

Ithaca College

Digital Commons @ IC

---

Ithaca College Theses

---

2021

## An Interpretative Phenomeonological Analysis of Black Female Student-Athletes' Experiences with Microaggressions and Percieved Perception of Body Image

Jessica E. Jones  
*Ithaca College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic_theses)



Part of the [Exercise Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, Jessica E., "An Interpretative Phenomeonological Analysis of Black Female Student-Athletes' Experiences with Microaggressions and Percieved Perception of Body Image" (2021). *Ithaca College Theses*. 439.

[https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic\\_theses/439](https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic_theses/439)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ IC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ithaca College Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ IC.

AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BLACK  
FEMALE STUDENT-ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES WITH MICROAGGRESSIONS  
AND PERCEIVED PERCEPTION OF BODY IMAGE

A Master's Thesis presented to the Faculty of the  
Graduate Program in Exercise and Sport Sciences  
Ithaca College

---

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Science

---

By  
Jessica E. Jones  
May 2021

Ithaca College  
School of Health Sciences and Human Performance  
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

---

This is to certify that the Thesis of  
Jessica E. Jones  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Science in the School of  
Health Sciences and Human Performance  
at Ithaca College has been approved.

Thesis Adviser:

Committee Member:

Candidate

Chair, Graduate Program:

Associate Dean of HSHP:

Date:

## ABSTRACT

The intersection of race and sex based discrimination is still an issue for any Black female student-athletes (BFSA) (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014). Because of this intersection of identities, BFSAs are subject to even more scrutiny than their White counterparts. BFSAs' experiences with discrimination are deeply rooted in collegiate athletics, particularly in predominantly White institutions (PWI). Black women face unique forms of discrimination because they do not identify as White or male.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1991), is used to "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's... experiences" (p.1244). The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was to understand Division III BFSA's personal experiences with microaggressions and the perceived impact microaggressions have on their athletic performance and well-being. Eight African-American female Division III athletes responded to asynchronous interview questions, electronically via email, with follow-up interview questions distributed one week later. Findings highlight that participants were unable to separate their racial identity from their athletic identity. Participants shared they did not let discrimination stop them from playing their sport because they were inspiring other Black girls and women. Instead, their experiences with microaggressions forced them to appreciate their racial and athletic identity. These findings add to existing research making it crucial to highlight the gender and racial microaggressions BFSAs face in comparison to their White counterparts (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014). In addition, BFSA's racial identity played a huge factor in their athletic identity.

*Keywords:* Black Female Student Athletes, microaggressions, intersectionality

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisors. Dr. Justine Vosloo and Dr. Belisa Gonzalez, for your support, patience and guidance throughout my challenging journey to write this thing we call a master's thesis. Thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself. Words cannot express the level of gratitude I have for you both. Thank you for always seeing the vision and pushing me to be better.

I would also like to thank my mother for always believing in me—you are the real MVP. My sister, Shante, for always having my back. My niece, Serenity, for adding light into my world. My dog KitKat, we have been through everything together! My best friend Keyoni, I am forever grateful to have you in my corner. And lastly, my grandmother, who paved the way for me to be here, although she is no longer with us. I want to thank them all for being my village.

## DEDICATION

This master's thesis is dedicated to my mother and all aspiring Black and Brown mental performance consultants, mental health professionals, coaches and teachers, we need more of us in the field.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
PROPOSAL	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement .....	3
The Scope of the Problem .....	4
Assumptions of Study .....	5
Definition of Terms .....	5
Delimitations .....	6
Limitations .....	6
REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	8
Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) .....	8
Critical Race Theory .....	9
Colorblindness .....	12
Intersectionality .....	14
Microaggressions .....	15
Examples of Microaggressions in Athletics .....	18
Psychological Impact of Microaggressions .....	19
Body Image .....	22
Body Image within Female Athletics .....	24
Discrimination within Athletics .....	28
METHODS .....	32

Design .....	32
Participants.....	33
Interview Guide and Screening.....	34
Procedures.....	35
Data Analysis .....	37
Trustworthiness.....	39
REFERENCES .....	41
<b>RESEARCH MANUSCRIPT</b>	
INTRODUCTION .....	46
METHODS .....	52
Design .....	52
Participants.....	53
Procedures.....	54
Data Analysis .....	56
Trustworthiness.....	58
RESULTS .....	59
Overview of Participants Thematic Structure.....	59
Sub-Theme #1: Dealing With Microaggressions as a Black Female Student-	
Athlete .....	60
Emergent Theme 1A – Thoughts, Feelings and Actions When Receiving	
Microaggressions .....	60
Emergent Theme 1B – Coping in Response to Microaggressions .....	62



Emergent Theme 1C – The Impact a Microaggression has on Their Athletic Ability and Body Image .....	62
Sub-Theme #2: The Black Female Student-Athlete Experience .....	63
Emergent Theme 2A – Stereotypes Undermined Their Efforts in Academics and Athletics.....	64
Emergent Theme 2B – The Lack of Emotional Support at a PWI .....	65
Emergent Theme 2C – Feeling Uncomfortable About their Hair and Body Image.....	66
Emergent Theme 2D – Doing it for the culture: The Reason They Continued to Play Their Sport Despite the Microaggressions.....	67
Participant Higher Order Themes .....	68
Becky’s Higher-Order Theme.....	69
Sarah’s Higher-Order Theme.....	70
Cindy’s Higher-Order Theme.....	71
Lizzie’s Higher-Order Theme.....	71
Amy’s Higher-Order Theme.....	72
Sally’s Higher-Order Theme.....	72
Review of Results .....	74
DISCUSSION.....	74
Limitations .....	80
Further Research .....	81
Applied Implications.....	82
Conclusion .....	82

MANUSCRIPT REFERENCES.....	85
APPENDIX A. REFLEXIVITY STATEMENT .....	90
APPENDIX B. SCREENING QUESTIONs, INTERVIEW GUIDE & PROBES .....	91
APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT STATEMENT EMAIL TO COACHES .....	92
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW SCRIPT .....	93
APPENDIX E. PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES AND SUB-THEMES.....	94
APPENDIX F. DEBRIEFING STATEMENT .....	117
APPENDIX G. LIST OF HIGHER-ORDER THEME, SUBTHEMES, AND REGENT THEMES.....	118
APPENDIX H. IRB APPROVAL STATEMENT .....	119

## PROPOSAL

### INTRODUCTION

Researchers believe the trauma, abuse, and race-related stress from slavery has been passed down for generations to contemporary Black-Americans. This phenomenon is called Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) (Franklin et al., Grump 2010). Similar to PTSS, Critical Race Theory (CRT) addressed social justice and the ways the judicial system has legitimized and legalized racial inequalities in the United States (Comeaux, 2010). CRT framework has been used to examine the idea that racism has been ingrained into our society since the beginning of colonization (Comeaux, 2010).

Similar to negative stereotypes, microaggressions impact how an athlete adapts to the college atmosphere, as well as their academics, personal growth and athletic performance (Comeaux et al., 2017). Microaggressions and racial discrimination severely impact people of color's (POC's) emotional health and well-being (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Surgeon General, 2001). Individuals confronting microaggressions risk uncomfortable interpersonal dynamics. For example, they risk bringing tension into their friendship and work relationships (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). Furthermore, in situations where POC are interacting with individuals who hold positions of power, confronting microaggressions can have serious consequences (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010).

Black women face unique forms of discrimination because they are both gendered and racialized. Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1991), is used to, "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's... experiences" (p.1244). Black women were sexually violated

by White men because they had no rights to protection. The dehumanization and hypersexualization of African women by European men allowed them a way to articulate, "shifting perceptions of themselves as religiously, culturally, and phenotypically superior to the black or brown personas they sought to define" (Morgan, 2004, p.15).

We find contemporary examples such as Serena Williams who has been compared to a gorilla; she has been referred to as an "an animal, and too muscular"; at the same time her "cat-suit" outfit has been represented as too sexy which illustrates racial stereotypes. Both racial stereotypes depict Black female athletes as animalistic, strong, and hypersexualized. She wore the cat-suit for her medical condition at the time, and it was banned by tennis officials because she was not following the uniform code.

However, throughout women's tennis, there have been many occasions where White women have worn outfits outside of the tennis dress code (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Such discrimination further demonstrates "longstanding, racist ideology that equates African heritage with animality" (Schultz, 2005, p. 340) and the sexist ideology against African American women that compared them "with normalized, white female athletes" (Schultz, 2005, p. 339) to ridicule the African-American beauty (Patton, 2006).

Another example is Misty Danielle Copeland, who became the first African-American Principal ballerina with the American Ballet Theater (ABT) in twenty years (Radsken, 2017). She was often criticized for her race and body image, being told her skin was too dark, and her body was too muscular (Cantu, 2019 p.1; Radsken, 2017). Similar to Copeland, many African-American dancers were discouraged from pursuing ballet due to many dance companies promoting a White Western European body type. Such negative stereotypes create a paradox that works against BFSAs; they should be

thin and sexy while at the same time demonstrate the natural athleticism attributed to their race (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). On the other hand, Black dancers are considered too athletic and their body type and skin color are shamed in the dance industry. However, BFSAs who experience such gendered and racialized stereotypes find it nearly impossible to satisfy the cultural and social expectations. The Black body has been marked "as inherently different from other bodies" (Douglas, 2002, p. 4) and thus, "blackness" is used as a way of "othering" male and Black female athletes (Douglas, 2002, p. 4; Schultz, 2005). This ideology is still prominent in today's society and directly impacts and negatively affects BFSAs. Subsequently, the intersection of racist and sexist discrimination is still an issue for Black female student athletes (BFSA) (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014) as they are subject to even more scrutiny than their White counterparts. BFSAs' experiences with discrimination are deeply rooted in collegiate athletics, particularly in predominantly White institutions (PWI) (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

Gaps in the literature suggested further research is needed to understand how such negative stereotypes and racial microaggressions affect BFSAs psychological well-being and athletic performance. Current studies have only focused on Division I athletes and professional athletes, and thus suggested, further research is essential to understand Division III female athletes' experiences. The gaps in the literature also suggested further focus on gender-based microaggressions and microaggressions in general among BFSAs. Furthermore, exploring BFSAs intersectionality of their multiple identities can also help athletic departments understand how such experiences affect these women and their

athletic performance. Many of these studies have focused on Black-Americans but not specifically on athletes and their personal experiences with negative stereotypes, racial microaggressions, and their perception of body image. Such discoveries add to the literature, highlighting the gender and racial microaggressions BFSAs face in contrast to their White counterparts (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014).

Concepts like PTSS help to understand the experiences of BFSAs. Further research is needed on the effects of PTSS on African-American Athletes (AAA)s' psychological well-being and athletic performance, but more specifically on BFSAs. Additionally, further research using a CRT lens is needed to show how the oppression AAAs face every day can transfer into athletics. This study aims to understand Division III Black female athletes' personal experiences with microaggressions and perceived impact on their athletic performance and body image.

### **The Scope of the Problem**

Racial microaggressions are formed from stereotypes that are deeply embedded in our society dating back to American slavery, which places Black women and their bodies at the bottom of the social ladder microaggressions as another way to oppress BFSAs systematically (Buyssee et al., 2004; Withycombe, 2011). CRT addresses the social policies and judicial systems that have been in place since the beginning of American slavery that continue to oppress Black Americans. The consequences of not addressing and ending such racial systems, further impacts BFSAs' overall college experience in terms of their athletic performance, well-being, and perception of body image.

### **Assumptions of Study**

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made at the beginning of the study:

1. Participant's age represented the typical college student population.
2. Participants honestly answered the screening questions.
3. Participants had a sincere interest in participating in this study.
4. Participants delivered honest responses in the interview.
5. Participants participated willingly until all interviews were completed.
6. Participants represented the experiences of minority female athletes.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of the study:

1. **Microaggressions:** Microaggressions "can be intentional or unintentional, can be subtle or overt, and are frequently based on assumptions about race/ethnicity, gender, or income" (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Valencia, 2010, p.20).
2. **Athlete Microaggression:** Athletic microaggressions are "subtle or overt, verbal or nonverbal exchanges (whether intentional or unintentional) which communicate negative and demeaning messages toward college athletes, regardless of race, gender, or sport" (Comeaux, 2012, p.191).
3. **Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome:** The trauma, abuse, and race-related stress from slavery has been passed down for generations to contemporary Black-Americans (Franklin et al; 2006; Grump, 2010).

4. **Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is used to, "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black woman's... experiences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1244).
5. **Critical Race Theory:** (CRT) was created to address social justice and the ways the judicial system legitimized and legalized racial inequalities in the United States (Comeaux, 2010).

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. Participants interviewed are only a sample of Division III athletes currently attending a small institution in the northeastern United States.
2. Participants are limited to ages 18-21.
3. Participants interviewed were only female athletes who identified as Black (African, Caribbean, North American descent).

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. A small pool of interviews limits the inferences that can be made about the minority population.
2. The institution is a PWI, and participants cannot be generalized to BFSAs attending HBU (Historically Black Universities) and other non-PWI's
3. Participants interviewed are only BFSAs currently attending the institution.
4. Participants interviewed self-identified as BFSAs and did not list any other identity markers.



5. Participants participated in only one-on-one interviews rather than group interviews.
6. There may be unknown conditions or factors on the college campus that could bias the responses of the participants.

## PROPOSAL

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many factors impact the experiences of Black female athletes (BFAs). Two most relevant experiences are microaggressions and the athlete's perceptions of body image. The majority of the factors manifest from the racist roots of Eurocentric ideas about African women's bodies, the after-effects of the institution of slavery, racism, and discrimination. This chapter reviews the literature on microaggressions, the psychological impact of microaggressions, body image of African women during the beginning of colonization, slavery, and modern-day discrimination within athletics. The section on microaggression will only focus on POC. This term is used in the literature to refer to racial and ethnic minorities (Sue, 2010). Another major section is dedicated to Critical Race Theory, colorblindness, and intersectionality and how these ideas connect to the purpose of this study which is to understand Division III Black female athletes' personal experiences with microaggressions, perceptions of body image, and perceived impact on their athletic performance.

#### **Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)**

Many researchers believe the trauma, abuse, and race-related stress from slavery has been passed down for generations to contemporary Black-Americans. The trauma of slavery has been passed down to Black Americans and has impacted their everyday life. This phenomenon called PTSS (Franklin et al., 2006). Gump (2010) notes:

There is little in slavery that was *not* traumatic: the loss of culture, home, kin, the attendant sense of self, the destruction of families through sale of

fathers, mothers, and offspring, physical abuse, and even witnessing castration of a fellow slave. Yet subjugation was its most heinous aspect as it sought nothing less than annihilation of that which is uniquely human-the self (p. 48).

Crawford and colleagues (2003) describe the multigenerational distress experienced by Black-Americans because of slavery and its lingering effects on the mind. Leary (2002) insists the emotional and psychological sufferings transferred through generations have never healed and continue to have adverse psychological effects. Such injustices have created psychosocial outcomes (Franklin et al., 2006) such as lack of self-esteem, anger, and violence (Leary, 2002). Gump (2010) theorizes that the trauma of slavery passed down over generations has negatively shaped Black-American subjectivity.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory was created to address social justice and the ways the judicial system legitimized and legalized racial inequalities in the United States (Comeaux, 2010). CRT framework examines the idea that racism has been ingrained into our society since the beginning of colonization (Comeaux, 2010). Racism is multifaceted and not merely defined by different levels of meaning and beliefs (Franklin et al., 2006). Jones (1997) defines racism as "the hierarchical domination of one racial group over another" (p.11), and it expresses itself when the dominant group forms negative attitudes and beliefs on another group (Franklin et al., 2006). CRT suggests race is deeply embedded in our society as race relations are used to uphold White supremacy (Comeaux, 2010). The social construction of race is critical to understanding CRT

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Many people believe that the separation between racial groups is due to biological factors (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). However, the observable characteristics that define race have minimal genetic variation between them (American Anthropological Association, 1998). Categories defining race are inconsistent and too broad to represent multiple groups. Race is also defined by sociocultural context. Another country is likely to assign a different racial meaning for a particular ethnic group or may not assign one at all (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Forrest-Bank, 2016; Navarro, 2012; Sue, et al., 2008).

In the U.S., race is classified and defined by physical characteristics, most commonly skin color, and is inconsistent across time and place; this concept emerged from the enslavement of Africans. For example, Tiger Woods is a well-known African-American golf player; however, he identifies as biracial. In an interview Tiger woods comments on his racial identities:

My parents have taught me to always be proud of my ethnic background.

Please rest assured that is, and always will be, the case. On my father's side, I am African-American. On my mother's side, I am Thai. Truthfully,

I feel very fortunate and equally proud to be both African-American and

Asian (Billings, 2003, p.29).

Due to his physical characteristics such as darker skin color, and the commonly accepted one-drop rule, which slave owners developed to deny Americans with any drop of Black blood the rest of his racial identity is ignored, because he *appears* to be Black (Billings, 2003).

Europeans became highly motivated to maintain the enslavement of Africans due to the outcome of wealth and profits (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Forrest-Bank, 2016). Essentially, they institutionalized slavery by legalizing the false idea that Blacks were "inferior" (Payne, 1998; Pierce, 1995; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Eugenics was the scientific theory of natural differences, which was used to argue the inferiority of Black intelligence and legitimize policies that reinforced the hierarchical structures of Whites (Payne, 1998; Pierce, 1995; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). CRT as a lens allows researchers to understand how people were classified by the color of their skin (Young, 1990). Minorities were considered oppressed members, stereotyped, ostracized, being classified as "other" become a part of their identities and realities (Young, 1990).

CRT also examines how our racial systems benefit White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). White privilege refers to the inherent advantages possessed by a White person on the basis of their race (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; McIntosh, 1988). Some researchers argue that Whites may not be consciously aware that they have negative attitudes and racial biases that encourage the oppression of POC (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). However, the idea that racism no longer exists in our society safeguards White people from acknowledging their role in systemic racism. Although White people may recognize the disadvantages POC experience, they are likely to be in denial of their White privilege (McIntosh, 1988). As Peggy McIntosh explains, White people acknowledging the role they play in systemic oppression of POC is paradoxical as it is a sensitive topic, it would force them to accept their White privilege (McIntosh, 1988). While it can be challenging to differentiate between bias and privilege, it does not change the ways White people benefit from their systematic privilege, whether that excludes

them from worrying about racial profiling or allows them to inherit wealth from homeownership which Blacks have been denied (McIntosh, 1988).

A final concept of CRT is that racism is embedded in the perspectives of marginalized groups; as such, dealing with racism is the norm and way of life for POC (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Understanding the foundations of White-on-Black oppression is crucial, as CRT shows such discrimination is deeply embedded in American society's legal, economic, political, social and educational systems (Hawkins et al., 2016). In this study, CRT is used as a framework to explain the racism and other forms of oppression Black student-athletes experience within the campus community, specifically to understand their experiences with microaggressions.

### **Colorblindness**

Race continues to be a problem in our society, even though many White Americans believe that racial oppression has decreased since the Civil Rights Movement (Comeaux, 2010). While it is not manifested as the blatant racism during slavery, color blind racism continues to prevail (Comeaux, 2010). Colorblindness occurs when people say they do not "see color," (Comeaux, 2010). As a result, they ignore an individual's culture and unique attributes and discredit their realities in everyday experiences. Such discrimination creates barriers to success for POC (Sue et al., 2007). In principle colorblindness is the idea that supports equality and fairness; however, it neglects racial equalities (Comeaux, 2010). Bonilla-Silva's book, *White Supremacy and Racism: in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, talks about how the racial ideology concept has changed, "The racial practices... today they tend to be covert, institutional, and nonracial" (Bonilla-Silva,

2001, p.138). The new racial ideology of colorblindness "safeguards racial privilege by applying the principles of liberalism to racial matters in an abstract and decontextualized matter (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p.139). This further supports the idea that White supremacy has changed in nature as it is no longer a blatant racism ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Similarly, Alexander develops this theory, further suggesting our criminal justice system is the new caste of slavery (Alexander, 2012). Bonilla-Silva (2001) mentions the four constructs that make up color blind ideology. The first is "abstract liberalism," (p.139) where people believe race should not be a factor when judging individuals and use liberalism to justify racial injustices in order to minimize their severity or the existence of racially unfair situations (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p.138). The second construct is the "biologization of culture" (p.139) which uses culture as a means to rationalize the status of minorities in society, simply claiming they live in poverty because they do not work hard enough (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). The third construct is the "naturalization of racial matters" (p.139) which infuses race-related issues with race-related arguments. For example, a White person who lives in an all-White neighborhood may claim this is the case because Blacks and Whites prefer to live with people that look like them. The fourth and last construct explores the "minimization of racism," (p.139). This refers to the inability to understand the ways in which racism operates in society and how it continually takes on new forms (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Bonilla-Silva's book, *Racism Without Racists: Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* states color blind racism is a very indirect way to justify racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Colorblindness is a more subtle form of racism, used to provoke and persuade negative images of Black people (Comeaux, 2010).

## **Intersectionality**

Black women face unique forms of discrimination, and the idea of intersectionality developed by Crenshaw (1991) helps explore this. Intersectionality is used to "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's... experiences" (p.1244). When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in society are better understood as being shaped by many axes of social division that work together such as race, class, gender, disability, sexuality, age and so forth (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Social movements formed Intersectionality's central ideas of social inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity and social justice. Such movements witnessed challenges of colonialism, racism, sexism, militarism, and capitalist exploitation. In the context of intersectionality, multiple systems of power discriminated against Black women (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hobson & Jolna, 2017) "because of their intersectional identity of both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1244).

The 1960s and 1970s were crucial decades for the exploration of the main ideas of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) argued that gender and racial discrimination were defined by White women's and Black men's experiences. However, "Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar and different from those experienced by White women and Black men" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.149). During the 1970s, Black women developed intersectionality as an analytical tool within their social movement. They also expressed their ideas in political pamphlets, poetry, essays, art and other creative venues. Black women participated in and held leadership positions within



the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. As a result, they saw the importance of exploring the concept of intersectionality with a political scope (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hobson & Jolna, 2017). For example, as a result of racism and sexism, crimes against Black women such as sexual abuse and rape were never prosecuted (Crenshaw, 1991). What Black women learned in their social movements led them to develop an analysis of social inequality. They realized that addressing the oppression they experienced could not be resolved by focusing only on one systematic framework; the issue was not just race, class, gender, or sexuality, etc. (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hobson & Jolna, 2017). Black women are battling multiple forms of oppression and discrimination all at once; and it comes with a psychological toll (Crenshaw, 1991; Hobson & Jolna, 2017). In this context CRT, color-blindness, and intersectionality can be used as a useful lens to show how BFSAs are alienated with regards to race and body image.

### **Microaggressions**

There are three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2010). Microassaults are the most blatant form of a microaggression as they are often unintentional and are an act of racism and sexism (Sue et al., 2010). Microaggressions "can be intentional or unintentional, can be subtle or overt, and are frequently based on assumptions about race/ethnicity, gender, or income" (Valencia, 2010, p.20). Microinsults refer to a microaggressions a person is not consciously aware. While they may be unintentional, they are still hurtful to the person on the receiving end (Sue et al., 2010). Microinsults are less detectable than microassaults but can cause more stress because the person is spending more time thinking about it (Sue et al., 2010). Microinvalidations occur when someone claims the target group is

overreacting, trying to deny the experience and associated feelings (Sue et al., 2010). Microaggressions and colorblindness are the new form of racism in society today. Incidents involving such acts "are varied, complex, and elicit a range of responses" (Forrest-Bank, 2016, p.21). A microaggression is very complex as the individual being aggressed upon may struggle to determine if they in fact experienced an intentionally racist or discriminating act (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue et al., 2007). The aggressors are often unaware of what they said (Forrest-Bank, 2016), which contributes to how microaggressions play a role in encouraging prejudice and oppression (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Researchers point out that subtle forms of discrimination are "often insidious, difficult to interpret, and may cause more psychological distress than blatant forms of discrimination" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Forrest-Bank, 2016, p.20; Noh et., 2007; Sue, 2010). The aggressors often believe in post-racial equality, and as a result, are unable to recognize their own racial biases and how such biases and microaggressive behaviors affect POC and other marginalized groups (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). Such beliefs allow the aggressor to perpetuate racial discrimination while believing racism no longer exists (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Microaggressions can be used to demonstrate how racial discrimination is influenced by society (Forrest-Bank, 2016).

The Foucauldian poststructuralist theory (FPT) provides a way for researchers to better understand why POC interpret and experience microaggressions differently (Burdesy, 2011; Comeaux, 2012; Jordan, 2010; Lee et al., 2018; Lilienfeld, 2017; Murray, 2013; Rainy & Granito 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2014) and how such subtle forms of discrimination are harmful (Lee et al., 2018). Researchers discovered that the effects of microaggressions are dependent on the situation and context (Lee et al.,

2018; Sue et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2014). POC tend to minimize the effects of microaggressions or fail to perceive that the encounter was in fact a microaggression (Burdesy, 2011; Lee et al., 2018). The FPT can help researchers examine the different ways POC interpret microaggressions and why there are reported inconsistencies among POC's experiences with microaggressions (Burdesy 2011; Comeaux 2012; Jordan, 2010; Lee et al., 2018; Lilienfeld, 2017; Murray, 2013; Rainy & Granito 2010; Wong et al., 2014).

Microaggressions send negative and degrading messages, such as making false assumptions about minorities. Some examples of these demeaning messages and untruthful assumptions are "You are expected to have lower career and economic success"; and "Your opinions don't contribute anything worthwhile"; and "You are not really American" (Forrest-Bank, 2016, p.21; Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions can occur between individuals, but they can also be portrayed through the media (Sue, et al., 2007). Microaggressions also tend to vary depending on which racial group is targeted (Torres, et al., 2010). For example, when Asians are stereotypically portrayed as overachieving perfectionists in the media or Black males are characterized as violent gangsters (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Many Black-Americans experience microaggressions such as the misconception that they are violent criminals or that they will not achieve academic or career success (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2009). Asians and LatinX are more likely to experience microaggressions in which people assume they do not speak English, thus sending the message that they are foreigners in their own country (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2015; Sue, et al., 2008). Microaggressions target minorities as a group and on an individual basis, and such insidious acts impact mental health.

The concept of athlete microaggressions was introduced to show and label the hurtful and insensitive behaviors directed at student-athletes (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux, et al., 2017). Comeaux defines an athlete microaggression as, "subtle or overt, verbal or nonverbal exchanges (whether intentional or unintentional) which communicate negative and demeaning messages toward college athletes, regardless of race, gender, or type of sport" (Comeaux, 2012, p.191). Comparable to negative stereotypes, microaggressions can impact how an athlete adapts to the college environment, as well as their learning and personal development (Comeaux et al., 2017).

Research suggests that in order to minimize and entirely diminish racial oppression and microaggressions, individuals must first recognize their own biases and participation in racial discrimination (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Recognizing such biases may make an individual uncomfortable, but in order to move forward, individuals need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. They need to put aside personal bias and be ready and willing to accept diversity. Individuals need to acknowledge their participation in microaggressions in order to end such racial discrimination (Forrest-Bank, 2016).

### **Examples of Microaggressions in Athletics**

An example of an athlete microaggression involves the Rutgers women's basketball team and Don Imus's comment about "rough girls from Rutgers...that's some nappy headed-hos there. And the girls from Tennessee, they all look cute" (Gill, 2011 p. 1). Imus degraded these female athletes and masculinized their sexuality. Such negative connotations ostracize Black female athletes based on embedded racist roots (Comeaux, et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014). It is important to note the intersection of racism and sexism in order to understand the experiences of BFSAs (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014).

Such microaggressions are harmful because they both trigger and rely upon embedded racist and sexist stereotypes (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014).

The following is an example of an athlete microaggression described by an athlete in Comeaux's (2012) study. A professor stood in front of the class and asked how many student-athletes were present. "When no one raised their hand, he said 'good; I don't have to slow down then'" (Comeaux, 2012, p.193). Athlete microaggressions should not be ignored. It is crucial to document and classify them so that possible strategies can be developed to address them (Comeaux, 2017). Researchers also found that athlete microaggressions can impact an athlete's academic performance, personal development, and even overall effort (Comeaux, 2017).

### **Psychological Impact of Microaggressions**

Racism and racial microaggressions are stressors that impact the experiences of Black-Americans (Carter-Francique et al., 2015). Research suggests that racial discrimination, such as microaggression, has severe adverse impact on POC's mental health and well-being (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Surgeon General, 2001). Microaggressions have such an insidious nature it is essential to pay attention to the "perception" of the microaggression (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Similar to CRT, microaggressions are defined by the perception of the individual being aggressed in which the aggression is aimed (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). Many individuals report being confused about the situation and are left to ponder the encounter (Sue, 2010). It does not matter how intentional or not the microaggressions are; the individual at the receiving end is likely to struggle with a response and may make a conscious decision not to respond (Sue, 2010). Individuals confronting microaggression risk uncomfortable

interpersonal dynamics. For example, they risk bringing tension into their friendships and work relationships (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). Furthermore, in situations where POC are interacting with individuals who hold positions of power, confronting microaggression might have serious consequences (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). For example, research found racial microaggressions are harmful and negatively affect White supervisor-Black trainee relationships (Beaumont, 2010) and have led to significant job dissatisfaction (Constantine & Sue, 2007).

In other instances, microaggressions may trigger emotions from prior experiences (Sue et al., 2007). Recipients may even question or blame themselves (Sue et al., 2007). In some cases where the individual may respect the aggressor, they are more likely to feel disappointed in addition to being angry, mistrustful, or depressed (Dovidio & Fiske, 2012; Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2009; Sue, 2010). Some individuals may feel a sense of helplessness, while others might adapt and "get used to it" as a regular part of what it means to be a POC living in American society (Dovidio & Fiske, 2012; Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2009; Sue, 2010).

Research shows microaggressions negatively impact an individual's mental and physical health (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Mays et al., 2007; Williams et al., 1997). Studies have found a link between racism-related stress and health problems amongst Black-Americans, such as heart disease, hypertension, depression, and poor functioning of the immune system (Brondolo et al., 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Din-Dzietham et al., 2004; Klonoff & Landrine, 1999; Utsey et al., 2002; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Research also found Black-Americans report more instances of discrimination and chronic stress than White-Americans (Troxel et al., 2003). A study done by Smith and

Colleagues (2007) found that Black males who experienced microaggression also encountered psychological stress responses—what the authors called *racial battle fatigue*—including frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear. Researchers indicate that microaggressive experiences may function like other forms of trauma and link the responses to those of post-traumatic stress and PTSS (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Franklin et al., 2006). For example, researchers propose unresolved grief and historical trauma across generations contribute to the societal issues among American Indians (Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). As a result, historical oppression influences current perceptions of bias and is harmful to the oppressed individual's mental health and wellbeing (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Franklin et al., 2006; Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

A study conducted by Blume and colleagues (2012) found a link between microaggressive experiences and adverse mental health outcomes. Researchers found a correlation between racial microaggressions, anxiety and binge drinking among ethnic and racial minority college students. Furthermore, researchers found connections between racial microaggression, depression, and perceived stress among Black-American adolescents (Sellers et al., 2006). Researchers also found that microaggressions were associated with depression, triggered by stress, and negatively impacted a participant's mental health that persist over a year (Torres et al., 2010). Additionally, researchers found a correlation between psychological distress and microaggressions in first-year racial and ethnic minority college students. (May et al., 2007; Noh et al., 2007; Sellers et al., 2006; Torres et al., 2010; Yip et al., 2008).

Researchers who examined various studies of the impact of microaggression on POC have reported unfavorable effects in multiple areas, including education, mental health, and employment (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Racial microaggressions have been connected with inequalities in education and the perceptions of hostile behavior in school (Smith et al., 2007; Steele, 2003). Examples of when minority students have reported subtle racial discrimination are lowered academic expectations and disregarded opinions from professors (Solorzano et al., 2000). As a result, POC are less likely to utilize mental health services and mental health programs and have lower self-efficacy than their White counterparts (Burkard & Knox, 2004).

### **Body Image**

Morgan's book, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, shows how a Black woman's culture and body type were unfamiliar to White male historians since the 1400s (Morgan, 2004). Between 1830 and 1860, European explorers portrayed African women as savagely over-sexualized beasts as a way to stabilize whiteness (Morgan, 2004). An Italian traveler Benzoni in his narrative, *History of the New World*, "used over sexualized indigenous women both as markers of difference and indicators of...immorality" (Morgan, 2004, p.19). He describes his first encounter with an African woman,

She was quite naked...she was old, and painted black, with long hair down to her waist, and her ear-rings had so weighed her ears down, as to make them reach her shoulders, a thing wonderful to see... her teeth were black, her mouth large, and she had a ring in her nostrils... so that she appeared like a monster to me, rather than a human being (Morgan, 2004, p.19).



His ignorance identifies her as a monster instead of a human being. Despite the fact that he called her beautiful, "African women were marked as unfamiliar, but their sexually and reproductively bound savagery-had become familiar" (Morgan, 2004, p.49).

The social order created by elite White men had two agendas, "the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race, and the control of women's sexuality and reproduction" (Morgan, 2004, p.48). Black women's bodies were seen as a tool to reproduce and multiply the plantation and slave owner's profit. Enslaved women were offered freedom, days off, or reduced workload in exchange for bearing more children. Some slave owners, without regard to health and safety concerns, overworked pregnant women. African women's bodies only served a purpose to reproduce, which is why such "property" could not claim sexual abuse and claim rape. Further, enslaved African women were "an object to be raped, bred or abused" (Morgan, 2004, p.48). These heinous acts were not only profitable, but also "primarily a weapon of terror that reinforced whites' domination over human property" (Morgan, 2004, p.49). White men knew they could get away with raping and impregnating their slaves while earning revenue.

In Mississippi, George, an enslaved man was charged with having sex with a ten-year-old enslaved girl. Courts dismissed the case, "the crime of rape does not exist in this State between African slaves" (Hopkins, 2011, p.11). The courts described such activity as "promiscuous" (Hopkins, 2011, p.11) and required the slave owners to handle the matter since "female slaves legally could be stripped, beaten, mutilated, bred, and compelled to toil alongside men" (Morgan, 2004, p.49). Black women could be sexually violated by law, by Black and White men, because they had no rights of protection. This reinforces a message to enslaved Black women that they were "inferior" to Whites

(Morgan, 2004). The dehumanization and hyper-sexualization of African women by European men allowed them a way to articulate, "shifting perceptions of themselves as religiously, culturally, and phenotypically superior to the black or brown personas they sought to define" (Morgan, 2004, p.15). This ideology is still prominent in today's society and directly impacts and negatively affects BFSA's.

### **Body Image within Female Athletics**

Female athletes face the same societal norms as females who are non-athletes, in terms of ideas regarding the body, dieting, and attractiveness (Anderson et al., 2012). Sociocultural and environmental factors, such as social media, advertisements, and coaches, play a huge role in an athlete's career. They also pressure athletes to lose weight (Anderson et al., 2012). A study conducted by Anderson and Neumann, found that female athletes are at greater risk for eating disorders than non-female athletes since female athletes are more exposed to gendered sociocultural and environmental factors (Anderson et al., 2012). The study further concludes that women feel pressured to maintain a particular body appearance, which leads to a higher risk of eating disorders (Anderson et al., 2012). Coaches and teammates play a huge role in this process as their comments and behaviors create an environment that pressures athletes about their body weight and appearance (Anderson et al., 2012).

Consequently, beauty and body ideals specified to European standards of beauty subject Black female student-athletes (BFSA) to even more scrutiny than their White teammates. BFSAs' experiences with discrimination are deeply rooted and embedded in collegiate athletics, particularly in predominantly White institutions (PWI) (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux, et al., 2017). For example, in certain sports BFSAs are seen as less

feminine than their female counterparts. BFSAs struggle with racial stereotypes classifying them as being hyper-sexual and masculine (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). In a qualitative interview study conducted by Bruening and colleagues (2005) examining the experiences of Division I BFSAs at a large Midwest University, the researchers discovered the media, coaches, faculty, and athletic directors ignored these pressing concerns often minimizing BFSAs' racist and sexist experiences (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017).

The subjection of Black-American female bodies has continued long beyond the days of slavery. BFSAs' bodies are still outcasted and portrayed in a negative light, (Withycombe, 2011) as both hypersexual and muscular with "manly" strength (Schultz, 2005; Verinsky & Captain, 1998). BFSAs were often contrasted with White women, who could do no wrong and portrayed as exhibiting "true womanhood" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p.635). Meanwhile, Black-American women were depicted as "ignorant, crafty, treacherous, thievish, and mistrustful", and sinful (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p.635). As a result, "the historical and social experiences of African women during slavery resulted in numerous images that defined African American women as deviant" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 633).

Schultz's (2005) tennis study observed that BFSAs such as Serena Williams are intentionally placed into racialized positions that are "outside the norm of professional women's tennis exemplified by players such as Anna Kournikova, Martina Hingis, Daniela Hantuchova, Elena Dementieva, and most recently, Maria Sharapova" (p. 348). Messner (2002) also stated, "blond, tanned, long-limbed, and lightly muscled Kournikova conforms to dominant cultural standards of White feminine beauty. Her form of beauty

stands in stark contrast to the highly muscular and very black bodies of... Serena and Venus Williams" (p. 102). BFSAs are also depicted as "mannish," Vertinsky and Captain (1998) explained:

White culture draws a direct correspondence between stereotyped depictions of black womanhood and "manly" athletic and physically gifted females. Their racialized notions of the virile or mannish black female athlete stemmed from many persistent historical myths: the linking of African American women's work history as slaves, their supposedly "natural" brute strength and endurance inherited from African origins, and the notions that vigorous competitive sport masculinized women's physicality and sexuality...(p. 541)

Serena William's, like many other BFSAs, was also featured in the most extreme poses (e.g., the body exposed with minimal uniform dress or pictured at the start of a stroke and/or mid-serve with arms and legs spread widely) (Schultz, 2005). Withycombe (2007) observed the differences between representations of Black and White female collegiate athletes' representations on magazine covers from 1977 to 2007 and found similarly exaggerated and negative portrayals of BFSAs. For example, Serena Williams has been compared to a gorilla, she has been referred to as an "an animal, and too muscular". Her "cat-suit" outfit, and her body, represented the gender stereotype ("sexy") but also pulled from the racial stereotypes (animalistic, strong). She wore the cat-suit for her medical condition at the time, and it was banned by Tennis officials because she was not following the uniform code. However, throughout women's tennis, there have been many occasions where White women have worn outfits outside of the tennis dress code

(Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Such discrimination further demonstrates "longstanding, racist ideology that equates African heritage with animality" (Schultz, 2005, p. 340) and the sexist ideology against African American women that compared them "with normalized, white female athletes" (Schultz, 2005, p. 339) to ridicule the African-American beauty (Patton, 2006, p. 5).

Another example is Misty Danielle Copeland, who became the first African-American Principal ballerina with the American Ballet Theater (ABT) in twenty years (Radsken, 2017). She received the leading role in *Swan Lake* alongside Brooklyn Mack; African-American dancers rarely get leading roles. She was often confronted for her race and body image,

I had been told to pancake my skin a lighter color to fit in with the rest of the company...You do not belong in the classical ballet world because your feet are too flat. Your butt is too big. I see dancers who are professionals who have these bodies who are white. Why am I being told my breasts are too big? Why am I being told my body is too muscular? It is code language for your skin is wrong (Cantu, 2019 p.1; Radsken, 2017).

Similar to Copeland, many African-American dancers are discouraged from pursuing ballet due to many dance companies promoting a certain body type for dancers. Copeland met with a group of African-American females from the Stajez dance troupe in Randolph. One of the students Kathryn Kearney said, "I quit ballet when I was a teen because being a black ballerina was painful and degrading...Constructions of the black ballerina body are problematic." (Radsken, 2017 p. 1).

Such negative stereotypes create a paradox that works against BFSAs: they should be thin and sexy while at the same time demonstrate the natural athleticism attributed to their race (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). On the other hand, Black dancers are considered too athletic, and their body type and skin color are shamed in the dance industry. However, BFSAs who experience such gendered and racialized stereotypes find it nearly impossible to satisfy the cultural and social expectations. The Black body has been marked "as inherently different from other bodies" (Douglas, 2002, p. 4) and thus, "blackness" is used as a way of "othering" male and Black female athletes (Douglas, 2002, p. 4; Schultz, 2005). This is clearly an extension of the attitudes held by Whites from the days of slavery (Withycombe, 2011).

### **Discrimination within Athletics**

CRT has been used as a lens to show that discrimination has been present within sports since the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was established in the 1900's (Hawkins et al., 2016). The NCAA's primary goal was to establish institutional control and order. However, in 1965, class and racial bias began to develop when they began enforcing academic eligibility requirements (Hawkins et al., 2016). The GPA required was now a 2.0 and athletes had to have earned an SAT score of at least 700. Due to previous segregation and present racism, and the inequality in the American educational system, Black athletes were at a disadvantage (Hawkins et al., 2016). In order to increase school profits, colleges often seek out Black athletes for their physical fitness and athleticism, hoping to create a winning team (Hawkins et al., 2016, Hylton, 2009). Black athletes, in return, see college as the land of opportunity to advance their education and chances of success (Hawkins et al., 2016, Hylton, 2009). However, these institutions

do not prepare Black athletes for the challenges they will face based on their race. Black student-athletes are not prepared for the stereotypes and racial discrimination that comes for playing at a PWI. Research shows Black student-athletes have difficulty interacting with faculty because student-athletes are identified as a particular population and many stigmas and stereotypes are attached to them before they have a chance to prove themselves (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017; Hawkins et al., 2016). As a result, Black student-athletes are alienated from the rest of the college population (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hylton, 2009).

Researchers suggest Black students and student-athletes are at risk because of the challenges they face including balancing academics with athletics, coping with social isolation, managing athletic success, maintaining healthy relationships, and coping with career termination; all while facing discrimination and microaggressions (Carter-Francique et al., 2015). Research has found the adverse environment of a PWI affects Black student-athletes because of the discrimination, and racial microaggressions contributing to their inability to succeed academically in comparison to their White counterparts (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). Black-American student-athletes are faced with profoundly rooted discrimination stigmas, and stereotypes before they even set foot on a college campus (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017).

An example of a negative stereotype toward the athlete population, is the claim an athlete is not intelligent enough to attend college, and the assumption they will not be as academically successful as their White counterparts (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). The campus community views them as *dumb jocks* (Comeaux et al., 2017, p.48)

that only got accepted in college because of their athletic ability. In many studies, Black athletes reported trying to over-perform to prove to the professor they were intelligent enough (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). Black athletes face the stereotype of being a "natural athlete," in comparison to their White counterparts. This stereotype depicts Black athletes as being physically superior while the success of their White counterparts is attributed to their hard work (Douglass, 2002; Withycombe, 2011). Such stereotypes undermine BFSAs effort and hard work to succeed in their sport and offer stereotype threats to BFSAs who are not the best players on their teams. Such stereotypes are detrimental to BFSAs' psychological well-being and academic and athletic efforts (Cahn, 1994; Collins, 2004; Douglass, 2002; Withycombe, 2011).

Gaps in the literature suggest further research is needed on how such negative stereotypes and racial microaggression affect BFSAs psychological well-being and athletic performance. Current studies only focus on Division I athletes and professional athletes; thus, suggesting further research on Division III female athletes is necessary. This should focus not only on gender-based microaggressions but also on microaggressions in general among BFSAs. Further research is needed not only on how stereotypes and microaggressions affect BFSAs, but also on the intersectionality of gender and race and how such experiences affect these women and their athletic performance. Many of these studies have focused on Black-Americans, but not specifically on athletes and their personal experiences with negative stereotypes, racial microaggressions, and their perception of body image.

Further research is needed on how the effects of PTSS impact AAAs' psychological well-being and athletic performance but more specifically on BFSAs. This



research needs CRT as a lens, to show the oppression AAA's face every day can transfer over into athletics. Further research needs to show how racial microaggressions are formed from stereotypes that are deeply embedded in our society dating back to American slavery, which places Black women and their bodies at the bottom of the social ladder, as this is another way to systematically oppress BFSAs (Buyssee et al., 2004; Withycombe, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to understand Division III BFA's personal experiences with microaggressions and the perceived impact on their athletic performance and body image. Two questions were examined;

1. How do participants perceive and cope with microaggressions?
2. Do participants feel these experiences with microaggressions and discrimination have impacted their athletic ability and/or perceived perception in body image in any way.

## PROPOSAL

### METHODS

The experiences of microaggressions can be most efficiently examined and understood through the voices of those who have experienced them firsthand. This makes it crucial to use an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design for this study. IPA is a method that is phenomenological, ideographic, and doubly hermeneutic when trying to understand the personal experiences of someone else's life (McDonough et al., 2011). This IPA study was conducted in efforts to understand BFSAs experiences with microaggressions.

#### **Design**

IPA was chosen as the design for this study to emphasize how important it is to understand each athlete's personal experiences with microaggressions. The primary purpose of IPA is to understand everyone's experience and how they interpret these experiences (Forrester, 2010). IPA is idiographic as each experience is distinctive (Forrester, 2010). IPA allows the researcher to understand each participant's personal experiences and their experiences at a particular time in their life (Forrester, 2010). IPA emphasizes and encourages participants to explore how vital their experiences are because this design is set up around these personal encounters. IPA is double hermeneutic, which means as researchers we are trying to make sense of the participants' experiences while they are trying to make sense of it themselves (Forrester, 2010).

The researcher involved in this IPA qualitative study is female and of African-American descent and participated in Division III athletics during her undergraduate studies. She has experienced discrimination within academics and on her college

campuses. She aspired to be a doctoral student in counseling psychology and supports social justice and equality for everyone. Her target group to work with is minority college athletes because of the struggles she herself faced as a college athlete. Her mission is to build stronger-minded individuals and help them develop effective strategies to cope with discrimination and microaggressions. These coping strategies are used to help minimize the psychological impact of discrimination. She wants to inspire other minorities to be successful and achieve greatness despite the oppression that exists amongst POC. She has experienced first-hand microaggressions in her everyday life and is aware of the possibility of bias. She will use bracketing (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009 McDonough et al., 2011) to filter out her personal experiences and opinions during this study. However, due to the researcher's close connection and experience with this topic of interest, rapport can be established with participants. Before each interview begins, the researcher and participant can spend some time casually talking about both their prior and current sport experiences. Refer to Appendix A for a complete reflexivity statement.

### **Participants**

The study will consist of interviews from participants who identify as African-American female Division III athletes. A homogeneous sample of eight to ten participants will be selected using snowball unique convenience sampling (Smith, 2009; McDonough et al., 2011). Strict selection criteria requires all participants to identify as Black females, which includes women who are of African, Caribbean, and North American descent. Participants must be a Division III athlete and have at least one year of experience playing at the collegiate level, and if graduated, graduation cannot be more than 2 years ago. Participants will be selected once they complete the screening questions

sent via email and meet all the required criteria. Afterward the potential participants will receive the consent form and interview questions via email to fill out electronically, and one week later will receive follow up questions via email.

### **Interview Guide and Screening**

The questions will be created out of efforts to avoid biasing the potential participants' responses and to define a microaggression. The following screening questions will be used:

1. What is your gender?
2. Do you identify as Black (African, Caribbean, or North America descent)?
3. Are you a Division III athlete?
4. Are you a current college student?
5. If graduated, how long ago?
6. Have you had at least one-year experience at the collegiate level playing your sport?

Please refer to Appendix B for the complete screening questions.

The interview guide will consist of questions to build rapport, including the following icebreaker question:

1. Tell me about how you first got involved playing your sport.

After efforts of rapport are made, other questions that will be asked are:

1. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete?
2. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete of color?

The interview probe questions that will be asked are:

3. Can you share example(s) using details?
4. How did you feel in response to that incident?

Refer to Appendix B for the complete list of interview guide and probe questions. These questions will be asked in order for the researcher to be consistent across interviews and to fully understand the potential participants experiences.

The semi-structured interview questions and probes will be used throughout each interview. An email will then be sent one week after the first interview with follow up questions and to provide the future participants the opportunity to edit or add to anything discussed in the previous interview. Examples of follow up questions include:

1. Can you elaborate more on this experience you spoke about from the previous interview?
2. Would you like to elaborate on anything from the first interview?
3. Do you feel this interview represents an accurate reflection of your experiences?

Refer to Appendix B for remaining questions. These questions are being included to encourage participants to provide their own experiences.

### **Procedures**

All sampling, interviewing, and data analysis will follow an IPA design (McDonough et al., 2011). The study will be conducted at a small institution in the northeastern United States. Following the approval of the Institutional Review Board, athletes will be contacted for participation via recruitment email. Screening questionnaires will be sent to respondents to the recruitment email for completion. Refer to Appendix C for the complete recruitment email. Following completion of the

screening questionnaire, participants who meet criteria will be invited to fill out the consent form and the electronic questionnaire with the interview questions. Anticipating the end of the semester and the researcher and participants soon to be relocating off campus, electronic responses to the interview questions via email is being proposed as an ideal solution to be able to contact participants. Participants can then fill out the electronic responses in the comfort of their own home, with a one-week deadline, which will allow time for participants to recall any events and an opportunity to provide more vivid detail of their experiences with microaggressions.

Before beginning the interview, participants will be made aware that participation in this study is voluntary and they can withdraw anytime without consequence. The researcher will then send the interview script via email to all participants in order to maintain consistency. Please refer to Appendix D for complete interview script. The researcher will remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers, because the researcher is interested in the participant's unique individual experience. The researcher's goal is to listen to BFSAs experiences with microaggressions and try to understand how the participant made meaning out of and coped with racial microaggressions as well as their perceptions of body image.

The participants' identities will be kept confidential, and their real identities will not be revealed. The researcher will assign pseudonyms to refer to participants to be used throughout the data analysis. Names of others, locations, and dates will be altered or omitted if it will put the participant's confidentiality at risk. Case files will be protected on a password locked computer only accessible by the researcher.

All interviews will be conducted asynchronously, via email with all participants. Before the interview summary is sent to participants, they will be given a pseudonym to cover up any identifying information. A summary of the interview will be sent to participants to ensure the researcher is accurately interpreting their experiences. Please refer to Appendix E to read the interview summaries. The researcher anticipates how sensitive the topic of the study will be and will offer women who are uncomfortable sharing their experiences via phone interviews, an option to submit electronic responses. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, at the end of each interview, each participant will be debriefed and offered the counseling services on campus if they are a current student. If they are not a current student, the researcher will encourage the participant to speak with a therapist if needed. Please refer to Appendix F for the full debriefing statement.

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview will be transcribed verbatim before the next step of the data analysis, which involves breaking down the content from the transcripts into the most critical content (Forrester, 2010). In an IPA qualitative study, the data collected is analyzed side by side, (Merriam, 2009), which is why, after the second interview, the first set of information is compared to the second interview. Afterwards, each participants' interview is compared to other participants interviews to see if there are common themes across participants. When beginning to analyze data, it is important to narrow findings, and avoid gathering data that does not apply to the study (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009). The researcher will focus on the essentials related to the purpose of the study to make sure relevant data is collected (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009). Another helpful

tool for the researcher will be to record ideas and observations as they are presented and to review these notes regularly to help the researcher think critically (Merriam, 2009).

Managing data is the next step in the data analysis, and the best way to do this is to code each interview as the researcher identifies connections and themes (Merriam, 2009; Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007). In order to derive meaning from the participant's responses, it will be crucial to be inductive and continuously compare the data (Forrester, 2010; Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Open-coding a word or phrase assists in making sense of the data, open-coding involves the interchange of viewing the data and exploring themes (Merriam, 2009). For this IPA study, participant's responses will be analyzed and coded one at a time, which ensured the double hermeneutic process was met (Forrester, 2010). Therefore, it is important to avoid scheduling an interview before understanding the participant's prior experience. Participants will schedule their first and second interview at least one week apart so the researcher has time to transcribe, write up a summary and identify themes of the first interview. The one-week time period will give participants an opportunity to reflect on any other experiences they may want to add or elaborate on from the previous interview. The researcher will schedule interviews with different participants at least 2 days apart in order to give the researcher time to be able to accurately record each participant's experiences in a timely manner. The next step will involve comparing and connecting the data into categories and themes. Themes will be achieved by looking over the transcript, turning these open codes into axial coding, and then grouping these categories into themes (Forrester, 2010). Themes will be identified using thematic analysis. This method will be used for reporting, identifying, and analyzing patterns within the data and helps to describe the data in rich detail (Robinson-



Wood et al., 2015). Patterns will be identified through a reflective process of data familiarization, coding, theme, and development (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). IPA interpretations of the data will be formed by first examining each participant as a single case before making interoperations across cases (McDonough et al., 2011; Smith, 2009).

Discoveries that reflect a pattern between participants will then be identified, clustered, and defined as thematic (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). At the end of all interviews, it will be essential to look for connections and make sure the coding is consistent. Following an IPA design, one grand theme must be developed out of the data and then split into subcategories (Forrester, 2010).

### **Trustworthiness**

After each interview is transcribed, a summary of the interview will be sent to participants for member checking. A follow-up interview will be scheduled over the phone or via email to ensure the summary is accurate in highlighting the participant's perspective of their lived experience (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). The interview probe questions that will be asked during the follow-up contact are:

1. Can you share example(s) using details?
2. How did you feel in response to that incident?

Participants will have the option to add, remove, or edit anything they mention in the previous interview. These member checks are important because the point of this IPA study is to examine the participants' experiences from their own perspective.

Triangulation in this study will involve multiple investigators, such as the researcher, two advisors, multiple sources of data, and the search for numerous themes (Merriam, 2009). Multiple investigators will allow all themes developed to be reviewed and revised if any

inconsistencies in the data emerge (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Multiple sources of data will allow more than one opportunity for the participants to provide data of their personal experiences (Merriam, 2009), which is why follow up interviews will be encouraged. Looking for multiple themes will help prevent bias, as the researcher is looking for unexpected data (Merriam, 2009). An audit trail will be kept throughout this entire study to log how the data is collected, how categories are developed, and how decisions will be made (Merriam, 2009). Such proposed methods of self-checking throughout the study will further decrease the chance of the researcher biasing the data.

## PROPOSAL

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. M., Petrie, T. A., & Neumann, C. S. (2012). Effects of sport pressures on female collegiate athletes: A preliminary longitudinal investigation. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 1*(2), 120–34.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (1999). Hoop dreams: Professional basketball and the politics of race and gender. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 23*(4), 403–420.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. L. Rienner.
- Bruening, J. E., Armstrong, K. L., & Pastore, D. L. (2005). Listening to the voices: The experiences of African American female student athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 76*(1), 82–100.
- Buysse, J. M., & Embser-Herbert, M.S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport. *Gender & Society, 18*, 66–81.
- Cahn, S.K. (1994). *Coming on strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women and sport*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Cantu, A. (2019, January 18). *Misty Copeland: Raising the "Barre"*.  
<https://www.stmuhistorymedia.org/misty-copeland-raising-the-barre/#marker-796875>
- Carter-Francique, A., Hart, A., & Cheeks, G. (2015). Examining the value of social capital and social support for Black student-athletes' academic success. *Journal of African American Studies, 19*(2), 157–177.

- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.
- Comeaux, E. (2010). Racial differences in faculty perceptions of collegiate student-athletes' academic and post-undergraduate achievements. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(4), 390–412.
- Comeaux, E., Griffin, W., Bachman, P., & Porter, J. (2017). NCAA division I athlete stem graduates: Stereotypes, microaggressions, race, and gender. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 10(1), 44-66.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Douglas, D.D. (2002). To be young, gifted, black and female: A meditation on the cultural politics at play in representations of Venus and Serena Williams. *Sociology of Sport On-Line*, 5(2). <http://physed.otago.ac.nz/sosol/v5i2/v5i2.html> on January 10, 2019.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Feagin, J. R. (2014). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations (3rd ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Forrest-Bank, S. S. (2016). Understanding and confronting racial microaggression: An imperative for social work. *Critical Social Work*, 17(1), 17–36.
- Forrester, M. A. (2010). *Doing qualitative research in psychology: A practical guide*. Los Angeles i.e. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Gill, J. L. (2011). The Rutgers women's basketball & Don Imus controversy (RUIMUS): White privilege, new racism, and the implications for college sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25(2), 118–130.
- Hawkins, B. J., Carter-Francique, A. R., & Cooper, J. N. (2016). *Critical race theory: Black athletic sporting experiences in the United States*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hobson, J., & Jolna, K. (2017). Transformation of consciousness: The national women's studies association and the combahee river collective's "Black feminist statement" turn 40. *Ms*, 27(3), 48–50.
- Hylton, K. (2009). *Race and sport: Critical race theory*. London: Routledge.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McDonough, M., M. Sabiston, C., & Ullrich-French, S. (2011). The development of social relationships, social support, and posttraumatic growth in a dragon boating team for breast cancer survivors. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 33(5), 627–648.
- McIntosh, P. (1998). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. In M. McGoldrick (Ed.). Collins (Eds.), *Race, class and gender: An anthology* (9th ed., pp. 94–105).
- Morgan, J., L. (2004). *Laboring women reproduction and gender in new world slavery*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Noh, S., Kaspar, V., & Wickrama, K. A. S. (2007). Overt and subtle racial discrimination and mental health: Preliminary findings for Korean immigrants. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(7), 1269–1274.
- Patton, T.O. (2006). Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA Journal, 18*(2), 24-52.
- Radsken, J. (2017, May 11). *Misty Copeland, offstage*.  
<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/05/dancer-misty-copeland-shares-her-life-story-with-students/>
- Robinson-Wood, T., Balogun-Mwangi, O., Fernandes, C., Popat-Jain, A., Boadi, N., Atsushi, M., & Xiaolu, Z. (2015). Worse than blatant racism: A phenomenological investigation of microaggressions among black women. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 9*(3), 221-236.
- Rutter, M. (1990). Competence under stress: Risk and protective factors. In J. Rolf, A. S. Masten, D. Cicchetti, K. H. Nuechterlin, & S. Weintraub (Eds.), *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology* (pp. 181–214). New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Schultz, J. (2005). Reading the catsuit. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 29*, 338-357.
- Sellers, R. M., Copeland-Linder, N., Martin, P. P., & Lewis, R. H. (2006). Racial identity matters: The relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning in African American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 16*(2), 187–216.

- Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2009). Assume the position ... you fit the description: Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(4), 551-578.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African-American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60–74.
- Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1372–1380.
- Steele, C.M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *The American Psychologist, 52*(6), 613–629.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62*(4), 271-286.
- Withycombe L. J. (2011). Intersecting selves: African American female athletes' experiences of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 28*(4), 478-493.
- Yarbrough, M., & Bennett, Crystal. (1999). Cassandra and the "Sistahs": The peculiar treatment of African-American women in the myth of women as liars. *Gender, Race, and Justice, 3*, 625-657.

## RESEARCH MANUSCRIPT

### INTRODUCTION

Many factors influence the experiences of being a Black female student-athlete (BFSA). Two critical factors that impact BFSAs experiences are microaggressions and the athlete's perceptions of body image. Many of these factors manifest from the racially prejudiced origins of Eurocentric ideas about African women's bodies, the after-effects of the institution of slavery, racism, discrimination and, specifically, microaggressions (Morgan, 2004). BFSAs are subject to even more scrutiny than White female athletes because of the discrimination that is deeply embedded in collegiate athletics (Comeaux, 2010).

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), is the trauma, abuse, and race-related stress from slavery has been handed down for generations to Black Americans today (Franklin Boyd et al., 2006; Grump, 2010). Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework has been used to further investigate the notion that racism has been engraved into our society since the beginning of colonization (Comeaux, 2010). CRT also examines how our racial structures benefit White people and affords them privileges based on their race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The belief that racism is extinct shields White people from recognizing their role in systemic oppression. This belief gave rise to colorblindness, which supports equality and fairness; however, it neglects racial equalities (Comeaux, 2010). Colorblindness further reinforces the idea that White supremacy no longer has this blatantly racist ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Although White people may acknowledge the disadvantages people of color (POC) experience, they are likely to be in denial of their White privilege (McIntosh, 1988). In this study CRT was used as a framework to explain the racism and other forms of oppression Black student-athletes experience



within the campus community and collegiate athletics, and to specifically to understand their experiences with microaggressions.

A microaggression is so insidious that the individual being aggressed may battle with deciding if what they just experienced was real, an intentionally racist or discriminatory act, and why it was said (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue et al., 2007). The aggressors are often oblivious to what they have said (Forrest-Bank, 2016), which contributes to how microaggressions play a vital part in encouraging prejudice and oppression (Forrest-Bank, 2016). Researchers have suggested microaggressions are insidious and challenging to understand, and they cause more psychological distress than blatant forms of discrimination (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Forrest-Bank, 2016; Noh et al., 2007; Sue, 2010). Microaggressions can be used to demonstrate how racial discrimination is influenced by society and further encourage racist and discriminatory acts (Forrest-Bank, 2016).

The concept of athlete microaggressions was introduced to validate and shed light on the hurtful and insensitive behaviors directed at student-athletes (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). Like negative stereotypes, microaggressions can influence how an athlete adapts to the college atmosphere, their academics, personal growth, and athletic performance (Comeaux et al., 2017). An example of an athlete microaggression involves the Rutgers women's basketball team. Don Imus's comments degraded these female athletes and masculinized their sexuality (Gill, 2011). Such negative implications ostracized Black female athletes based on embedded racist roots (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014). Consequently, the intersection of racist and sexist discrimination is still an issue for BFSAs (Comeaux et al., 2017; Feagin, 2014). However, BFSAs who experience

such gendered and racialized stereotypes find it nearly impossible to satisfy the cultural and social expectations, regarding physical attractiveness and dieting (Anderson, 2012). There are particular sports where BFSAs are seen as less feminine than their White female counterparts. BFSAs struggle with racial stereotypes classifying them as being hyper-sexual and masculine (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017).

During segregation Black women were often contrasted with White women, who by contrast, could do no wrong and were portrayed as exhibiting "true womanhood" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p.635). Meanwhile, Black-American women were depicted as "ignorant, crafty, treacherous, thievish, and mistrustful", and sinful (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 635). As a result, "the historical and social experiences of African women during slavery resulted in numerous images that defined African American women as deviant" (Yabrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 633).

Schultz's (2005) tennis study observed that BFSAs such as Serena Williams are endlessly depicted as "mannish" and oversexualized in the media (Messner, 2002). Withycombe's study (2007) observed the disparities between depictions of Black and White female collegiate athletes on magazine covers from 1977 to 2007 and found similarly exaggerated and negative portrayals of BFSAs. For example, Serena Williams's body has been compared to that of a gorilla (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011), further demonstrating the constant racist ideology that compares African heritage with animality (Schultz, 2005). Serena Williams was hypersexualized for wearing her "cat suit", further demonstrating the sexist ideology against African-American women that hypersexualizes them in comparison to their White counterparts, whose beauty is normalized (Schultz,

2005, p. 339). The study further concluded the racist and sexist ideology against BFSAs further ridicules African-American beauty (Patton, 2006, p. 5).

Another example is Misty Danielle Copeland, who became the first African-American Principal ballerina with the American Ballet Theater (ABT) (Radsken, 2017). She received the leading role in *Swan Lake* alongside Brooklyn Mack; African-American dancers rarely get leading roles. She was often confronted for her race and body image, being told her body is too muscular, and her skin is too dark (Cantu, 2019, p.1; Radsken, 2017). Like Copeland, many African-American dancers are dissuaded from pursuing ballet due to many dance companies promoting a certain body type that dancers should have (Radsken, 2017). Such negative stereotypes create a contradiction that works against BFSAs: they should be thin and sexy while at the same time demonstrate the natural athleticism attributed to their race (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). On the other hand, Black dancers are considered too athletic and their body type and skin color are shamed in the dance industry. BFSAs who experience such gendered and racialized stereotypes discover it nearly impossible to satisfy the social expectations (Douglas, 2002).

Black athletes see college as a place of opportunity in order to advance their education and job security (Hawkins et al., 2016, Hylton, 2009). However, these institutions do not prepare Black athletes for the challenges they will face based on their gender and race. Black student-athletes are not ready for the stereotypes and racial discrimination that comes with playing at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Research shows Black student-athletes have difficulty interacting with faculty because they are already alienated and many stigmas and stereotypes are assigned to them before

they even arrive on campus (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017; Hawkins et al., 2016). As a result, Black student-athletes may feel separated from the rest of the college population (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hylton, 2009).

Researchers suggest Black students and student-athletes are at risk because of the challenges they face, including balancing academics with athletics, coping with social isolation, managing athletic success, maintaining healthy relationships, and coping with career termination, all while facing discrimination and microaggressions (Carter-Francique et al., 2015). Research has found the adverse environment of a PWI affects Black student-athletes because of the discrimination and racial microaggressions contributing to their inability to succeed academically in comparison to their White counterparts (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). Black-American student-athletes are faced with profoundly rooted discrimination, stigmas, and stereotypes before they even set foot on a college campus (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017).

An example of such a stereotype is the claim the athlete is not intelligent enough to attend college, and the assumption they will not be as academically successful as their White peers (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). The stereotype infers they got accepted to college because of their athletic ability alone (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). In many studies, African-American athletes (AAAs) reported trying to overexert academically in order to prove to the professor they were intelligent enough (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux et al., 2017). AAA's face the stereotype of being a natural athlete, in comparison to their White counterparts. This stereotype depicts AAA's as being physically superior, while the success of their White teammates is attributed to

their hard work (Douglass, 2002; Withycombe, 2011). Such stereotypes undermine BFSAs' effort and hard work to succeed in their sport and offer stereotype threats to BFSAs who are not the best players on their team. Such stereotypes are detrimental to BFSAs' psychological well-being and academic and athletic efforts (Cahn, 1994; Collins, 2004; Douglass, 2002; Withycombe, 2011).

Gaps in the literature suggest further research is needed on how these negative stereotypes and racial microaggression affect BFSAs mental health and athletic performance. Current studies only focus on Division I athletes and professional athletes, thus suggesting further research on Division II and Division III female athletes is necessary. Future studies should focus not only on gender-based microaggressions but also on microaggressions in general among BFSAs. Further research is needed not only on how stereotypes and microaggressions affect BFSAs, but also on the intersection of gender and race and how such experiences affect these women and their athletic performance. Many of these studies have focused on Black-Americans but not specifically on athletes and their personal experiences with negative stereotypes, racial microaggressions, and their perception of body image.

Further research is needed to understand the impact of PTSS on Black-Americans psychological health and athletic performance, but more specifically on BFSAs. CRT can be used as a lens, to show that the oppression Black people face every day can transfer over into athletics. Further research needs to reveal how racial microaggressions are formed from stereotypes that are deeply ingrained in our society dating back to American slavery, which places Black women and their bodies at the bottom of the social ladder, as this is another way to systematically oppress BFSAs (Buyssee et al., 2004; Withycombe,

2011). Further research is needed to further examine the intersectionality between BFSAs' athletic identity and their racial identity.

The purpose of this study was to understand Division III BFSAs' personal experiences with microaggressions and perceived impact on their athletic performance and body image. Two questions were examined:

1. How do participants perceive and cope with microaggressions?
2. Do participants feel these experiences with microaggressions, and discrimination have impacted their athletic ability, and/or perceived perception in body image in any way?

## METHODS

The experiences of microaggressions can be best examined and understood through the voices of those who have experienced them firsthand. This makes it crucial to use an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design for this study. IPA is a method that is phenomenological, ideographic, and doubly hermeneutic, and is appropriate when trying to understand the personal experiences of someone else's life (McDonough et al., 2011). This IPA study was conducted in efforts to understand BFSAs experiences with microaggressions.

### **Design**

IPA was chosen as the design for this study to emphasize how important it is to understand each athlete's personal experiences with microaggressions. The primary purpose of IPA is to understand everyone's experience, and how they interpret these experiences (Forrester, 2010). IPA is idiographic as each experience is distinctive (Forrester, 2010).

## **Participants**

The study consisted of eight participants who identified as African-American female Division III athletes. A homogeneous sample size of eight participants was selected using snowball unique convenience sampling (McDonough et al., 2011; Smith, 2009). Strict selection criteria required all participants to identify as Black females, which includes women who are of African, Caribbean, and North American descent. Participants needed to be a Division III athlete and have at least one year of experience playing at the collegiate level, and if graduated, had to have completed their studies no more than 2 years ago. Participants were selected once they completed the screening questions sent via email and met all the inclusion criteria requirements. The eight participants received the consent form and interview questions via email to fill out electronically, and one week later received follow up questions via email. Eight individuals completed the recruitment survey and consented to be interviewed. All eight individuals identified as African-American female Division III athletes. The individuals ranged from Freshman to graduate students, and played either track, basketball or softball. For additional information on the participants demographics please refer to Table 1. Table 1 presents demographic information on each interviewed participant.

**Table 1***Demographic Information on Each of the Eight Interviewed Participants*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Year in College</b>	<b>Sport</b>
Becky	Sophomore	Track and Field
Sarah	Junior	Track and Field
Cindy	Graduated 2017	Track and Field
Lizzie	Graduated 2017	Track and Field
Amy	Graduated 2018	Track and Field
Sally	Sophomore	Basketball and Softball
Beth	Sophomore	Basketball
Rebecca	Graduated 2017	Basketball

*Note.* This table provides demographic data for all eight participants, such as their pseudonym name, year in college, and the sport they participated in.

### **Procedures**

All sampling, interviewing, and data analysis followed an IPA design (McDonough et al., 2011). The following screening tool questions inquired about: gender, self-identity as Black (African, Caribbean, or North America descent), age, sport etc. Please refer to Appendix B for the complete screening questions. After completing the screening tools, eligible participants who met criteria were invited to participate in the interviews by filling out the consent form and the electronic questionnaire with the interview questions. The interview guide consisted of the following icebreaker statements in efforts to increase comfort:

1. Tell me about how you first got involved playing your sport.



2. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete?
3. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete of color?

Refer to Appendix B for the complete list of interview guide and probe questions. These questions were asked to be consistent across interviews and out of the extra precautions the researcher was taking to make sure to understand the participant's experiences.

The study was approved by the IRB, and the researcher obtained informed consent from participants. Due to students being off campus for the summer, all interviews were conducted asynchronously, via email, allowing easy accessibility to participants in different states and countries. Participants were given the option to conduct their interview over the phone; however, all eight participants chose electronic responses. Participants were given one week to fill out the interview questions, allowing flexibility and convenience. Before beginning the interview, participants were made aware that participation in this study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without consequence. The researcher sent out the interview script via email to all participants to maintain consistency.

The semi-structured interview questions were used throughout each interview. An email was sent one week after the first interview with follow up questions, and to provide participants the opportunity to edit or add to anything discussed in the previous interview. Examples of follow up questions include:

1. Can you elaborate more on this experience you spoke about from the previous interview?

2. Would you like to elaborate on anything from the first interview?

Refer to Appendix B for remaining questions. These questions were chosen to help ensure accuracy and to make sure the participants were in fact providing their own experiences.

The researcher assigned pseudonyms to refer to participants throughout the data analysis in efforts to keep participants identities confidential. Case files were protected on a password locked computer only accessible by the researcher. All interviews were received via email and stripped of any identifying information; a summary of the interview was sent to participants to ensure the researcher is accurately interpreting their experiences. Electronic response interviews on average were returned within 1 week after they were sent. A one-page summary was sent to participants within 1 week after the researcher received the electronic responses with follow-up questions.

### **Data Analysis**

All participants were sent the interview guide questions via email, and then returned their electronic responses via email. Participants' electronic responses varied from a minimum of 500 words to a maximum of 2,300 words and the average length was 1,140 words per electronic response. The researcher first reviewed each participant's electronic responses to the interview guide questions separately. The purpose of an IPA qualitative study is for the researcher to provide a platform for participants to share their lived experiences. Hence the importance of the data collected to be analyzed side by side (Merriam, 2009) to make sure the researcher is truthfully letting the participants tell their story. Additionally, this is why, after the second interview, the first set of information is then compared to the second interview.

After the data from the first interview was compared to the second interview, each participant's interview was compared to other participants' interviews to see if there were common themes across participants. When beginning to analyze data, it was essential to narrow findings to avoid gathering data that did not apply to this study (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009). The researcher focused on the essentials of the purpose of the study and the research questions to make sure they were collecting relevant data (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009). Another helpful tool for the researcher was to record ideas and observations as they were presented and to review these notes regularly to help the researcher think critically (Merriam, 2009).

The researchers managed data by coding each interview as connections and themes were identified (Merriam, 2009; Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007). For the IPA study, it was essential to analyze and code one participant at a time to ensure the double hermeneutic process was met. Participants scheduled their first and second interview at least one week apart so the researcher had time to transcribe, write up a summary, identify themes, and record each participant experiences accurately. The next step involved comparing and connecting the data into categories and themes by looking over the electronic responses, turning these open codes into axial coding, and then grouping these categories into themes (Forrester, 2010). Themes were identified using thematic analysis. This method was used for reporting, identifying, and analyzing patterns within the data and helped to describe the data in rich detail (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Patterns were identified through a reflective process of data familiarization, coding, theme, and development (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

### **Trustworthiness**

After each interview was transcribed, a summary of the interview was sent to participants for member checking. All follow-up interviews were scheduled via email to ensure the summary was accurate in highlighting the participant's perspective of their lived experience (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). Participants had the option to add, remove, or edit anything they mention in the previous interview.

Triangulation in this study involved multiple investigators, such as the researcher, and two advisors, multiple sources of data, and the search for numerous themes (Merriam, 2009). Multiple sources of data allowed more than one opportunity for the participants to provide data of their personal experiences (Merriam, 2009), which is why follow up interviews were used. Looking for multiple themes helped prevent bias, as the researcher was looking for unexpected data (Merriam, 2009). An audit trail was kept throughout this entire study to log how the data was collected, how categories developed, and how decisions were made (Merriam, 2009). Such methods of self-checking throughout the study further decreased the chance of researchers biasing the data.

The researcher wanted to explore and understand Division III BFSAs' personal experiences with microaggressions and perceived impact on their athletic performance and body image. Two questions were examined:

1. How do participants perceive and cope with microaggressions?
2. Do participants feel these experiences have impacted their athletic ability, and/or perceived perception in body image in any way?

## RESULTS

### Overview of Participants Thematic Structure

The overall higher-order theme linking all eight interviews was identified as: *The constant battle with microaggressions Black female student-athletes' encounter*. The higher-order theme emerged from the researcher noticing a similar trend across all interviews. Participants' responses have shown how it is nearly impossible to separate BFSAs' athletic identity from their racial identity, as a result of experiencing, perceiving, and coping with microaggressions. All eight participants felt uncomfortable in their skin due to the microaggressions that were addressed towards their race, athletic ability, academic ability, and hair. All participants felt their athletic efforts were undermined because of their race. Furthermore, they felt there is a lack of social support at their PWI, especially when it came to coping with the microaggressions they encountered from their coaches, teammates, and peers on their college campus. Through their experiences with microaggressions, they felt forced to embrace their Black culture and Black identity.

The overarching theme reflected two overlapping sub-themes, 1) *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, and 2) *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete* had three emergent themes: 1A) *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving a microaggression*, 1B) *Coping in response to a microaggression*, and 1C) *The impact a microaggression has on their athletic ability and body image*. Subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience* had four emergent themes: 2A) *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, 2B) *The lack of emotional support at*

*PWI, 2C) Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image, and 2D) Doing it for the culture: The reason they continue to play their sport despite the microaggressions.*

Appendix F summarizes each individual interview, as well as the individual sub-themes that surfaced therein. The following pages outline the two major sub-themes, as well as the emergent themes from which they were constructed.

### **Sub-Theme #1: Dealing With Microaggressions as a Black Female Student-Athlete**

Sub-theme #1 consisted of contextual themes that emerged from all eight interviews. Participants shared similar experiences about their everyday experience being a BFSAs experiencing microaggressions. They all shared a microaggression they faced and were asked to reflect on that experience. Across all participants, similar thoughts, feelings, and actions to the microaggressions were found. Participants were then asked to reflect on how they coped with the microaggressions and if the microaggression impacted their athletic ability and perceived body image in any way. This part of the interview addresses the two research questions on how BFSAs perceive and cope with microaggressions, as well as, if microaggressions impacted their athletic efforts and their apparent body image.

#### ***Emergent Theme 1A – Thoughts, Feelings and Actions When Receiving***

##### ***Microaggressions***

One of the interview questions was for the participants to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and actions towards a microaggression they experienced. All participants spoke of a similar thought process when they first perceived the microaggression. Rebecca's response is like those of the other seven participants, "Is this really happening?" When discussing a time they experienced a microaggression, all eight participants asked

themselves why the person would say that to them and is this really happening, and as a result looked at the person differently. Five out of the eight participants reported similar feelings when perceiving a microaggression such as feeling angry, uncomfortable, and shocked. Becky reports her first feelings of the microaggression she spoke about, "My first feelings were anger and later I just felt sad because no matter how far along people of color come, there will always be people who just see color and associate it with ignorance." When speaking on the microaggression she experienced, Beth felt uncomfortable, "It was awkward because they had asked the only two players of color to do the move." Sarah further reflects on the possible feelings BFSAs face when experiencing a microaggression:

I felt angry, because when this happens, I always feel like it is my responsibility to correct people or ignore it. However, it should not be my task to educate people on what to say and not to say.

All participants reported similar feelings, however, these three participants stood out as their experiences connect to the higher order theme of the constant norm of what BFSAs experience, and the microaggressions they consistently faced.

All participants responded to the microaggressions the same, "I would just laugh it off, or walk away." Many of the participants felt if they stood up for themselves there would have been negative consequences. Amy was one of them, as she stated "I wish I would have stood up for myself then, and told my teammates how I really felt, but I did not want to be labeled as the *angry black woman*." All participants were reluctant to stand up for themselves because they believed they would be confirming the stereotype that Black women are hostile and angry. Furthermore, every participant admitted to ignoring

the microaggressions they reported laughing them off or walking away.

### ***Emergent Theme 1B – Coping in Response to Microaggressions***

All participants reported talking about the microaggression after the fact with someone they trusted. Becky said, "I went to my friends who understand what it's like." as she did not feel comfortable talking to someone who did not share the same experience as herself. Lizzie mentioned, "I reached out to friends and family members to vent about the situation." None of the participants mentioned talking to the perpetrator about the microaggressions. Rebecca, similar to the other seven participants, wanted to make sure she was not overexaggerating the extent of the situation, "I typically respond to acts of microaggression by discussing the incident with someone else to help me to decide if I am overreacting." All eight participants' coping mechanisms were talking to friends or family members they can trust, because they shared similar experiences with microaggressions. All participants had some form of support and safe space to cope with their discriminatory experiences.

### ***Emergent Theme 1C – The Impact a Microaggression has on Their Athletic Ability and Body Image***

Emergent theme 1C, *The impact a microaggression has on their athletic ability and body image*, dives into the last research question (examining) how microaggressions impacted their athletic ability and perceived body image. Seven out of eight of the participants reported their athletic ability being impacted due to microaggressions. For example, Lizzie said, "I felt as if I was not good enough to run the longer distances, or I would not perform well because everyone in the crowd believed Black girls can only run



sprints." Rebecca mentioned, "I felt overlooked, and not good enough"; her confidence was impacted as result of a microaggression. Amy speaks on her experience:

Whenever we had track meets, I ran with my hair down and my long nails while all the other girls (white girls) had their hair in ponytails and short nails. Some would comment on how they found it strange for me to have my hair down and for me to have long nails when running. I felt uncomfortable because everyone was so focused on my hair and nails. I was the top runner at the meet that is all that mattered.

Amy felt like her body image should not matter, because it does not define her performance as an athlete. However, all participants report such microaggressions impacts an athlete's ability to perform and focus.

### **Sub-Theme #2: The Black Female Student-Athlete Experience**

Sub-theme #2 consisted of contextual themes that emerged from all eight interviews. Participants shared similar motives for participating in their sport, which are reflected in the two emergent themes. Within sub-theme 2, four themes emerged: emergent theme 1A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, emergent theme 1B, *The lack of emotional support at a PWI*, emergent theme 1C, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*, and emergent theme 1D, *Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport, despite the microaggressions*.

***Emergent Theme 2A – Stereotypes Undermined Their Efforts in Academics and Athletics***

This theme reflected on how stereotypes undermined, challenged, and questioned all eight participants' efforts on the college campus academically and athletically. Seven out of eight of participants' responses related to emergent theme 2A concerning stereotypes that undermined their efforts in relation to their sport and academics. Seven of the eight participants identified with this emergent theme, as they all described having to work harder than their White teammates and White peers in the classroom. Participants spoke on their everyday experience being a student-athlete and what it means to be a student-athlete of color. Lizzie's experience relates to this emergent theme: "I had to work harder to get recognized, because of the color of my skin. Many of my teammates assumed because I was Black was the only reason, I was fast." Several participants had comparable experiences, and again, here is where the researcher can identify the importance of the intersection between BFSAs' racial identity and their athletic identity. Amy had a comparable experience with her White teammates deflating her work ethic: "However, many of my white teammates always tried to touch my hair, or said I was naturally faster than them, this made me feel like my hard work went unnoticed." Becky also had a similar experience to the other seven participants, as her work ethic was disregarded because of her race: "Being an African American identifying woman stereotypes have been used as the reason for why I have succeeded in my sport, instead of all the hard work I have put in over the years." These responses show how it is nearly impossible to separate BFSAs' athletic identity from their racial identity. This emergent theme connects back to the sub theme 2, *The black female student-athlete experience*, as

the participants shared their struggles of being a student-athlete of color. The participants reported in their responses that it is impossible to separate their racial identity from their athletic identity as a Black female athlete.

***Emergent Theme 2B – The Lack of Emotional Support at a PWI***

Five out of the eight participants in this study related to emergent theme 2B, such as their similar encounters around their everyday experience being a student-athlete, and what it means to be a student-athlete of color. This theme reflected on the experiences of being a student-athlete at a PWI and the lack of emotional support available for student-athletes of color, whether it is from a mentor, teammate, or coach. Lizzie goes on to discuss her thoughts about the lack of emotional support she received at her PWI: "My experience of the poor emotional support for a Black student-athlete at a PWI, may be completely different at an HBCU or another diverse school." Emergent theme 2B consisted of five of the eight participants' personal experiences with the lack of social support at their PWI assumed how the emotional support for BFSAs must be different at an institution that is more diverse. As Cindy explained, "I honestly feel that it's such a big difference being a student athlete at a PWI vs. a more diverse school. Having at least one POC in your corner really makes a difference". All five of the participants' responses connect back to subtheme #2, *The black female student-athlete experience*, as their lack of emotional support at a PWI, further reflects what it means to be a student-athlete of color. Five out of the eight participants had comparable experiences, and again, this subtheme can be connected back to the overarching theme, *The constant battle with microaggressions Black female student-athletes' encounter*, as participants reflected on

the lack of emotional support they receive from their coaches, professors, teammates and peers at a PWI, as well as the lack of emotional support they received at a PWI.

***Emergent Theme 2C – Feeling Uncomfortable About their Hair and Body Image***

Emergent theme 2C consists of participants sharing similar experiences about their daily experiences being a student-athlete and what it means to be a student-athlete of color. This theme reflected on participants' experiences at a PWI as a student-athlete of color. Additionally, emergent theme 2C reflects on participants feeling uncomfortable by their teammates, peers, coaches, and mentors regarding their hair and body image. Amy speaks on her experience of feeling uncomfortable in her own skin around her White teammates:

However, many of my white teammates always tried to touch my hair.... I felt very sub-conscious when I got a different hairstyle as my white teammates always had something to say. I eventually tried to ignore them so I can feel more confident as their opinion did not matter.

The emergent theme 2C was represented in four of the eight participants experiences of feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image. Sally shares her similar experiences in comparison of the other participants:

In times where I felt like I was being talked about because of the color of my skin and or my talent and success I kept fighting and ignored it because I remembered that I was playing for something that was bigger than myself.

Participants further portray their day-to-day experience being a student-athlete and what it means to be a BFSA. Cindy shares a similar experience with regard to her hair:

There was a time when it my freshman year when I had Senegalese twists for the beginning of the Fall semester and decided to take my hair out during the middle of the track season. I was not really comfortable with having my hair out as I was not in being natural fully. During practice, my teammates thought I cut my hair. Once I got weave, they thought my hair grew (in 3 days). One of my teammates asked to touch my hair while simultaneously reaching to touch my hair. I dodged her and said no. She said why not, does it feel real? I felt uncomfortable...

In summary, several participants had comparable experiences, and their responses reflect to subtheme 2, as their experiences of feeling uncomfortable in their own skin, further reflects what it means to be a student-athlete of color. BFSAs have to deal with coping with microaggressions on top of trying to excel academically and athletically, as well as developing their own identity, this does take a toll on an individual.

***Emergent Theme 2D – Doing it for the culture: The Reason They Continued to Play Their Sport Despite the Microaggressions***

This theme reflected on how despite the microaggressions the participant faces while playing their sport, the reason they continued was to inspire other Black female athletes and to represent for their Black culture. All eight participants felt continuing to play they sport was for a higher purpose. Cindy shares her inspiration behind her efforts and hard work: "Whenever I won or ran a PR (personal record) for a race, I knew I wasn't doing it for myself, but for my race, for my culture. The race is bigger than me." Many participants wanted to inspire their younger siblings, family members, or friends by showing that they 'too' can be successful. Sally shares her experience:

In times where I felt like I was being talked about because of the color of my skin and or my talent and success I kept fighting and ignored it because I remembered that I was playing for something that was bigger than myself. So, I had to succeed, and I had to be great for them under me, especially my younger sister. I had to pave the way for her.

Emergent theme 2D also consists of participants combined experiences about their everyday struggles being a student-athlete, specifically, what it means to be a student-athlete of color. This theme reflected how being a BFSAs is about something bigger than themselves, and the goal is to succeed for your culture and to inspire other Black women and children. All participants spoke about their day-to-day experience being a student-athlete and what it means to be a student-athlete of color. Amy shares her experiences to inspire other BFSAs: "Being a student-athlete of color is very rewarding as you get to represent the Black community and have the opportunity to inspire other Black female athletes." Hence, many participants wanted the opportunity to become a role model and to continue to inspire other BFSAs'. This relates back to the subtheme 2 *The black female student-athlete experience* and higher order theme of BFSAs constant battle of dealing with microaggressions.

### **Participant Higher Order Themes**

The higher-order themes from each participant (Table 2) reflected a careful and thoughtful process. Each higher-order theme includes personal and unique details that speak to each participant's individual experiences. Each participant was looked at as one distinctive individual before being compared as a collective whole. These higher-order

themes reflect the careful process of how these themes emerged from the participant's own words and experiences.

**Table 2**

*Higher Order Themes Drawn From Each Participant's Individual Interview*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Higher Order Theme Drawn From Interview</b>
<b>Pseudonym</b>	
Becky	The Skin I am in: A Black girl forced to desensitize in order to succeed athletically
Sarah	The pressure to succeed: the complexities of being a competitive black athlete
Cindy	The race is bigger than me: the journey of a Black girl finding self-love while inspiring others
Lizzie	Constantly proving myself: because of the color of my skin
Amy	The assumptions made my athletic achievements feel invisible but did not stop them
Sally	Being different and standing out: the paradox of a talented athlete
Beth	Black swagger: Always being held to a higher standard
Rebecca	Being a BFSAs: Is exhausting yet rewarding

*Note.* This table explains all eight participants higher ordered theme drawn from each individual interview.

### **Becky's Higher-Order Theme**

Becky's higher-order theme for her interview was: *The Skin I am in: A Black girl forced to desensitize in order to succeed athletically*. Becky describes her experience as a

woman athlete of color and how exhausting and taxing her unique experience was on her well-being: "By including being a person of color to being a student-athlete its really three jobs. Having to desensitize what people may say because of the color of my skin, while still doing what is required of me." Becky's higher-order theme connects to the overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter* as she shares her experiences as a BFSA. Becky's persistent struggle with microaggressions forced her to become numb to the race-related stress and became a solution to existing as a Black woman, as well as succeeding in her sport.

### **Sarah's Higher-Order Theme**

Sarah's higher-order theme for her interview was *The pressure to succeed: the complexities of being a competitive black athlete*. Sarah describes her experience as a BFSA along with the multiple layers of pressure that come with it:

As a student-athlete of color, the pressure of a "regular" (non POC) athlete is increased tenfold. Every mistake feels enhanced, and every reward feels bigger than it should...because everyone is always looking at you... Every performance feels like everything is on the line because of my skin color.

She describes her experiences as a BFSA feeling like she is under constant pressure and under the spotlight because of her race. Overall, Sarah's experience with microaggressions connects back to the overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter* as she describes why she pushes herself as hard as she does, because being a BFSA means she is under a microscope. While under the microscope, every move is being watched and criticized.



### **Cindy's Higher-Order Theme**

Cindy's higher-order theme for her interview was: *The race is bigger than me: the journey of a Black girl finding self-love while inspiring others.* She describes being a student-athlete of color and how she did not always consider her athletic identity until she came to college. Cindy describes why running track is a part of something bigger than herself: "Whenever I won or ran a PR (personal record) for a race, I knew I wasn't doing it for myself, but for my race, for my culture. The race is bigger than me." Overall, Cindy knew her purpose in excelling in track was bigger than herself. She was racing for her culture and all the history that exists within it. Cindy's experiences connect to the overarching theme and further shows how microaggressions influenced her athletic ability in a positive way, forcing her to excel in her sport.

### **Lizzie's Higher-Order Theme**

Lizzie's higher-order theme for her interview was *Constantly proving myself: because of the color of my skin.* Lizzie describes her experience of being a woman athlete of color and why she feels she continuously must prove herself:

I had to work harder to get recognize, because of the color of my skin. Many of my teammates assumed because I was Black was the only reason, I was fast. I felt drained and exhausted because I was constantly trying to prove myself. I lost interest during my college year. I quit and started focusing on my academics more.

Overall, the higher-order theme reflected Lizzie's experience with microaggressions that impacted her athletic ability because she had to constantly work harder than her White peers for recognition. Through her athletic career, she became exhausted in trying to

prove her efforts; she eventually lost interest in her sport and quit to focus on other opportunities.

### **Amy's Higher-Order Theme**

Amy's higher-order theme for her interview was: *The assumptions made my athletic achievements feel invisible but did not stop them.* Amy describes being a BFSA:

Being a student-athlete of color is very rewarding as you get to represent the Black community and have the opportunity to inspire other Black female athletes. However, many of my white teammates always tried to touch my hair, or said I was naturally faster than them, this made me feel like my hard work went unnoticed. I felt very subconscious when I got a different hairstyle as my white teammates always had something to say. I eventually tried to ignore them so I can feel more confident as their opinion did not matter.

In summary, the higher-order theme reflects how her experiences with microaggressions impacted her overall self-esteem. She was not confident in her skin, because she was worried what her White teammates would say about her different hairstyles.

### **Sally's Higher-Order Theme**

Sally's higher-order theme for her interview was: *Being different and standing out: the paradox of a talented athlete.* Sally describes her experiences being a BFSA and a situation where she experienced a microaggression:

...I overheard one of my teammates telling another teammate that she wishes she could be as fast as me, but it is just not possible because African Americans are born with a longer Achilles and it gives them an

advantage. Then she proceeded to call me over and what it seemed like to confirm that it was true.... I do not focus on other people but myself, however, I was hurt that my teammate said this about me.

In short, Sally's experiences with microaggressions impacted her athletic performance because her hard work was disregarded because of her racial identity and the stereotypes of BFSAs. Sally was viewed by her White teammates for having natural athletic ability that is attributed with being African-American, she was not recognized for her efforts.

### **Beth's Higher-Order Theme**

Beth's higher-order theme for her interview was: *Black swagger: Always being held to a higher standard*. Beth goes on to talk about her experiences with microaggressions as a student-athlete of color and how it has impacted her athletic performance:

I think that being a student-athlete of color holds you to a higher standard than white student-athletes. I think that I have definitely, at times, changed the way I played and the swagger and style of it in order to please a coach or keep myself on a coach's good side.

In summary, Beth was already seen differently by her coach because she identified as an athlete of color; she was held to a higher standard than her White peers. In knowing this, Beth changed the way she played her sport to satisfy her coach. The apparent intersection between her racial and athletic identity highlights the struggles her White peers will never have to encounter.

## Review of Results

The higher-order theme across all eight interviews in relationship to exploring BFSAs' experiences with microaggressions was, *The constant battle with microaggressions Black female student-athletes' encounter*. The higher-order theme was developed through the process of developing the subthemes, emergent themes, and overarching themes for each individual interview. Participants shared their everyday experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete and a student-athlete of color. Breaking down the data into more depth demonstrated how the two sub-themes (i.e., *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete and The Black female student-athlete experience*) and seven emergent themes distinctively appeared within the individual interviews. In all eight of the participants' interviews, there was an intersection with their racial and athletic identity. All eight participants spoke to how they perceived and coped with their experiences with microaggressions and how it impacted their athletic ability and perceived perceptions of body image. Despite the adversity these Black women have faced, their experiences with microaggressions inspired them to inspire others, work harder and excel at their sport, appreciate their culture, and most importantly love themselves unapologetically.

## DISCUSSION

All participants did report experiencing microaggressions as part of their student-athlete experience. All participants in the study reported being confused about the microaggressions they experienced and were left to contemplate the encounter. A common trend that emerged from the data was that the majority of participants in this study froze up and did not respond to the microaggression while it was happening, some

walked away, and others pondered the situation after the fact. Most of the participants reported that the microaggressions they received were from their friends, teammates, professors, and coaches, and were not sure of how to react to the situation. Their response is similar to previous studies as they reported feeling like confronting a microaggression risked an uncomfortable interpersonal dynamic (Forrest-Bank, 2016; Sue, 2010). BFSAs confronting their coach or professor about a microaggression would be very painful as the coach and professors are in positions of power over their academics and playing time. Many participants even questioned if the microaggression was really happening, while others wondered if they themselves were the problem.

CRT framework indicates how racial stereotypes and microaggressions are deeply embedded in American society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). These findings are consistent with previous research that predict BFSAs at a PWI will encounter microaggressions on campus because of the racialized roots of America's laws and institutions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). DuBois's (1903) *double consciousness* provides a framework for understanding the realities of BFSAs. The *double consciousness* highlights the position of Black people living in America after slavery. It posits that Black people are faced with an internal conflict as they are an oppressed group in American society, and their identity is divided into several parts (Du Bois, 1903). It is impossible for someone to be both Black and American because what it means to be Black and American are constantly at odds with the another (Du Bois, 1903).

BFSAs in this study are exhausted because of the dueling realities of their racial and athletic identities. The participants in this study are in an internal conflict of what it means to be Black, what it means to be female, what it means to be an athlete, and what it

means to be a BFSAs. The constant battle between these warring ideals (Du Bois, 1903) is apparent for a Black American, as well as a BFSAs. The results' significance is that BFSAs could excel even more in athletics if they did not have to continually deal with microaggressions from their peers, teammates, and coaches. BFSAs would excel more if they were recognized and appreciated for their hard work instead of undermining their efforts. More BFSAs may feel encouraged to attend a PWI if they felt supported by the campus community. BFSAs can thrive at PWI's if they were inspired and empowered, instead of continually being belittled, put down, and overlooked for their successes and hard work.

Many participants were either motivated to overcome microaggressions or spent more time than necessary trying to overcome them. The costs associated with dealing with microaggressions are severe to BFSAs as they spend a significant amount of time trying to make sense of it and could be investing this time into excelling in their sport. A possible recommendation would be to help decrease the amount of time BFSAs invest in overcoming microaggressions would include providing more emotional support to them on campus. Additionally, BFSAs are not the problem. They should not have to educate the college community continuously. PWI's have to put in the work to educate themselves to create a safe space for BFSAs to thrive.

This study aimed to provide insight regarding Division III Black female athletes' experiences with microaggressions and perceived impact on their athletic performance and body image. For this study, two questions were explored:

1. How do participants perceive and cope with microaggressions?

2. Do participants feel these experiences have impacted their athletic ability, and/or perceived perception in body image in any way?

This study's results reflected the participants' lived experiences, expressed through compelling quotes supporting how they cope and perceive microaggressions. This study mirrored participants' voices on experiences with microaggressions that have affected their athletic ability and body image somehow. Additionally, this study examined BFSAs' experiences with microaggressions. Finally, this study examined how microaggressions altered participants perception of how they view themselves, and how microaggressions impacted their athletic performance.

All eight participants explained in detail their experiences as a BFSAs. Participants spoke about the different stereotypes and microaggressions that undermined their hard work on academics and athletics. Participants also revealed that they have minimal support on a predominately White campus. Some participants reported that they were made to feel uncomfortable about their hair and body image by peers, mentors, coaches, and teammates at a PWI. Despite the microaggressions they encountered, participants continued playing their sport to uplift Black culture, embraced their blackness, and inspired other BFSAs. Through this examination, this study gives voice to BFSAs' experiences with microaggressions and how they cope and perceive them. This study also explored how microaggressions impacted BFSAs' athletic ability and how they perceived themselves in terms of body image.

Participants in the study reveal how microaggressions can negatively impact student athletes' overall growth in academics and athletics. Findings in this study suggest that overperforming was a strategy respondents used to prove to their teammates,

professors, or coaches that they did not fit the prescribed BFSAs stereotype and that they were capable of being high achievers academically and athletically. As a result of microaggressions, Black athletes are alienated from the rest of the college population (Hawkubs et al., 2016; Hylton, 2009).

Black women deal with both gender and racial discrimination daily (Crenshaw, 1991; Hobson & Jolna, 2017). All eight participants in this study have a gender identity, racial identity, and athletic identity. The original research questions were not aimed at exploring the participants different identities. However, a trend emerged from the data; all participants responses from the interviews indicated the intersection of their multiple identities. They were all forced to deal with the intersections between all three of their identities and the different ways they were discriminated against within their multiple identities. In further reading all eight participants' responses, many participants associated negative stereotypes with their multiple identities. Many participants in this study always considered themselves different because of the color of their skin. Additionally, their racial identity always meshed into their athletic identity. For all the participants in this current study, the intersectional identities mattered and contributed to BFSAs being exposed to discriminative and oppressive academic and athletic environments.

The majority of BFSAs in this study who experienced a microaggression from a highly respected aggressor (teammate, coach, professor, etc.) felt disappointed in addition to being angry, mistrustful, or depressed. In addition, some participants felt a sense of helplessness, and they just "took it" feeling there was nothing they could do to control the situation. All participants in this study experienced a microaggression at some point in



their lives and were asked to express their reactions to them. Most of the participants felt angry and shocked the aggressor would act this way.

Participants in the study reported microaggressions from their teammates and coaches related to their hair and skin tone. For example, in certain sports, BFSAs' efforts are undermined due to stereotypical beliefs of Black athletes being seen as naturally athletic as compared to their White counterparts. One participant was called faster by her teammate because they believed Black athletes have longer Achilles. Another participant did not feel confident about her hair, because she was the only Black girl on the team, and her teammates were fascinated with her hairstyles as if she were in a museum on display. The participant felt very insecure about her hair because she was always having to answer to her teammates when she came to practice with a new hairstyle. Other participants overheard the crowd or opponents saying they would win because they have darker skin, and Black girls run faster. These findings indicate such stereotypes tend to undermine BFSAs' efforts attributing their athletic success to their race. Furthermore, negative labels and stereotypes given to BFSAs, whether intentional or unintentional, discourage these women when they realize they are seen as "other" or "inferior" (Steele, 1997).

Many participants in this study suggested that BFSAs face the stereotype of being a "natural athlete," in comparison to their White teammates. This stereotype depicts BFSAs as being physically superior, while the success of their White counterparts is attributed to their hard work (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Douglass, 2002; Withycombe, 2011). Consequently, stereotypes are detrimental to BFSAs' psychological well-being and academic and athletic efforts. The BFSAs' body has been exhibited as different from

those of other female athletes (Douglas, 2002) due to racially embedded attitudes (Withycombe, 2011) that still exist at PWIs.

### **Limitations**

Like most studies, the current study is not without limitations. This study was conducted at a PWI, and these BFSAs cannot be generalized to BFSAs attending HBUs (historically black universities) and other non-PWIs. The researcher only interviewed Division III athletes at PWI institutions, and these findings cannot be generalized to Division I or Division II athletes at PWIs or HBUs. Another limitation is the researcher only interviewed BFSAs at one PWI and cannot generalize their experiences to BFSAs attending other PWIs. Additionally, the researcher only interviewed BFSAs and no other racial or ethnic minority athletes and cannot generalize these findings to other marginalized athletes. Another limitation of the study is that the interviews were conducted asynchronously via email. This gave the opportunity to easily access participants. However, the in-person interview experience was lost. Additionally, the researcher lost out on the opportunity to build a stronger rapport and to connect with the participants as they read through the interview questions on their own via email. Hence, these findings cannot be generalized to in person individual or group interviews. Such limitations should encourage future research to investigate if in-person interviews on microaggressions with BFSAs reflect differently than asynchronous via email interviews. Another limitation is that the researcher asked participants during the interview to reflect on a time they experienced a microaggression; this could have happened many years ago, and participants may suffer from selective memory or incomplete information. The

findings of this study are generalizable only to the eight women who participated and not to all BFSAs.

### **Further Research**

Future research needs to be done on the continuous misrepresentation of BFSAs in research samples and studies. BFSAs are consistently grouped with other female athletes or as being African-American, never as a separate classification (Bruening et al., 2005). Future research should help justify the distinction that BFSAs belong to both groups and identify as female and African-American. Further research is needed on the intersecting identities of BFSAs regarding race, gender, and athletic identity. Further research is needed on how such negative stereotypes and racial microaggression impact BFSAs psychological well-being and athletic performance. Previous studies only focus on Division I athletes and professional athletes thus further research on Division III female athletes is necessary. New research should focus not only on gender-based microaggressions but also on microaggressions in general among BFSAs. Further research is needed not only on how stereotypes and microaggressions affect BFSAs, but also on how intersectionality can help understand how such experiences affect these women and their athletic performance. Further research is needed on the effects of PTSS on AAAs' psychological well-being and athletic performance but more specifically on BFSAs' psychological well-being and athletic performance. Additionally, new research using a CRT lens is recommended to show how the oppression Black people face every day can in fact transfer over into athletics. Lastly, there should be more qualitative research done on BFSAs' experiences on the college campus, microaggression, and their intersecting identities so many more women can share their stories.

### **Applied Implications**

Findings from the current study suggest valuable practical implications for coaches, teammates, and the campus communities. BFSAs interact with their coaches daily. Hence, coaches play an influential role in whether or not BFSAs have to invest more time overcoming microaggressions while on campus. Overcoming microaggressions is not always easy and suggests implications for coaches to provide or find reliable emotional support for BFSAs so they can thrive at a PWI. Having such a supportive environment has been found to serve as protective factor (Rutter, 1990) for individuals who are more resilient after facing adversity. For example, if a coach feels they cannot provide the emotional support a BFSAs needs to overcome microaggressions, they can refer them to the college counseling center. Coaches are role models for their athletes and can help monitor microaggressions BFSAs' encounter from their teammates. In order for a coach to monitor microaggressions, they have first to witness it is happening and also understand what is happening. Coaches should be encouraged to take multicultural classes to understand the BFSAs experience. Athletics, psychology, and other campus support groups should work together to make sure they are creating a safe space for BFSAs and to help decrease microaggressions.

### **Conclusion**

The injustice in research about BFSAs brought the necessity and urgency of this study, which explored BFSAs' personal experiences with microaggressions and perceptions of body image within their campus community and athletics. Conducting a qualitative IPA study ensured participants' voices were heard. Participants' experiences of discrimination, stereotypes, and the impact of microaggressions were documented.

Overall, this study discovered all participants' experiences with microaggressions impacted their athletic ability and performance in terms of their overall effort; many participants' efforts were undermined by their peers. Many participants worked harder in their sport to fight back against these assumptions made by their coaches and White teammates. Consequently, one participant eventually quit the team because her hard work was continuously undermined, and she felt she should invest her energy elsewhere. Additionally, several participants who experienced microaggressions reported that their body image was impacted. Many participants were unaware of how they associated negative stereotypes with their hair and skin tone. Many respondents were unaware of the impact microaggressions had on how they perceived that their peers viewed them and the way that they viewed themselves. Many participants felt self-conscious, uncomfortable, and confused as to why their peers were so focused on their hair and skin color, instead of their sport performance. Many participants also felt hurt because their hard work was undermined due to stereotypes and microaggressions attributed towards their race.

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences BFSAs have with microaggressions on their college campus. The findings suggest that racial stereotypes are deeply embedded in athletics, as BFSAs are still facing discrimination at PWIs. BFSAs in this current study experience an internal conflict of what it means to be Black, what it means to be female, what it means to be an athlete, and what it means to be a Black female athlete. The continuous battle within oneself is apparent for a BFSAs as they struggle with multiple conflicting identities and the intersectionality between them.

BFSAs should not have to face microaggressions from professors, coaches, teammates, and the college community. The findings of this study beg the question what would BFSAs be capable of achieving if they did not have to constantly be dealing with microaggressions from the college community? BFSAs would flourish at PWIs if they were acknowledged and respected for their efforts instead of being challenged and undermined for their hard work. More BFSAs may feel encouraged to attend a PWI if they felt the PWI community offered moral support and outreach. BFSAs can thrive at PWIs if they were motivated and empowered instead of continuously being demeaned and ignored for their successes and hard work. Athletics and the college campus need to provide a safer space for BFSAs to prosper and to make sure their experiences are validated. This study ensured all eight participants' voices were heard, and that their experiences were validated. Future researchers must make it their duty to ensure that BFSAs' experiences will be heard, specifically through qualitative research, because their voices will be lost behind numbers and percentages.

## MANUSCRIPT REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. M., Petrie, T. A., & Neumann, C. S. (2012). Effects of sport pressures on female collegiate athletes: A preliminary longitudinal investigation. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 1*(2), 120–34.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (1999). Hoop dreams: Professional basketball and the politics of race and gender. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 23*(4), 403–420.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. L. Rienner.
- Bruening, J. E., Armstrong, K. L., & Pastore, D. L. (2005). Listening to the voices: The experiences of African American female student athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 76*(1), 82–100.
- Buyse, J. M., & Embser-Herbert, M.S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport. *Gender & Society, 18*, 66–81.
- Cahn, S.K. (1994). *Coming on strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women and sport*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Cantu, A. (2019, January 18). *Misty Copeland: Raising the "Barre"*.  
<https://www.stmuhistorymedia.org/misty-copeland-raising-the-barre/#marker-796875>
- Carter-Francique, A., Hart, A., & Cheeks, G. (2015). Examining the value of social capital and social support for Black student-athletes' academic success. *Journal of African American Studies, 19*(2), 157–177.

- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.
- Comeaux, E. (2010). Racial differences in faculty perceptions of collegiate student-athletes' academic and post-undergraduate achievements. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27(4), 390–412.
- Comeaux, E., Griffin, W., Bachman, P., & Porter, J. (2017). NCAA division I athlete stem graduates: Stereotypes, microaggressions, race, and gender. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 10(1), 44-66.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Douglas, D.D. (2002). To be young, gifted, black and female: A meditation on the cultural politics at play in representations of Venus and Serena Williams. *Sociology of Sport On-Line*, 5(2). <http://physed.otago.ac.nz/sosol/v5i2/v5i2.html> on January 10, 2019.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Feagin, J. R. (2014). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations (3rd ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Forrest-Bank, S. S. (2016). Understanding and confronting racial microaggression: An imperative for social work. *Critical Social Work*, 17(1), 17–36.
- Forrester, M. A. (2010). *Doing qualitative research in psychology: A practical guide*. Los Angeles i.e. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.



- Gill, J. L. (2011). The Rutgers women's basketball & Don Imus controversy (RUIMUS): White privilege, new racism, and the implications for college sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25(2), 118–130.
- Hawkins, B. J., Carter-Francique, A. R., & Cooper, J. N. (2016). *Critical race theory: Black athletic sporting experiences in the United States*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hobson, J., & Jolna, K. (2017). Transformation of consciousness: The national women's studies association and the combahee river collective's "Black feminist statement" turn 40. *Ms*, 27(3), 48–50.
- Hylton, K. (2009). *Race and sport: Critical race theory*. London: Routledge.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McDonough, M., M. Sabiston, C., & Ullrich-French, S. (2011). The development of social relationships, social support, and posttraumatic growth in a dragon boating team for breast cancer survivors. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 33(5), 627–648.
- McIntosh, P. (1998). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. In M. McGoldrick (Ed.). Collins (Eds.), *Race, class and gender: An anthology* (9th ed., pp. 94–105).
- Morgan, J., L. (2004). *Laboring women reproduction and gender in new world slavery*. University of Pennsylvania Press

- Noh, S., Kaspar, V., & Wickrama, K. A. S. (2007). Overt and subtle racial discrimination and mental health: Preliminary findings for Korean immigrants. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(7), 1269–1274.
- Patton, T.O. (2006). Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA Journal, 18*(2), 24-52.
- Radsken, J. (2017, May 11). *Misty Copeland, offstage*.  
<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/05/dancer-misty-copeland-shares-her-life-story-with-students/>
- Robinson-Wood, T., Balogun-Mwangi, O., Fernandes, C., Popat-Jain, A., Boadi, N., Atsushi, M., & Xiaolu, Z. (2015). Worse than blatant racism: A phenomenological investigation of microaggressions among black women. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 9*(3), 221-236.
- Rutter, M. (1990). Competence under stress: Risk and protective factors. In J. Rolf, A. S. Masten, D. Cicchetti, K. H. Nuechterlin, & S. Weintraub (Eds.), *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology* (pp. 181–214). New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Schultz, J. (2005). Reading the catsuit. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 29*, 338-357.
- Sellers, R. M., Copeland-Linder, N., Martin, P. P., & Lewis, R. H. (2006). Racial identity matters: The relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning in African American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 16*(2), 187–216.

- Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2009). Assume the position ... you fit the description: Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(4), 551-578.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African-American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60–74.
- Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1372–1380.
- Steele, C.M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *The American Psychologist, 52*(6), 613–629.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62*(4), 271-286.
- Withycombe L. J. (2011). Intersecting selves: African American female athletes' experiences of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 28*(4), 478-493.
- Yarbrough, M., & Bennett, Crystal. (1999). Cassandra and the "Sistahs": The peculiar treatment of African-American women in the myth of women as liars. *Gender, Race, and Justice, 3*, 625-657.

APPENDIX A  
REFLEXIVITY STATEMENT

The researcher involved in this IPA qualitative study is of female of African-American descent and participated in Division III athletics during her undergraduate studies. She has experienced discrimination within academics, and on her college campuses. She is an aspiring sports psychologist who supports social justice and equality for everyone. Her target group to work with is minority college athletes, because of the struggles she faced as a college athlete. Her mission is to build stronger-minded individuals and help them develop effective strategies to cope with discrimination and microaggressions. These coping strategies are used to help minimize the psychological impact discrimination causes. She wants to inspire other minorities that to can be successful and achieve greatest despite the oppression that exists amongst POC. She has experienced first-hand microaggressions in her everyday life and is aware of the possibility of bias. She will use bracketing (Forrester 2010; Merriam, 2009) to filter out her personal experiences and opinions during this study. Further making sure her own experiences with microaggressions does not bias the study in any way. However, when considering the researcher's close connectedness and experience with this topic of interest, rapport can be established with participants. Before each interview begins, the researcher and participant can spend some time casually talking about both their prior and current sport experiences. Her main goal is to let other BFSAs have their voices heard, and to understand their experiences with microaggressions. The researcher wants to let the participants know they are not alone in their experiences.

## APPENDIX B

### SCREENING QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW GUIDE & PROBES

#### **Screening Questions**

1. What is your gender?
2. Do you identify as Black? (African, Caribbean, North American descent)
3. Are you at least 18 years old?
4. Are you a current college student? If graduated, how long ago?
5. Are you a division III athlete?

#### **Interview Guide Questions**

1. Tell me about how you first got involved playing your sport.
2. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete?
3. Using your own words, can you describe what it is like to be a student-athlete of color?
4. In what ways do you feel these experiences have influenced your athletic performance?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add that we did not discuss?

#### **Interview Probes**

1. From these experiences what makes your sport fun?
2. Can you share example(s) using details?
  - a) How did you feel in response to that incident?
  - b) What were your thoughts to that incident?
  - c) How did you respond to that incident?
  - d) Looking back, would you respond differently? If so how? If not, why?
  - e) How do you cope with incidents like that?

#### **Second Interview Questions**

1. Can you elaborate more on this experience you spoke about from the previous interview?
2. Would you like to elaborate on anything from the first interview?
3. Do you feel this interview represents an accurate reflection of your experiences?

## APPENDIX C

### RECRUITMENT STATEMENT EMAIL TO COACHES

My name is Jessica Jones; I am currently a second-year graduate student at Ithaca College, studying sport and exercise psychology. I am conducting my thesis on minority female athletes and their experiences with microaggressions. I am emailing you all because I am looking to interview potential candidates for my study who identify as minority female athletes, and who may have dealt with any experience that they felt may have targeted their racial and or gender identity.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and all of their interview responses will be kept confidential. All interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. The researcher is aware of how sensitive the topic is and will offer women who are uncomfortable being interviewed face-to-face, the opportunity for phone interviews, or to submit electronic responses.

The screening questionnaire takes only about 5 minutes to fill out. The study involves two 60-minute interviews at small institution in the northeastern United States. Each interview scheduled at least one week apart. Each interview will be audiotaped. The total time commitment for this study is 125 minutes over the course of two weeks. There are very few risks for this study, such as psychological or emotional risks, as this is a very sensitive topic and may trigger past emotional experiences, anger, race-related stress, and possibly depression. Participants are at minimal risk for emotional discomfort as this study is a very sensitive topic as participants are sharing their personal experiences.

Please forward this email to any graduate assistant coaches, previous players, or current athletes who may be interested. Below is my contact information if any of your athletes would be interested in participating in my study. Thank you for your time. For more information or to sign up, please contact:

Jessica Jones, Researcher, Dept. Exercise and Sport Sciences  
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY 14850  
917-622-1326  
[Jjones11@ithaca.edu](mailto:Jjones11@ithaca.edu)

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Jessica. Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research on Black female student-athletes experiences in sport. Before we start, I would like to go over some reminders for your participation. This information has also been outlined in the informed consent I emailed you. I want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your unique individual experience. I may ask several follow-up questions and ask you to explain in detail to make sure I am understanding your point of view. I do not want to assume anything, please feel free to correct me if I summarize any of your ideas inaccurately. Please remember that your participation in the study is voluntary and you can drop out at any time. If you chose to drop out, you have the option to omit your responses from the study as well. Your participation will be kept confidential, as your real identity will not be revealed. I will refer to you as the name "A" throughout the interview. Names of others, locations, and dates will be altered or omitted if it puts your confidentiality at risk. If you feel uncomfortable of any question you do not have to answer it. If you feel the distressed at any time of the interview, we can stop the interview. I can also refer you to additional resources if you need them. This interview will be audio recorded. However, the recording will also be kept presidential. Even for the recording our names will be removed. Do you have any questions? If not, you can sign the consent form twice, and keep a copy for yourself.

## APPENDIX E

### PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES AND SUB-THEMES

#### **Lizzie's Interview Summary**

Participant 1, pseudonym name Lizzie, graduated in 2017, she played on the Track and Field team for four years. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *Constantly proving myself: Because of the color of my skin*. She first got involved playing her sport in high school:

*I was asked to join team by other Black females on my High School Team. I started running track and enjoyed being a part of the social outlet. I enjoyed feeling a part of something bigger than myself.*

She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*I had to work harder to get recognize, because of the color of my skin. Many of my teammates assumed because I was Black was the only reason, I was fast.*

From her response, *The Black female student-athlete* experience subtheme 2 evolved, and the emergent theme 2A evolved, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. Here is where the researcher saw the intersectionality between the participants racial and athletic identity. Once the researcher went through all eight interviews individually, and then compared them side by side, the overarching theme that connects all eight participants



emerged, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter.*

She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*I felt drained and exhausted because I was constantly trying to prove myself. I lost interest during college years. I quit and started focusing on my academics more.*

The participants response further supports the development of emergent theme 1C, *The impact a microaggression has on their athletic ability and body image*, as the participant discusses experiences that impact her athletic performance.

Lizzie goes on to discuss additional thoughts and insights:

*My experience of the poor emotional support for a Black student-athlete at a PWI, may be completely different at an HBCU or another diverse school.*

From her response the emergent theme 2B, *The lack of emotional support at PWI* developed as she expressed her feelings about the lack of diversity and support at a PWI.

She described a situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*People at the meets would make comments like "here come those black girls watch out for them in the sprint events"*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*. In response to that incident she felt:

*These assumptions made me feel as though I would not perform well in a long-distance event. From that day I started training for 800meters and place 1st several*

*times. I challenge myself based on that stereotype that I could only perform in a short distance race.*

The participants response further supports the development of emergent theme 1C, *The impact a microaggression has on their athletic ability and body image*, as the participant discusses experiences that impact her athletic performance.

Her thoughts during that incident:

*I felt as if I were not good enough to run the longer distances, or I would not perform well because everyone believed Black girls can only run sprints.*

The participants response further supports the development of emergent theme 1C, as the participant discusses experiences that impact her athletic performance. She responded to that incident:

*I did not respond; I ignored the comments.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*. Looking back at the incident she feels she would have responded differently to the microaggression: *Looking back, I would want to have maybe defended myself, but I feel I did the right thing because I had to focus on my event and upcoming race.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*, as she is describing her experiences with microaggressions and how she felt during this experience. She goes on to describe how she copes with an athlete microaggression, the researcher can also see the intersectionality of the racial microaggression as well. Her response

supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *Constantly proving myself: Because of the color of my skin*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Amy's Interview Summary**

Participant 2, pseudonym name Amy, graduated in 2018, she played on the Track and Field team for four years. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *The assumptions made my athletic achievements feel invisible but did not stop them*.

She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*Being a student-athlete of color is very rewarding as you get to represent the Black community and have the opportunity to inspire other Black female athletes. However, many of my white teammates always tried to touch my hair, or said I was naturally faster than them, this made me feel like my hard work went unnoticed. I felt very subconscious when I got a different hairstyle as my white teammates always had something to say. I eventually tried to ignore them so I can feel more confident as their opinion did not matter.*

Amy's insightful response falls under *The Black female student-athlete* experience subtheme 2, and existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined efforts*, and two new emergent themes developed, and 2C, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. Here is where the participants interview was confirmed under the overarching theme, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*, as she is describing her experiences with microaggressions and how she felt during this experience, the researcher can also see the intersectionality of her racial and athletic identity. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*These experiences have influenced me to work harder, and to inspire other Black females who may feel discouraged to play a sport they love because of the discrimination they may face at a PWI.*

Amy's response fell under the existing subtheme theme 2, *The daily battle as a Black female student-athlete*, and existing emergent theme 2B, *The lack of emotional support at PWI* developed as she expressed her feelings about the lack of diversity and support at a PWI. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*My teammates always were so fascinated about the versatile hairstyles I do with my hair. They would just reach out and touch my hair without asking.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, and emergent theme 2B, and overarching theme, as she is describing her experiences with microaggressions and how she felt during this experience. She goes on to describe how she copes with an athlete microaggression, the researcher can also see

the intersectionality of the racial microaggression as well. In response to that incident she felt on display:

*I felt like I was a walking museum. I felt very uncomfortable.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. Her thoughts during that incident:

*I wish they would just ask to touch my hair, or do not assume, or just mind their business, we came to run track not to touch my hair!*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, emergent themes developed, and 2C, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*, and overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*.

Looking back at the incident she feels she would have responded differently:

*I wish I would have stood up for myself then, and told my teammates how I am really felt, but I did not want to be labeled as the "angry black woman".*

Her response supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and

overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as, *The assumptions made my athletic achievements feel invisible but did not stop them*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Becky's Interview Summary**

Participant 3, pseudonym name Becky, is a Sophomore, she currently plays on the Track and Field team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *The Skin I am in: A Black girl forced to desensitize in order to succeed athletically*. She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*By including being a person of color to being a student athlete its really three jobs. Having to desensitize what people may say because of the color of my skin, while still doing what is required of me.*

Becky's response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Here is where the participants interview was confirmed under the overarching theme *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*, as she is describing her experiences with microaggressions and sacrifices she has to make as a BFSAs. Here, the researcher can also see the

intersectionality of her racial and athletic identity. She describes these experiences have undermined her efforts:

*Being an African American identifying woman stereotypes have been used as the reason for why I have succeeded in my sport, instead of all the hard work I have put in over the years.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. She wanted to add additional comments at the end of the interview:

*I think the color of my skin was something that was not considered to others but being that it is something that I identify with, it is something I always consider.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2C, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. Again, the intersectionality between her racial and athletic identity is present here, further confirming the overarching theme that connects all eight participants emerged, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*During freshman year being told I speak well "for someone like me".*

Becky's response further supports the development of the subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, and another existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. In response to that incident she felt:

*My first feelings were anger and later I just felt sad because no matter how far along people of color come, there will always be people who just see color and associate it with ignorance.*

Her response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Her thoughts during that incident:

Her supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*.

Becky's response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *The Skin I am in: A Black girl forced to desensitize in order to succeed athletically*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Beth's Interview Summary**

Participant 4, pseudonym name Beth, is a Sophomore, she currently plays on the Basketball team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *Black swagger: Always being held to a higher standard*. She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*I think that being a student-athlete of color holds you to a higher standard than white student-athletes.*



Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Beth's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*I think that I have definitely, at times, changed the way I played and the swagger and style of it in order to please a coach or keep myself on a coach's good side.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*I had been playing in a practice and I was using more flashier skills and tricks that would enable myself to get by defenders and score easier. Once that was done, a coach asked me and another black player to do something called "jelly". It was awkward because they had asked the only two players of color to do the move.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete* and subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Beth's response further explores the overarching theme for all eight interviews, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. In response to that incident she felt:

*At the time I thought that it was weird that they had just asked us to do it, but at the same time I wanted to please the coach.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete* and subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Beth's response further explores the overarching theme for all eight interviews, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. Her thoughts during that incident:

*I think that it was not necessary to even showcase the move, let alone ask two of the only athletes of color to do the move.*

Her response supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the overarching theme, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *Black swagger: Always being held to a higher standard*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Rebecca's Interview Summary**

Participant 5, pseudonym name Rebecca, graduated in 2017, she played on the basketball team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *Being a BFSAs: Is exhausting yet rewarding*.

She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*I have found that as a student-athlete of color, I am required to work at least ten times harder than my white peers. I find that I encounter microaggressions, microinsults, and microassaults. Moreover, I was shocked by the lack of community, love, and support while at the PWI. Aside from the difficulties associated with being a student-athlete of color, I have found this identity to be very rewarding. I did not view my membership on the team on an individual level, I focused on what my membership meant in a collective/ group-level for other persons of color. I knew that other Black girls would come after me, and it was important to set the stage for them. With the lack of other persons of color at my institution, I developed a greater love and respect for my culture.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, existing emergent theme 2B, *The lack of emotional support at a PWI*, and emergent theme 2D, *Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions*. Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Rebecca's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*These experiences have influenced my athletic performance significantly. I feel as though I am required to attempt to make a name for myself and "prove" myself to my peers. I also want to inspire. I think that it is crucial to teach and educate younger black girls that the sky is the limit.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, existing emergent theme 2B, *The lack of emotional support at a PWI*, and emergent theme 2D, *Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions*. She described a particular situation where she experienced a microaggression:

*Although I have many experiences with microaggressions, this particular experience sticks out in my mind. As a year 1 graduate student in a Clinical Psychology program (in an ETHIC's class, might I add) I was asked to join a group of students to engage in a group exercise. I was in group of approximately three other students, all of which were Caucasian. The professor asked each group to answer a set of questions. As I began to talk, a student in the group (Student A) began to talk over me. As I continued to talk and elaborate on my point, Student A continued to talk over me. A different student made the exact same point that I made to which Student A responded by saying "Omg! You're so right!" A different student made a comment by saying "but she just said that, and you ignored her..."*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the emergent theme 2A. *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. In response to that incident she felt:

*I was in shock; I could not believe this was happening in my ethics class*

Her response supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience e*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *Being a BFSA: Is exhausting yet rewarding*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Sarah's Interview Summary**

Participant 6, pseudonym name Sarah, is a Junior, she currently plays on the Track and Field team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *The pressure to succeed: the complexities of being a competitive black athlete*. She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*As a student-athlete of color, the pressure of a "regular" (non POC) athlete is increased tenfold. Every mistake feels enhanced and every reward feels bigger than*

*it should. Winning and losing as a student-athlete of color feel like the highest and lowest points of your career, no matter how small they may be, because everyone is always looking at you.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*. Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Sarah's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*I feel as though I push myself harder and care more about my training and performance because I know what people before me have done to allow me to get to where I am. Every performance feels like everything is on the line because of my skin color.*

Her response supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, and existing emergent theme 2D, *Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions*.

Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Sarah's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She wanted to add additional comments at the end of the interview:

*Sometimes, it feels as if we, POCs, are recruited for the color of our skin and not the talent, especially when you go to a school that is not very diverse.*

Her response is assigned to the existing emergent theme 2B, *The lack of emotional support at PWI*. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*One particular time when my teammates asked and persistently asked why I did not play basketball if I was Black. Being an African-American athlete most assume I run track or play basketball. When they find out that I do neither, they seem ignorant person, but it still made me feel bad that I was getting worked up from someone asking such a ridiculous question.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience* Her thoughts during that incident:

*When things like this happen, I always feel like it is my responsibility to correct people or just go along with their jokes. However, it really should not be my task to educate people on what to say and not to say. At the age we are now, it should be common sense of what to say and not, so I am tired of having to educate people when they continue to do what they do.*

The participants response further supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. The participants response further supports the

development of the subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *The pressure to succeed: the complexities of being a competitive black athlete*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Sally's Interview Summary**

Participant 7, pseudonym name Sally, is a Sophomore, she currently plays on the Basketball and Club softball team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *Being different and standing out: the paradox of a talented athlete*. She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*To be a student-athlete of color it is very rewarding...I feel as though there is a lot of comments/ actions that occur to try and downplay or undermine your success. I've had experiences where white athletes and coaches would make the comments "oh you have such natural talent you don't even have to try. I feel like there is a very high standard when you are a student-athlete of color and expectations to constantly play at a high level. Another thing is depending on the sport especially softball but basketball as well I am typically the odd one out and there we are never others or a lot of others that looked like me so I felt like I had to be successful, I already stood out as the only student-athlete of color I could not suck too. In times where I felt like I was being talked about because of the color of my skin and or my talent and success I kept fighting and ignored it because I remembered that I was playing for something that was bigger than myself. So, I had to succeed, and I had to be great for them under me, especially*



*my younger sister. I had to pave the way for her. Overall, I did enjoy my time as a student-athlete of color minus the undermining action of others I eventually took pride in being different and standing out and being a dominant student-athlete of color on and off of the court and playing for me and not the approval of my teammates or others because over time I built a strong sense of myself and confidence so nothing else could phase me.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, and existing emergent theme 2C *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*, and emergent theme 2D, *Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions*. Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Sally's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*I was a person who realized when others treated me differently or said certain things about me because of the color of my skin and the fact that I was a good athlete, but I never let that hate or negative energy get to me. I used it as motivation instead.*

The participants response further supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact*

*microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*One time I was at a softball tournament and I was doing very well and dominating and while warming up before a game I overheard one of my teammates telling another teammate that she wishes she could be as fast as me, but it is just not possible because African Americans are born with a longer Achilles and it gives them an advantage. Then she proceeded to call me over and what it seemed like to confirm that it was true and to defend herself because she noticed that I overheard.*

The participants response further supports the development of the subtheme 1 and subtheme, as well as the overarching theme, *The constant battle with microaggressions Black female student-athletes encounter*. In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *Being different and standing out: the paradox of a talented athlete*. It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

### **Cindy's Interview Summary**

Participant 8, pseudonym name Cindy, graduated in 2017, she played on the Track and Field team. The overarching theme of her interview (and follow-up correspondence via email) was labeled, *The race is bigger than me: the journey of a Black girl finding self-love while inspiring others*. She goes on to describe her experiences of what it is like being a student-athlete of color:

*Being a student-athlete of color did not a big identity until participating in the sport in college. I was blessed to be a good student-athlete on the team and win conference championships, participate at Nationals and become an All-American during my undergrad years, but I always had in my head that most to all of final heats, I was the only black individual on the podium for hurdles. I always wondered how other athletes viewed me. Either the mean student-athlete? The good hurdler from IC? Or the Black girl? It is an identity that will always be a part of me.*

Her response falls under existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme 2A, *Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics*, and existing emergent theme. Here is where the researcher notices the intersectionality between Sally's racial identity and athletic identity and confirms the overarching theme for all eight interviews to this interview, *The constant battle with microaggressions black female student-athletes encounter*. She describes these experiences have influenced her athletic performance:

*Whenever I won or ran a PR (personal record) for a race, I knew I was not doing it for myself, but for my race, for my culture. The race is bigger than me.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Here is where emergent theme 2D, *Doing it for the culture: The reasons why they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions*. She wanted to add additional comments at the end of the interview:

*I honestly feel that it is such a big difference being a student athlete at a PWI vs. a more diverse school. Having at least one POC in your corner really makes a difference.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2B, *The lack of emotional support at PWI*. She described a particular situation where she expressed a microaggression:

*There was a time when it my freshman year when I had Senegalese twists for the beginning of the Fall semester and decided to take my hair out during the middle of the track season. I was not really comfortable with having my hair out as I was not in being natural fully. During practice, my teammates thought I cut my hair. Once I got weave, they thought my hair grew (in 3 days). One of my teammates asked to touch my hair while simultaneously reaching to touch my hair. I dodged her and said no. She said why not, does it feel real?*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2D, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. In response to that incident she felt:

*I felt uncomfortable, I told my teammate that it is real because it is on my head.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2D, *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. Her thoughts during that incident:

*I would look in the mirror and really try to compare how I looked natural versus when I had a weave/wig/braids/etc. I saw me as the issue.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2C. *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. She responded to that incident:

*I responded with a "haha" and kept it pushing. I did not really go into why I wore my hair in different ways or asked why they thought I look different. I just was kinda shocked that those were questions/comments I got about my hair preferences.*

Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2C. *Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image*. Looking back at the incident she feels she would have responded differently:

*I would look in the mirror and really try to compare how I looked natural versus when I had a weave/wig/braids/etc. I saw me as the issue*

*I cope by educating people who may not be aware of what they are saying in regard to hair and Black girls. I have seen myself transform from a shy girl to a down to earth person. I say it how it is, and I tell non-ignorant people the reasoning behind my choice of hair or nails. Ignorant people, I hold my breath.*

Her response supports the development of subtheme 1, *Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete*, as well as emergent theme 1A *Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions*, emergent-theme 1B, *Coping in response to microaggressions*, and 1C, *The impact microaggressions has on their athletic ability and body image*, as well as subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*. Her response further supports the existing subtheme 2, *The Black female student-athlete experience*, and the existing emergent theme, 2D.

*Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image.* In conclusion, and to restate, the higher-order theme of this interview was identified as *The race is bigger than me: the journey of a Black girl finding self-love while inspiring others.* It was through the quotes included above (as well as various others) that this was formed.

APPENDIX F  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated by the researchers involved, and the data collected could possibly help others understand the experiences female minorities athletes face with microaggressions. The purpose of this debrief session is to answer any questions or concerns you may have now that you have completed the study. There are very few risks for this study, such as psychological or emotional risks, as this is a very sensitive topic and may trigger past emotional experiences, anger, race-related stress, and possibly depression. Participants are at minimal risk for emotional discomfort as this study is a very sensitive topic as participants are sharing their personal experiences. Participants can mitigate/minimized such emotional discomfort by contacting CAPS on campus 607-274-3136 for IC students. Participants can also seek counsel from their therapists if needed. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. If after reviewing the above information you wish to withdraw your contributions to the research, please notify the researcher of your request using the above contact information. If you have any questions about this study, please contact us.

Dr. Justine Vosloo, Faculty Advisor  
Dept. Exercise and Sport Sciences  
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY 14850  
607-274-5190  
[Jvosloo@ithaca.edu](mailto:Jvosloo@ithaca.edu)

Jessica Jones, Researcher  
Dept. Exercise and Sport Sciences  
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY 14850  
917-622-1326  
[Jjones11@ithaca.edu](mailto:Jjones11@ithaca.edu)

Ithaca College IRB  
Peggy Ryan Williams Center  
953 Danby Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
[irb@ithaca.edu](mailto:irb@ithaca.edu)  
(607) 274-3011

APPENDIX G  
LIST OF HIGHER-ORDER THEME,  
SUBTHEMES, AND EMEREGENT THEMES

**Higher order theme across all eight interviews:**

*The Higher order theme across all eight interviews: with microaggressions Black female student-athletes encounter.*

**Subthemes**

1. Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete
2. The Black female student athlete experience

**Emergent themes**

- 1) Dealing with microaggressions as a Black female student-athlete
  - a) Thoughts and feelings when perceiving microaggressions
  - b) Coping in response to microaggressions
  - c) The impact a microaggression has on their athletic ability and body image
  
- 2) The Black female student athlete experience
  - a) Stereotypes undermined their efforts in academics and athletics
  - b) The lack of emotional support at PWI
  - c) Feeling uncomfortable about their hair and body image
  - d) Doing it for the culture: The reason they continued to play their sport despite the microaggressions



APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL STATEMENT

June 21, 2019

Jessica Jones, Graduate Student

Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences

School of Health Sciences and Human Performance

Re: **IRB 0419-02 - Female Black student-athletes' experiences with microaggressions and perceptions of body image**

Thank you for responding to the stipulations made by the Institutional Review Board for Human Participants Research (IRB). You are authorized to begin your project. This approval is issued under the Ithaca College's OHRP Federal-wide Assurance #00004870 and will remain in effect for a period of one year from the date of authorization.

Please add the IRB approval number (IRB **0419-02**) to ALL recruitment and consent materials.

After you have finished the project (when data collection is complete and there is no further risk to human subjects), please complete the *Notice-of-Completion Form* found on the Sponsored Research website. Please note that review/approval of future proposals is contingent upon submission of this form.

Should you wish to continue the approved project beyond the expiration date you may request an extension by sending an email to [irb@ithaca.edu](mailto:irb@ithaca.edu) before June 20, 2020. The project can be extended up to three years. *If the project expires, you must complete a new application for expedited review.*

Please note that if there are any adverse events resulting from this research, they must be reported to the IRB at [irb@ithaca.edu](mailto:irb@ithaca.edu).

Sincerely,



Warren Calderone

Director of Corporate, Foundation Relations, and Sponsored Research

Institutional Review Board for Human Participants Research

Cc: Justine Vosloo