for future research that would enhance the understanding of Black woman hoopers' experiences, the findings do at important nuances to current literature. Most importantly, by inserting the voices of these women into the cannon of race, gender, sexuality, athletic, and college student literature, my participants' responses combat the invisibility that Black women traditionally experience in these academic areas. By showing how both category and role based identities are conflated and make a salience hierarchy irrelevant to impose in attempts to diffuse role conflict, my finding provide further support for intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the experiences of people marginalized on multiple bases. Within the larger goal of combatting the silencing that

Black women experience, my research also revealed themes with important social implications.

### Major Themes and Implications

Chapters IV, V, and VI revealed important information about my participants experiences with basketball as adolescents, as Division I college athletes and in their careers after basketball. I will address the major themes presented from their responses and discuss their larger implications on the development and performance of Black womanhood.

#### ***Basketball as a cultural reference group for Black women's empowerment***

The major theme out of this part of my research is the positioning of basketball as a cultural reference group for Black empowerment. Stevens' research suggests that is a necessary socialization experience for Black girls to develop positive identities as women (1997). My participants' expressed not only family but also communitywide support for them as hoopers directly and indirectly: From family members introducing them to basketball and helping develop their skills, older hoopers serving as informal mentors and coaches and welcoming them on the basketball courts, and community members coming to their games and celebrating their accomplishments in the community, my participants highlighted how their adolescent experiences were empowering. Besides developing a love for basketball and a competitiveness to maximize their potential, the supportive environment of the basketball community was an incentive to remain engaged. This research presents basketball not only as a cultural

reference group of Black empowerment, but specifically Black women's empowerment. Recognizing the additional gendered marginalization that Black girls face, and the tendency to center the needs of Black men when developing community empowerment (Smith 1983), it is important to acknowledge a space where Black girls can be centered.

Because basketball, within the Black community, symbolizes Blacks' ability to overcome obstacles and achieve high levels of success, basketball players have been supported since the 1970s, the first decade of basketball's integration and the decade when the urban playground style transitioned into the NBA resulting in increased popularity and success for the league after the ABA Merger. For the first two decades however, the community support focused on men and boys. After the domination of US Black women internationally at the 1996 summer Olympic games, and the subsequent creation of two professional leagues for women, that community support was provided to Black woman hoopers. The supportive environment allowed my participants to develop the confidence to fearlessly develop their skills because they had positive reinforcement to celebrate their successes and help them recover from any failures. They were also largely exempt from pressures to conform to narrowly constructed gender norms during adolescence. Not until their college experiences did my participants express any pressure to perform in a more traditionally feminine manner.

In addition to the support my participants enjoyed from their local communities, the increased visibility of women's basketball after the 1996 summer Olympic games with the inaugural seasons of the now defunct ABL and currently thriving WNBA also helped provided positive representations of Black women. My participants were

exposed to Black woman hoopers at Division I and professional levels on television to help them adopt role models more similar in ability to them than NBA stars like Michael Jordan. Seeing Black women playing basketball at elite levels also validated women as hoopers. Whereas many of my participants expressed initial exclusion from their male peers from playing basketball because they were girls, they acknowledged how WNBA players shifted many of their male peers' views from exclusionary to embracing as they gained respect women's abilities as hoopers. This respect extended past my participants' peers to their older male family members and other community members. This resulted in positive intervention by older brothers, fathers and other men in the community who not only embraced my participants presence at the basketball, but also contributed to their development by teaching them basketball skills that my participants acknowledged gave them an advantage over girls who did not play with boys. Men's support of my participants also role modeled respect for women to their younger male peers. It is important to acknowledge that Black woman hoopers provided a positive representation of Black women who were often limited to sexual objects through mainstream media outlets. In this way, basketball not only directly empowered my participants by creating a safe space for them to develop their skills but also created a culture where they are appreciated, supported, and respected as equals by the boys and men in their communities. It is widely acknowledged that solidarity between Black men and women is necessary to combat racial subjugation, but solidarity is often contingent on women assuming a subservient role. My participants' adolescent basketball experiences provide an example of a space where Black girls can be centered.

### ***Importance of being a hooper***

My participants were adamant about distinguishing between a hooper and someone who played basketball casually. Although the community support was reserved for all girls who played, because basketball is a team sport, there are additional benefits and responsibilities to committing to the identity of a hooper. One important aspect of the hooper identity is that it has to be validated. Not being able to simply proclaim oneself as a hooper provides a level of accountability for members of the basketball community. This also eliminates gender barriers because inclusion is dependent solely on display and recognition of basketball skills. In order to develop these skills, commitment to basketball and sacrificing potentially conflicting interests become necessary components of being a hooper.

My participants expressed feeling empowered by being a hooper because it was something that could not be taken from them once they had proven themselves. Although they identified that there were politics that determined the recognition from those outside the community, they claimed that on the court, their skills could not be denied once they developed and displayed them. Because being a hooper is a merit-based identity, my participants were not excluded by any social constructions of race, class gender or sexuality. Being a hooper also served as a deterrent of destructive behaviors for my participants. Their focus on basketball prevented them from succumbing to peer pressure to drink alcohol or abuse illicit or illegal drugs, or seek sexual attention to be accepted by their peers because of the possibility that it would interfere with the skills they'd worked hard to develop or get them in trouble that would

prevent them from being able to perform well on the basketball court. This reveals that it is not simply participant in athletics that is beneficial for girls but the extent to which they embrace the expectations of being an athlete.

Differing from the construction of athletic identity for Black boys, that often results in neglect of academic pursuits in attempts to chase often-unrealistic professional athletic pursuits, Black woman hoopers value academic attainment. All of my participants expressed that obtaining a degree was just as much a motivation for them to play basketball in college as the possibility of playing professionally. Additionally, feeling fortunate to receive scholarships that allowed them to pursue higher education without incurring debt further motivated my participants both on the court and in the classroom. Understanding this unique construction of Black woman hoopers that added an academic success expectation to their athletic identity shows that there is not always a conflict between the two. Knowing that hoopers were granted a high level of respect, my participants felt obligated to carry themselves respectfully; they were often leaders in their community and as they grew older became role models for younger aspiring hoopers. My findings also add to literature on girls' participation in sports that focuses on parents' and coaches' abilities to use sports to foster positive development in young girls. With my participants, discipline were self-imposed by my participants due to their desire to embody their definition of a hooper and reinforced by their peers more so than any adults in the community.

### ***Conflation of race, gender and athletic identity for Black woman hoopers***

Repeatedly, my participants mentioned how basketball allowed them to develop the same skills that were being instilled in them as necessary to combat marginalization that they would experience due to race and gender oppression. As a result, their race, gender and athletic identities conflate and are performed simultaneously. This eliminates any necessity to place identities into a hierarchy of salience because they are present at all times. Because race and gender are visibly recognizable categories, and there are certain symbols like clothing and mannerisms that hoopers adopt to be identified as such, my participants embody both their categorical and role identities. Thus, in addition to simultaneously performing these identities, those who Black woman hoopers interact with are responding to them based on the conflation of these identities.

Gaining this understanding of how basketball empowers Black girls and transforms their communities of spaces of Black women's empowerment is important because allowed me to recognize ways in which it was transferrable to their college experiences to shield them against potential marginalization and helped me evaluate how effective their coping strategies were at times when the shield was not enough.

### ***Significance of Black teammates and coaches***

Having Black teammates and coaches proved to be a major benefit to my participants by extending the culture of support they had grown experiencing to their collegiate experiences. They received mentorship from older players and coaches about not only how to succeed on the court but how to carry themselves and be successful on campus. This reality provides support for an increase in the number of Black women

basketball coaches at the Division I level to better reflect the composition of the players. Although the amount of Black women head basketball coaches is not proportional to the amount of Black players, my research findings highlight the importance of assistant coaches. Most often, those are the ones that developed the close mentorship relationships with my participants. Carter & Hart stress the importance and benefits of mentorship for Black woman collegiate student athletes to combat the alienation and isolation they experience by being minorities at their universities (2010).

For my participants with Black teammates and Black coaches, being in the majority gave them the confidence and courage to confront stressful situations because they knew they had support whereas for my participants who were among the few or the only Black person on the team, who defaulted to avoidance coping strategies. Teams with Black players and coaches operated as a brave space for my participants. Brave spaces differ from safe spaces because they don't simply aim to protect marginalized groups but also emphasize bravery and provide support needed to resist continually dominant viewpoints (Arao & Clemens 2013). Black woman hoopers provide alternative, and often defiantly constructed representations of femininity and womanhood so environments that celebrate and encourage their bravery are important.

### ***Coping for Black woman hoopers on majority white teams***

Early research about the experiences of Black women student athletes found that their experiences were more similar to Black woman non-student athletes than to either Black men or white woman student athletes (Sellers, Kuperminc & Damas 1997). For my participants who played on teams with majority white teammates and coaches, this



held true. Whereas participants with Black teammates and coaches were able to create a brave space within the team to deal with the isolation, alienation and marginalization they experienced on campus, participants with white teammates and coaches did not have that option. These participants not only expressed difficulty building bonds with teammates and confiding in coaches but they also expressed racial battle fatigue in having to be the sole representative of Black women for their teammates who had never interacted with Black people before. This exacerbated their stress because they were required to live and attempt to build trusting relationships with their teammates where as non-athlete students were able to remove themselves from potentially draining situations more easily. My participants thus dealt subject to stereotyping not only in class and around campus but in their dorm rooms and even at practice. Whereas this experience is more reflective of traditional research of Blacks on PWI campuses, it is important to understand how being a Black woman hooper provide potential outlets beyond their teammates and coaches. My participant who played on majority white teams were able to get support from other Black student athletes, most often guys from the basketball team who both respected them as hoopers and were experiencing similar struggles. In addition to bonding with other hoopers, my participants were supported by the Black student community. This again extends basketball as a cultural reference group of Black women's empowerment because my participants' support came out of recognition that they lacked it from the larger student community. Many of my participants, especially those attending school away from home mentioned how good it made them feel to hear their classmates, cheering in the often empty and silent stands at home games. They

further discussed how the Black student community made efforts to integrate and involve them in campus activities. This support was paramount to my participants' abilities to cope with the isolation and alienation they experienced. It is important to acknowledge this informal community of support among Black students because there were no official initiatives targeting my participants for greater student body involvement. Perhaps understanding the experiences of Black woman hoopers will encourage more Black student organizations to support Black women athletes recognizing that they do not receive it from the larger student community like their male athlete counterparts. Understanding the implications of racial team make up on the level of stress that Black woman hoopers experience can also influence recruiting decisions with high school players seeking out diverse rosters to help relieve some of this potential stress. This may exhort athletic programs to create more inclusive and supportive spaces to Black woman hoopers or risk losing them to more inclusive programs. Because Black woman hoopers provide a wide representation of Black womanhood, this inclusion extends to sexuality as well as race and gender.

### ***Basketball as a brave space for queer Black women***

Because Black woman hoopers are all stereotyped as lesbians, all of my participants, queer or not, expressed being subjected to hostile treatment based on the assumption that they were lesbians. These experiences allowed my participants to develop deep level of empathy due to their firsthand experience of how hurtful these stereotypes are to their targets. In response, my participants bonded with their teammates to show not only acceptance but also support and empowerment for queer

players. Essentially important to understanding this community support is the respect for the privacy of queer players. Whether or not players admitted to being queer, they were encouraged to express their sexuality however they desired, so long as it did not disrupt the team chemistry on the court. As the WNBA launches its first marketing campaign to attract fans from the queer community, it is important to understand that women's basketball is considered a welcoming space for not only queer fans but also players who are becoming more open about their sexuality.

***Black woman hoopers extending representations of Black womanhood***

In reflecting on their experiences as hoopers after their playing careers had ended, my participants articulated an appreciation for the freedom that basketball afforded them. They acknowledged that even though media attempted to box them into stereotypes of either hyper masculine or hyper feminine, they felt support among players to dress and act however made them feel comfortable. Being able to see Black woman hoopers on television presented them and all views with multiple representations of Black womanhood in all shapes, sizes and sizes to celebrate. Whereas mainstream images often adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards that limit the range of acceptable Black women, basketball, because it is dominated by Black women at the elite levels, cannot help but represent the vast spectrum on which they exist. Providing these representations further empowers young Black girls looking for role models because they are able to find players they identify most with instead of trying to change who they are to fit a narrow construction of femininity. Acknowledging the growing influence they have socially Black woman hoopers have been vocal about social issues; most

recently Seimone Augustus advocating for same-sex marriage ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)) and Swin Cash addressing the apprehensions to college athletes unionizing ([www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com)). Although Black woman hoopers have allegiance to the teams they play for, there is a larger community of support that transcends those connections and is committed to equality for not only Black woman hoopers but also those marginalized on the basis of race, gender, class and sexuality. Because they are visible, they are becoming examples of the revolutionary potential of elite level athletes and role models that empower Black girls to be fearless in their pursuits of greatness both on and off the court.

Seeing Black woman hoopers embrace their position as role models and use their increased visibility to improve society takes Black women from the margins to the centers of the most important social movements of our generation. While Black women occupy leadership positions scattered across all major industries, within Basketball, there is a community of visible support that can extend past athletics and increase solidarity across industries as Black women continue to fight for liberation from the multiple jeopardies they face.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. What is your age, occupation and where do you currently reside
2. Where did you grow up? Describe
  - a. The area: urban, suburban, rural
  - b. Class makeup: upper/lower/middle income
  - c. Racial composition: mostly white/Black mixed
3. When did you first start playing basketball? What/who got you into playing?
4. Did you watch basketball before playing? Who were your favorite players?
5. Did you ever view basketball as a “boy’s sport”? Why/why not?
6. When you started playing basketball did you play with boys or girls?
7. Is there a difference in playing with boys and girls? What are the differences?
8. How did people initially react to your interest in basketball?
  - a. Family
  - b. Friends
  - c. Other important people
9. Did you ever get made fun of because you played basketball? Did anybody discourage you because you were a girl?
10. How was the community support for girls playing basketball in your community?

11. Did you ever hear negative comments about girls that played basketball? What are some of the negative comments you heard?
12. What's the difference between a hooper and somebody who just plays basketball
13. What does a hooper look like?
14. What happened to make you officially feel like a hooper?
15. During high school, what impact did being a hooper impact
  - a. Interactions with
    - i. With peers
    - ii. Family members
    - iii. Teachers
  - b. Your own feelings about yourself
16. Did you look up to any college or WNBA players? Why/why not?
17. What made you consider playing basketball in college
18. What factors went into your college selection
19. What type of school did you attend?
  - a. Location
    - i. Urban
    - ii. Rural
    - iii. Suburban
  - b. Size
  - c. Private/Public

20. How different was your university setting from the community in which you grew up
21. What was the racial composition of your team? Players and coaches?
22. How did you get along with your teammates? What kind of things did you bond over? What were your biggest conflicts
23. How did you get along with your coaches? Did you feel comfortable talking to them about personal issues?
24. Did you get along with other student athletes at your school
25. Was anyone on your team (including you) treated unfairly because of the way they acted or dressed?
26. Did you feel like basketball prevented you from being able to do other college activities? Besides basketball, what else were you involved in on your campus
27. How was dating? Did anything about playing make it easier or harder?
28. Describe your normal schedule during the season and in the off season?
29. How were your classroom experiences
30. What was your major and why did you choose it
31. How did your professors and classmates treat you?

32. What was the best part of being on the women's basketball team? What was the worst part?
33. Did you ever feel discriminated against by fans from the other teams or opposing players? What kind of things did you endure? How did you respond?
34. What was your initial reaction to Don Imus' comments about Rutgers?
35. What did you think about Rutgers' response?
36. Where do you think people get the negative images of Black woman hoopers?
37. What are the stereotypes of Black Women Hoopers? Where do they come from? Are White women athletes subject to the same stereotypes?
38. How do you deal with these stereotypes both on and off the court?
39. Do you think there is anything you can do to change these negative images?
40. How has playing basketball shaped your identity as a Black woman?
41. If anything, what would you change about your college basketball experience?
42. Anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B

### REGIONAL DIVISION OF THE 48 CONTINENTAL STATES

