EXCEPTIONAL RECRUITING: IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS’ IMPACT ON DECISION MAKING FOR YOUNG BLACK WOMEN ATHLETES DURING THE NCAA RECRUITING PROCESS

by

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2019
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Dissertation directed by Professor Andrea J. Bingham

ABSTRACT

This qualitative critical phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of Black collegiate women student-athletes attending predominantly White institutions. Interviews and written narratives of ten Black woman student-athletes who attend National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) colleges or universities were analyzed. Wilen’s (2007) critical scholarship, policies, and practices of inclusion and exclusion are applied to the embodied lived experiences described by Moustakas (1994) to capture the circumstances and configurations of collegiate athletic recruitment.

This research integrates Intersectionality and Organizational theories to describe the relationship of the Black Collegiate (BC) woman athlete to her college or university. The Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities was the conceptual framework and categorized their decision-making process and explained how they perceive and make sense of their recruitment. The explication of the data captured the system-, process- and group-centered objectives of critical analysis. Emerging themes revealed the emotions embedded in the decision-making process. The original contribution to knowledge is within the transition and development of Black female student-athletes and is also associated with the critical methodologies involved.
DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this work to my daughter London. You are my inspiration and a model of everything I still hope to become. The things you need most on this journey are knowledge and understanding. I pray that you find answers to some of your questions in this text along the way to fulfilling your unique and incredibly particular purpose. Also, I dedicate this work to my boys Marcus and Hollis. You made your debut on this world during this doctoral journey and fueled my ingenuity, creativity, and commitment to our family and my vision. I pray that you find value in these efforts and my sacrifice in ways that directly impact the decisions you make in the future. Finally, to my husband, and forever teammate on this journey, I dedicate everything I do in this name to you. Your willingness to be supportive in so many ways while I faced this enormous challenge was seen, respected, appreciated, and valued. Thank you for choosing us, and for encouraging me to pursue my passions in the manner of my choosing. I love you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would first like to acknowledge the way that Jesus Christ has ordered my steps and continues to make way for me. I am thankful. To my parents, I hope to honor you with this work. Your guidance in my life is undeniable. Your advice to reject excuses, create solutions and be respectful has cultivated the woman I am today. In recognizing my in-laws, what a blessing it is to have you in my life. You have always been an advocate for me and the things I stand for. I must also acknowledge my big sister, a woman who is a fighter and survivor. Thank you for demonstrating what it means never to shy away from a fight. Your ability to survive is my reason to try. Finally, to my brothers and sisters, you have challenged and motivated me. I revisit your personal stories to become uplifted, comforted, and inspired. Thank you!

To my committee, thank you so much for your direction and willingness to help. Dr. Bingham, you are such an amazing woman and professor. Thank you for your courtesies and willingness to allow me to grow under your leadership. Dr. Witkowsky, you are so skilled and a pleasure to work with. I thank you for your honesty, trust, and ability to help me get where you and I both know I am headed. Dr. Morris, your welcoming spirit, was helpful after some of the hectic weeks in this process. Thank you for sharing your family’s experiences and expertise to prepare me for my next step. Dr. Tuitt, I am humbled in your presence. You have diligently advanced your field and remained committed to serving others along the way. Taking the time to remember and support me is not taken lightly. Dr. Coakley, you have advanced my network, my experiences, and my way of understanding my passion for sport. I am excited about each interaction to learn from you. Also, Dr. Mendez, you have served our cohort well while
working as our Department Chair. Thank you for the care and concern you showed us all, personally and professionally. Lastly, Dr. Strawn, our interaction, although brief, was timely and critical as I completed my coursework. You were a phenomenal resource and functioned as a great leader worth modeling.

Finally, I am happy to acknowledge and thank the Black collegiate women athletes who contributed to this research study. I appreciate your time, honesty, and willingness to connect with me regarding your dynamic experiences. Thank you for supporting me in this process and granting permission to speak on your behalf when you cannot. I wish you the very best of luck and opportunity to become the woman you aspire to be.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Young Black Women Student-Athletes and Exceptionalism

Demonstrating excellent cognitive ability, displaying leadership qualities, proving a sincere interest in succeeding professionally, and volunteering time and service position students as presumably attractive candidates when it comes to college admission recruiters. One example of such a candidate is a young Black woman (YBW) student-athlete who proves herself as exceptional among high school peers through performances in athletic participation that result in merit scholarships for college. Parents and coaches groom many of these student-athletes as adolescents for an opportunity for recruitment to college once they have been identified as athletic and accepting of the identity of student-athlete. However, this distinction of exceptionalism explains the individual circumstances and characteristics of the student-athlete, the society in which they function, and the history that connects them.

The primary basis of this research is to explore how YBW student-athletes operate within layered derivatives of the ideology of American Exceptionalism before and during the time they transition to being Black collegiate women athletes. At the time of this research, the nation’s greatest college admissions scandal surfaced, where college athletic coaches and administrators allegedly accepted millions of dollars to help admit undeserving students to a collection of elite colleges and universities (Pennington, 2019). By portraying these students as recruited and admitted high school student-athletes, this scandal highlights the economic disparities affecting access to higher education (Pennington, 2019). An awareness of this scandal, although not wholly investigated at
this time, provides a current and tangible anchor for the argument supporting the role of exceptionalism in America.

American exceptionalism has been associated with imperialism and White supremacy but has also managed to construct the dynamics of political influence on the subordination and exploitation of internal minorities (Lopez, 2008). Further, Black Exceptionalism describes the assimilation of Black minorities in the United States. The idea speaks to the difficulty faced by Black people to assimilate into a mainstream society based on their skin color, making them the most visibly distinctive group in the United States (Basañez, 2014). As an example, Black Male Exceptionalism has operated as an appeal for intervention, advocacy, and programming based on the premise that Black men and boys are endangered due to faring more poorly than any other group in the United States (Butler, 2013). These claims are based on social measures of high school and college graduation, incarceration, life expectancy, rates of poverty, and marriage (Butler, 2013). Criticism of this theory is that this premise obscures the problems of Black women.

Higginbotham (1997) introduces the concept of Black Female Exceptionalism as a way to suggest that to create inclusive spaces is to progress past the notion of treating women of color as “exceptional” in relation to White women. Celebration and discussion of Black women for outstanding contributions in their given field negate the experiences of the undifferentiated mass. This limited observance for praise creates an understated and sometimes false sense of success for students as an example. Instead, it communicates that the accomplishments of some successful Black women despite various obstacles in their experiences contradict the failures of other Black women due to
faulty culture, lack of motivation, and personal shortcomings (Higginbotham, 1997).

Black Female Exceptionalism challengers argue that the only thing separating women of color from others is an opportunity (Manigault-Bryant, 2015). Butler (2013) highlights the dearth of philanthropic programs that support Black women and girls funded in manners similar to their male counterparts and found that besides the Schott Foundation, which works to highlight barriers that keep girls from attaining academic and career success, most programs for Black women are self-help or networking organizations.

Minority women expect inclusion based on proven merit, accumulation of credentials, and the ability to contribute to the betterment of the organization (DuMonthiere, Childers, & Milli, 2017; Kaba, 2017). In this study, I explored the collegiate athletic recruiting experiences of YBW student-athletes to predominantly White institutions of higher education to better understand this expectation. I do this using a critical phenomenological examination of how Black collegiate women athletes experience and perceive how gender, race, and social identity as a student-athlete shape their college or university choice. By depicting YBW student-athletes against the characteristics of exceptionalism, recognizing them as different from the norm based on their athleticism, and symbolic of the effects of oppression and marginalization within a nation, I can contribute to the body of literature by using this critical research design. Doing so may improve the scholarship of inclusion in education, sport, and leadership and may define the realm of Black women’s experiences and its impact on organizational teams, philanthropic initiatives, and policy agendas. To better describe the experiences of these students, I need to clarify the demographic categorization label of Black.
Identifying and Categorizing “Black”

Self-identification is the only determinant of how one is federally categorized when it comes to official racial classification, with the exception that parents determine it for children (Prewitt, 2018). Within this current system, there is no subcategory for Black, which acts as an all-inclusive group accounting for recent immigrants and African Americans alike. Therefore, when focusing on the role of identity, I found it challenging to use the term “Black” when I meant African Americans and African Americans when I was speaking more generally about the African diaspora. Race and ethnicity carry significant intellectual and political baggage and often contested within and across groups (Sandefur, Campbell, & Eggerliing-Boeck, 2004). The challenge within the African American community related to racial identity is the changing demographics in the United States. Waters (1991) describes that the rule of hypodescent or “one-drop rule” of the early 20th century, functioned to keep non-Black ancestral history from influencing present identifications of Black people. Some dilemmas with this system of identification and categorization surface when individuals who share multiple racial parentage and desire to affirm mono or biracial identities and in some cases, racially transcendent and situationally shifting identities. Another challenge arises from the immigration of people of African descent from Africa and the Caribbean. Changes in self-identification among generations of this population vary but are often inaccurately classified as Black or African American depending on who does the classifying (Waters, 1991).

Carter-Francique and Flowers (2013) explain that racial categorization (ex. Black, Hispanic) is based on shared biological traits. Further, this categorization uses an expression of power hierarchy among groups as a social construction that aids in the
continuance of hegemonic ideologies that promote race-based discrimination. Ethnicity (ex. African American, Mexican American), unlike race, considers “shared cultural traditions such as language and customs more aligned with nationality” (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013, p. 74). Furthermore, Ratna and Samie (2017) point out that “Black” and “Women of Color” (WOC) hold distinct cultural and political meanings for people in America. For example, the marginalization of African American women in the United States have influences on their development, interactions, and perspectives based on their race, gender, and social class (Carter-Francique, 2018).

Considering the presence of international recruiting in college athletics to American colleges and universities and the small number of student-athletes on those campuses, in this research, I use the term Black as it is used in scholarship typically referring to African Americans. I recognize that this demographic and other women described as “minority” or “Women of Color” are “othered” in the way Ratna and Samie (2017) present it. Recognizing Black women student-athletes within this “othered” group asserts that “despite the differences within and between groups, they nevertheless possess agency, and resistive power which unites their struggles for visibility, representation and acceptability in/through sport in physical cultures” (Ratna & Samie, 2018, p. 4). In this study, I name specific racial or ethnic groups when scholarship points to them and within the analysis and findings in chapter 4.

**Problem Statement**

Actions taken by individuals show consequences embedded in the cultures that produce them and sometimes require recognition and explanation to avoid misinterpretation of the underlying causes (Fong, 2014). A multi-level approach
functions to better understand the decision-making process of the targeted higher education recruit who identifies as a young Black woman student-athlete. I first examined the matter on an individual or micro-level to conceptualize the overall experiences of high school-aged YBW and make sense of their identity intersections created by race, gender, academic, and athletic identities. Then a macro-level or systemic perspective is offered to present the historical significance and present-day collegiate climate for Black collegiate women athletes. These levels connect through the examination of the high school student’s experience of the NCAA recruiting policy and processes, also referred to as the meso-level in this research study. Considering the identity intersection of student-athletes facilitates an understanding of the decision-making process for the applicant as it relates to the recruiting process and future opportunities within or because of higher education.

Crenshaw (2015) said that “Intersectionality is not primarily about identity; it’s about how structures make certain identities the consequence of and the vehicle for vulnerability” in a 2015 Washington Post interview titled Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait. By defining Intersectionality and its relationships to other social theories and racially motivated movements, I review the political structures surrounding education attainment and opposition that targets the alleged bonds of Intersectionality and its effect on ethnic “other” women and their college recruiting experience. Identifying as a student-athlete brings with it some power dynamics within certain circles where privileges, resources, and first opportunities are offered based on athletic merit rather than on class privilege or wealth and work within a system in which such persons are rewarded and advanced (Mijs, 2016). Student-Athlete Identity (SAI) is an identity that has its own need
for development (Harris et al., 2015). Whereas emerging adults are already engaged in a variety of developmental tasks such as identity formation, becoming personally competent, developing interpersonal relationships, and planning for the future (Chickering & Reissr, 1993; Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013).

By recognizing the historical impediments of the biological identity intersections of race, gender, and the social identity of student-athlete as it relates to Black women, this research aims to capture the true essence of pursuing higher education for this demographic and its relationship to selection factors around and within organizations.

Scholarship on the topic of recruiting Black women tends to fall into the areas of specific academic programs in higher education for students (Morton & Parsons, 2018) and faculty (Kaplan, Gunn, Kulukulualani, Raj, Friend, & Carr; 2018), service professions like counseling (Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, Lloyd-Hazlett, 2018) and teaching (Farinade-Wu, 2018), health research participants (James, Harville, Efunbumi, Babazadeh & Ali, 2017) and experiences on college campuses (Patton & Croom, 2017) among others. Meanwhile, research on the recruitment of athletes can be found to support the relationship between recruiter characteristics and recruiting outcomes (Magnusen, 2011; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, Ferris, 2014), international student-athlete recruiting process (Jara, 2015), and the recruitment of athletes as business professionals (Alix, 2017). Czekanski and Barnhill (2015) developed a twenty-eight-point list of intrinsic and extrinsic decision factors for recruited student-athletes accounting for their gender and financial aid needs but not for their race. Students representing the sport of football heavily influenced their research study findings.
Chawansky (2008) points out that there has been little analysis of gendered nature recruiting and the rarity of women’s sports stories. Most of the scholarship on woman college student-athletes’ experiences have a foundation in sexual harassment, body image, self-esteem, and academic performance (Brackenridge, 2000; Harrison, Stone, Shapiro, Yee, Boyd & Rullan, 2009; Varnes, Stellefson, Janelle, Dorman, Dodd & Miller, 2013). However, little research has followed the specific experiences of Black woman student-athletes who have a unique set of challenges. This work expands the research on ethnic “other” women in sport as discussed by Ratna and Samie (2017) and is necessary to help fill the research gap about the transition from YBW student-athletes in high school to Black collegiate women athletes at universities.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purposes of this critical phenomenological study are to use the benefits of a multi-level approach to provide a tool to progress diversity and inclusion efforts for all people within systems regardless of their combination of identity intersections. Next, it describes the challenges in the recruitment process and retention of “othered” women in organizations. Finally, it examines and updates the description of the multifaceted lived experiences of YBW student-athletes as a group, recruited to take part in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletics. The NCAA dedicates resources to the wellbeing and lifelong success of college athletes by operating through their core values that include inclusive cultures, respect, leadership, and the allowance of intercollegiate athletics to function as a supporting role in the higher education mission (NCAA.org). The NCAA strategic plan, drafted in 2004, expected changes for today that would result in demographics and trends where women would be more interested and
qualified for a college education than men and in political and social values related to advocacy, safety, and personal freedoms. The priority of this research is to help explain what challenges may exist in recruiting and indirectly retaining Black female representation in various organization types using higher education as a model. The secondary priority is to contribute to the dialogue surrounding diversity and inclusion initiatives by supplying analysis of complex issues using the Cynefin sense-making framework as a guide.

This research study uses a critical phenomenology research design to accomplish the goals of the research mentioned above. Participating as a college student-athlete has the potential to complement or impede self-exploration to develop a clear sense of self-commitment and direction depending on the support in place for that student (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013). It becomes imperative to consider the historical tribulations of Black women to conceptualize their reasons for seeking higher education and using merit-based scholarships to do so while managing the challenges and strategies used to distinguish themselves among the majority population today. Critical phenomenology as a research method is then justified because it offers me the capability to critique the outer regions of this topic by critically analyzing the primacy of Black women student-athletes’ specific social identities and their relationship to power or marginalization within society in the context of higher education. Also, it expands the possibilities of conditions lived by Black women student-athletes through a process of reduction resulting in the emergence of new options and layered perspectives. Finally, it provides openness to the opportunities to develop actionable procedures based on the world revealed in the description (Salamon, 2018).
In this critical phenomenological research study, I strive to bridge the gap in research between secondary and higher education experiences of YBW student-athletes. Describing the recruitment experience of YBW student-athletes offers a greater appreciation for the realities faced by members of the higher education student body. Findings from this study may have implications for the official college athletic recruiting process. Also, in this study, I seek to use the college recruiting experiences of Black collegiate women athletes at NCAA Division I institutions to influence diversity and inclusion initiatives in education by describing the student-athletes’ decision-making process and rationale. To create a critical analysis, I contrasted the experiences of women across the nation’s colleges and universities to explain the patterns and varied experiences of this group. The research questions guiding the study are:

1) What is the experience of young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions (PWIs)?
   a) How do young Black women student-athletes recruited to PWIs perceive athletic departments’ consideration of their experiences during and after the recruiting process?
   b) How do young Black women student-athletes experience and understand the college recruiting process?
   c) How does this experience and understanding of the recruiting process inform or shape the college experience for young Black women student-athletes?
Overview of Methodology

This research study uses a critical phenomenological research design. It relies on qualitative research methods that focus on hearing the voices of Black collegiate woman athletes (Stanley 2016; Withycomb, 2011). The Black feminist body of knowledge “resists oppression and the ideas that justify it” (Collins, 2002, p. 22). Critical phenomenology investigates historical and social factors and addresses experiences of marginalization and oppression and attempts to make visible how negotiating social and political systems come to structure this reality. Critical phenomenology also reflects on the quasi-transcendental social structures that form experiences of the world possible and meaningful as well as allows us to engage in restructuring the world in a tangible way that generates new and liberates possibilities for significant experience and existences (Gunther, 2004).

The setting for this study is NCAA Division I colleges and universities. Using purposeful and snowball sampling of students, I recruited ten current Black collegiate women athletes who have experienced the college athletic recruiting process. As is typical in phenomenology, this study uses two qualitative methods of data collection: in-depth interviews, and qualitative narratives.

Finally, I use the critical research theory of Intersectionality to examine historical and societal influences on current circumstances of multiple identities but also the expectation of its findings to result in social justice advocacy. Consequently, I use critical phenomenological analysis processes and then apply the Cynefin Framework methods. This framework categorizes the process of decision making and helps to explain how people perceive and make sense of simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic situations.
to make decisions (Snowden, 1999). My use of the Cynefin Framework concentrated on the complex conditions because of the double complexities of the decision (college choice) and the decision-maker (YBW student-athletes). This space is particularly crucial to this research study, considering its functions for problems that must be found and evaluated in hindsight. In other words, it helps gain an understanding of a situation or event after it has developed, which is the case for the Black collegiate women athletes participating in this study.

**Rationale and Significance**

Black women suffer the consequences of gender and racial ideologies (Coakley, 2014). Historically, their experiences have been omitted, devalued, and misinterpreted (Collins, 2000). Understanding the experience of Black women in sport offers value to not only the student-athlete (Birrell, 1989; Coakley, 2014; Withycombe, 2011) but also on a larger scale by providing perspective to institutions of higher education looking to attract high-performing minorities. A recent analysis of highly skilled occupations in fields such as law, medicine, science, academia, and management show a positive relationship between diversity and the value of goods and services produced in the United States (Hsieh, Hurst, Jones & Klenow, 2013) and partially explains the strategic agenda of recruiting for diversity in education and business. Findings from this study are expected to be influential in advancing recruiting strategies on systemic, process, and group levels, which helps to communicate and position institutions and organizations within various markets appropriately. Straightforwardly, this research is essential for those invested in inclusive environments and need understanding the role identity plays in college and university experiences.
Terms

**African American**: A person who identifies as being of non-Hispanic origin and sharing cultural traditions such as language and customs aligned with their African heritage and American nationality.

**Black**: A person who racially identifies as being of African descent.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)**: A member-led organization dedicated to providing a pathway to opportunity for college athletes (NCAA.org).

**Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)**: Institutions of higher education in which Whites account for more than 50% of student enrollment.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In the next chapter, I synthesize the research that influenced this study. This synthesis reveals what is known on the topic while exposing gaps in the literature surrounding student-athlete identity for YBW students and their perception of their experiences upon arriving on college campuses. Chapter 3 details the research setting and places it in the context of the research questions. Methods used for research participants follow, including rationales for sample size and selection. I discuss the established system of data collection and plan for analysis. Lastly, I confront issues of trustworthiness, along with the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 4 organizes and reports the main findings and essential collected qualitative data in preparation for the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations found in chapter 5.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two discusses current and relevant scholarly research that investigates the experiences of YBW student-athletes. It begins by defining the phenomenon of exceptionalism and its relationship to the identity intersections that YBW student-athletes face. Sections then detail the exceptional circumstances of recruits and considerations of trends at institutions of higher education directly affecting Black women students and NCAA Division I athletic programs. Next, I discuss the theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Organizational Culture to explain how the research problem shows up in various settings informed by history and society. The concluding section introduces my use of the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities as a conceptual model based on the Cynefin Framework. A detailed explanation of the Cynefin Framework is within the data analysis section of Chapter 3.

Making a Case for Exception

Exceptionalism is a theory that underscores the uniqueness of a nation or region and is the condition of being different from the norm (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2019). As a concept, American Exceptionalism appoints the belief and practices that explicitly or implicitly regard the United States as exceptional rather than as different (Gordon, 2013). Initially, American Exceptionalism referred to the outstanding conditions of a) favorable geographic location; b) abundant (although already inhabited) land; c) equality of living condition; d) voluntary association; e) land that is continuously replenished by self-selected individuals of existing nations relocating to join America (minus slavery); and f) favorable timing that created the opportunity for this claim.
These variables of location, equality, association, and choice are also useful when examining the experience of minorities within the United States because of their impact on racial categories. Racial categories influence both the life chances and opportunities of individuals within societies, as well as the shared social institutions of family, education, economic institutions, and government.

*American Exceptionalism and the Remains of Race* (Fong, 2015) compares the political identity of the race on United States democratic foundations and the advocacy for the multicultural community. The author explains that obtaining the constitutional promise of a “more perfect union” for a multicultural society today, would mean to acknowledge the United States “as a nation uniquely devoted to individual liberty, opportunity, and freedom, both set down in advance and dependent upon transcending the country’s racial divides and its racial history” (p. 3). Two trends have emerged over the debates on race (Fong, 2015). The first views race as a form of ethnicity and hyphenated identity such as African-American or Italian-American, creating the illusion of position that all are equal and distinct in their own right. The second trend views race as too corrupted a “language,” creating a negative view within any modern-day multicultural accommodation. Fong (2015) summarizes by describing how emptying racial identity of distinctive meaning in the first trend equalizes race as that of an outcast in the second.

ESPNW published an article, *All the Stars: Black women dominating in sports* (Marable, 2018), describing the impact of Black woman athletes over the past 20 years as history-making and barrier-breaking. Marable (2018) describes their presence as often being revolutionary, where her existence is both fascinating and disruptive. Meanwhile, Carter-Francique (2018) recounted the feats of Black woman professionals in college
athletics in 2017, citing National Championships earned and a Director of Athletic position held. YBW student-athletes prove exceptionalism among their peers and within their communities. Choosing to frame YBW student-athletes against the definition of exceptionalism allows me to juxtapose the celebration of a presumed power on a college campus as a student-athlete and oppression as it relates to their multiple marginalizing identities of race and gender. Recruited student-athletes have satisfied the definition of being unique and superior based on their athleticism compared to their peers. Concurrently, they directly experience the exception that results from neglect based on their gender and racial categories.

In summary, Black women student-athletes recruited to attend various colleges and universities may have an illusion of their position based on their invitation. Deciding to omit discussion and scholarship on their marginalizing identities further diminishes their experiences and ability to contribute in that space. The next section of this chapter describes the conditions of students and settings related to the academic recruitment of YBW student-athletes looking to develop through higher education and understand how fixed exceptions compound to influence their decision making when it comes to college choice.

**Exceptional Circumstances for Young Black Women Student-Athletes**

Issues facing YBW begin with socially constructed uniformity such as preference and style of dress, skin color, and hair as well as family history, sexual orientation, spirituality, age, and marital status (Commodore, Baker & Arroyo, 2018). Issues also include the quality of their K-12 education, first-generation status, a transfer from community college, and overall family support of education (Berry & Asamen, 1989;
Henry, Butler & West, 2012). Social constructs explain meanings or concepts assigned to objects and environments and people’s understanding of their relationships and interactions with these expressions or identities (Social Constructionism, 2019). Gender, for example, represents boundaries created and reinforced by society to construct masculine or feminine characteristics built and strengthened by society to define their proper roles. This concept of social constructionism holds that the distinguishing factors of self-identity shape the categories of Black collegiate women (Kang, Lessard, Heston & Nordmarken, 2017). Also, it describes how these same women categorize themselves to navigate their everyday experiences.

A review of the literature dedicated to circumstances related to YBW recruited for participation in college athletics connects the conditions of YBW in the high school setting with the experiences of the Black collegiate women they become. Areas of relevance to this research study begin with psychological stressors, primarily in the form of microaggressions, that impact Black youth and Black student-athlete identity development. NCAA recruiting policies and procedures bridge the gap of the young Black woman student-athlete with the current higher education climates related to Black collegiate women and the sports culture they experience there. Collectively this foundation encourages the role of advocacy in developing these research findings, sports culture, and academic climate further. Gaining an understanding of the relationship among these variables provides insight into the intricacies this subset population of students faces.
Microaggressions as Psychological Stressors in Educational Settings

Microaggressions are covert or underhanded forms of identity-based aggression (Levchak, 2018). These microaggressions are a form of psychological stressors that affect Black girls and women daily. The concept of psychological stressors sheds light on matters of adaptation, dysfunction, and disease (Monroe & Slavich, 2007). Monroe and Slavich (2007) use Selye’s (1976) definition of stress “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand” to help define that of stressors as “that which produces stress” (p. 279). They explain that there are factors believed to moderate the impact of psychological stressors ranging from environmental issues such as social support and more personal reasons like prior experiences and coping strategies. Developmental considerations have also been influential in responsivity to psychological stressors based on the idea that earlier exposure to stress renders the individual more susceptible to increasing lower levels of psychological stressors like microaggressions.

Gendered racial microaggressions experienced by Black women and girls are subtle and everyday nonverbal, verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one’s race and gender (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne-Huntt, 2010). Racial microaggressions in academic and social settings create negative experiences for students of color by attacking academic merit and portraying students of color as academically inferior while social microaggressions assume that these students do not belong in, and are a threat to, public campus spaces (Lee & Hopson, 2019). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found that racial microaggressions are present in higher education and exist on college campuses, specifically in academic spaces when faculty-student interactions are challenged by
faculty maintaining low expectations of them, instilling a sense of self-doubt. Also, racial segregation among in-class study groups of their peers adds to a feeling of diminishment by the nonverbal microaggressions perpetrated by their White counterparts, and finally, questions or assumptions about how these students gained university admission insinuating that affirmative action would be the only way this access could have occurred. In spaces outside of the classroom, Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) detailed discomfort in business schools, libraries, and hard science buildings. In social spaces, acts of subtle and overt racism, as well as double standards, were provided as evidence of the impact of microaggressions. Collectively, these types of microaggressions affect African American students and the counter-spaces African American students create to challenge them. Lewis and Neville (2015) settled on three core types of gendered microaggressions related to this research. They are a) projected stereotypes (objectification based on race and gender or other marginalizing identities), b) silencing and marginalization (perceived authority and/or intellect questioned or challenged in academic or professional settings also experiencing invisibility), and c) assumptions about styles and beauty (reduction based on communication, physical appearance and embodiment of cultural elements). Collectively, microaggression exists in many forms and potentially impact the daily experiences of YBW student-athletes to varying degrees (Litchfield, Kavanaugh, Osborne & Jones, 2018). Jordan (2010) summarizes the result of these types of microaggressions and others in nine themes as implications for planning and policy development (Fig. 2.1). This section outlines these forms of microaggressions and places them in the socio-historical context of academic and athletic settings.
Projected stereotypes. Projected stereotypes generate socially premised psychological threats that arise when minority populations are in situations or doing something for which a negative stereotype about their group applies known as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). For example, Shelvin, Rivadeneyra, and Zimmerman (2014) found that when considering racial identity awareness and stereotype threat on African American youth, children in a classic stereotype threat condition performed more poorly on an academic task compared to their peers who tested in a no threat condition. Awareness of stereotypes and Black identity moderated the stereotype threat effect in this case. In another example evaluating the role of stereotype threat in athletic performance, Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley (1999) confirmed their hypothesis of stereotype
threat when comparing athletic performance success framed as diagnostic of sports intelligence versus that of natural athletic ability. Stereotypes perpetuate Black women on an interpersonal level in ways that objectify and reduces them to their race and gender (Lewis & Neville, 2015). In the United States, race, and gender work together in a way that both consciously and unconsciously minimizes the substantial efforts of Black women athletes through social stereotypes (Douglas, 2002). Social stereotypes can be described as those shared representations and beliefs about a particular social category that possess a combination of positive and negative connotations and can be both descriptive (how people are) and prescriptive in nature (how people should be) and may be activated by merely presenting the face of an individual (Sartore & Cunningham, 2006). Stereotypes have disenfranchised Black women from positions of leadership and authority. Rosette, Koval, Ma, and Livingston (2016) expand on this to explain that Black women are two degrees removed from the White male leadership prototype, which means that their performances tend to be evaluated more strictly because they were not able to benefit from at least one predominant identity of being White or male. Typically, the description of one of four abstract images – Mammy, Jezebel, Matriarch/Sapphire, and the Strong Black Woman (SBW) – paint the likeness of these women (Donovan, 2011).

Mammy. The Black body has been characterized as naturally different from other bodies since the days of slavery and is used in sport as a way of “othering” Black women athletes, and reinforces culturally constructed gender and racial stereotypes that influence individual and athletic experiences (Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Similarly, the “Mammy” image characterizes the working-class Black woman as a compliant, asexual, self-sacrificing, overweight woman whose caretaking and nurturing abilities are
without limits (Donovan, 2011). Traditionally, this image served the political, social, and economic interests of White America in that it offered evidence of humanity in the institution of slavery.

**Jezebel.** In contrast to the Mammy is the Jezebel, which portrayed Black women as promiscuous, lustful, and hypersexual and used to justify sexual assault and exploitation against them (Donovan, 2011; West, 2008; Withycombe, 2011). According to the report *Beating Opponents, Battling Belittlement: How African American Female Athletes Use Community to Navigate Negative Images* (Morgan State University, 2018), Black women athletes risk becoming “caricature images of themselves” (p 29). The Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes both have similarities in the way in which the Black body is “othered.” Indeed, this system of “othering” plays itself out in media through images of Black women athletes in positions of domination and aggression that exude masculinity that further depicts them as “mannish” (Withycombe, 2011, p. 480).

**Matriarch/Sapphire.** The most pervasive stereotypes towards African Americans are assumptions of temperament. In an article on Black women and leadership, labels of dominance, hostility, and anger are common stereotypes associated with them that function to create demanding team environments (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). The Matriarch/Sapphire stereotype contrasts the Mammy illustration in that it emphasizes domination, aggression, anger, strength, and toughness while minimizing nurturing and caring qualities (Donovan, 2011). Interestingly, Donovan (2011) calls for an embracing of the Matriarch label to help build strength to cope with the adverse effects of racism, limiting avenues of support, and justice. Overcoming trauma, harassment, violence, abuse, toxic stress from living in poverty, racism and sexism, create an image of being
hard-working, but this image can be intimidating (Graves, 2014; Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016).

**Strong Black woman.** While many of the stereotypes used to describe Black women have a negative connotation, strength is another stereotype assigned to this group of women (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). The contemporary Strong Black Woman (SBW) or superwoman theorizes to be a combination of the Mammy and Matriarch viewed as communal and empathetic of others (though often to her detriment) and as being strong and resilient. The SBW is an educated, intelligent, and upper and middle-class Black woman (Collins, 2002) who is ambitious and successful but without being overly domineering or aggressive (Donovan, 2011). Here, “strength” has two meanings referring first to physical strength, which is often seen as a hereditary trait of Black men and women (Alexander, Brewer & Livingston, 2005), and secondly as a product of the experiences of Black women as mothers, heads of households, and pillars of the Black community. Ironically, these characteristics have similarities to the role of the Mammy that began this section and created a closed-loop of accepted Black women types in the face of a society based on these stereotypes.

**Silencing and marginalization.** Marginalization is the process of pushing a specific group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity, or place in it (Syracuse, 2019). Research describing the marginalization of Black girls and women in the area of education stems from a call for a coalition of educational researchers who prioritize Black girls’ multiple realities to improve academic outcomes and schooling experiences (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Also, challenges aimed at the limits placed on the creation and implementation of policies that center
Black girls and women (Patton, Crenshaw & Haynes, 2016), and an emphasis on integrating more holistic approaches through frameworks comprised of connection, awareness, programming, and encouragement (Ricks, 2014). In the book *Pushout*, Morris (2016) details the consequences of silencing Black girls where they are “rendered invisible or cast as deserving of the mistreatment because of whom they are misperceived to be” (p. 12). Morris (2016) explains further the impact that this silencing and marginalization has on the development of identity and pursuit of professional and personal futures. The need to see and recognize the curiosity, independence, and discontent of Black girls is to complement African-American author Zora Neal Hurston’s claim that “If you are silent about your pain, they will kill you and say you enjoyed it” an ode to Black girls and women (Farmer, 2015). Both the book and quote summarize the role and pervasiveness of stereotypes and how they help to perpetuate the silencing or attempts to minimize the contribution of YBW and their choice to self-silence as a form of self-protection. Silencing children in distress occurs through four different social processes (Akello, Reis & Richters, 2010). To begin, victim-blaming or the avoidance of public expression of one’s emotional distress related to another to prevent drawing negative attention. For instance, sexual violations, like those alluded to in the Jezebel stereotype description, manifest when the girl or woman is convinced, she is responsible for not protecting herself, based on unspoken communal consensus.

Another method is mimetic resilience. Mimetic resilience describes how children stoically confront or conceal their suffering and rewarded with appreciation and praise, a strategy to enhance strength in a person. Black girls also adopt strategies of self-silencing as a defense mechanism. The Theory of Self-Silencing explains how self-silencing
behaviors involve inhibiting self-expressing from maintaining relationships and circumventing retaliation, and conflict (Jack & Dill, 1992). Abrams, Hill, and Maxwell (2018) explain that Black women and girls may self-silence by muting internal standards and by adhering to externalized self-perceptions, a suppressive behavior that makes them susceptible to depressive symptoms. Self-silencing manifests in four distinct acts. The first is by silencing the self where one does not directly ask for what they want or confess to others how they feel. Second is the divided-self or presenting a submissive exterior to the public despite feeling hostility and anger. Third is care as self-sacrifice, which manifests by putting the needs and emotions of others ahead of their own. Lastly, are the externalized self-perceptions. These perceptions happen when individuals evaluate themselves based on external cultural standards (Jack & Ali, 2010). Endorsing the strong Black woman (SBW) schema promotes strength as an asset while negating these liabilities of silencing (Abrams, Hill & Maxwell, 2018).

Finally, mirroring resilience presents the choice to hide one’s distress out of compassion for the suffering of others so as not to contaminate them (Akello, Ries & Richters, 2010). External silencing or self-silencing create expressions of emotional distress that manifest through somatic idioms (Jack & Ali, 2010). Somatic idioms are considered adaptive responses in circumstances where other modes of expression fail to communicate pain adequately or provide appropriate coping strategies used when Black girls and women have weak social support and limited opportunities to ventilate their feelings and seek help outside of their family household (Desai & Chaturvedi, 2017). Expressions like this lead to negative consequences for children’s health and avert
attention from social, economic, political, and moral causes of children’s suffering (Jack & Ali, 2010).

An example of societal silencing from 2017 describes a heightened degree of this type of suppression. Limits of punishment towards students had to be placed on schools for protests of the National Anthem by student-athletes – a trend initiated by professional football quarterback Collin Kaepernick to combat social injustices as summarized and described by the National Federation of State High School Associations (Green, 2017). His presence as an NFL quarterback influenced various athletic teams, coaches, and officials, on all levels of play around the nation to examine their position on extreme economic inequality and police brutality against people of color. Several premises justified these punishments (Green, 2017). One argument suggested that freedom of speech guarantees should not apply to students in the same way such rights operate for the public and that courts should defer to the judgment of schools in matters of discipline.

A second argument centered on the assumption that schools have broad authority to punish student-athletes because their participation in sports is a privilege, not a constitutionally protected right. Finally, that argument used policy to position that offenders were violating the explicit language of their school’s athletic codes of conduct by engaging in behavior that disrespected the country, its flag, the military, or the school in question. It is helpful to capture the experience of a young Black woman involved in this demonstration to place the concept of silencing in a real context. In 2017 a young Black woman student in Texas was expelled from her high school after refusing to stand for the American flag during the Pledge of Allegiance, explaining that her liberty and justice were not active in America that day (Croucher, 2018).
**Assumptions about style and beauty.** Gendered racial microaggressions can also take the form of assumptions about cultural ways of being, communication styles, and physical appearance like body types when it comes to the way that YBW shows up in the world (Lewis & Neville, 2015). White popular culture has created standards where attractive icons carry lighter body frames, lighter skin tone, and straighter hair that promote the criteria used to judge Black girls and women (Daufin, 2015). Even assumptions of style and beauty for YBW today derive by the rebellion of the entangled historical and societal beliefs that perpetuate the stereotypes about them.

**Cultural ways of being.** Culture derives its power both from the values and ideas communicated to young women and from young women’s experience in the culture (Duke, 2000). As an example, adolescents tailor their fashion, style, vernacular, or sexuality to reflect the music, media, and celebrities’ messages they consume. Society responds to their choices similar to how Black celebrities, entertainers, and athletes are ostracized when choosing to embrace Black culture publicly (Gammage, 2017). Popular culture has recognized and linked the patterns of cultural production, consumer consumption, and political stances to systems of stratification and power since the 1960s (Mukerji & Schudson, 2001). As a result, popular culture serves as a constant influence on the racialized and gendered identity construction of YBW who have different gender socialization experiences than White girls their age (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015).

Perceptions of Black girls and women are exaggerated characters, objectified personas, and belligerent personalities constructed through images presented within American popular culture. Television and film utilize problematic roles because of mainstream expectations (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). The music industry,
specifically within the hip-hop genre, disappoints when it endorses the representations of demeaned and exploited women. Finally, representations in print and advertising media suffer from dated characterizations; however, digital media formats help to redefine these images (Giesemann, 2016). There are expansive television representations of Black women, but a near absent account of Black women and girls in major media outlets in favorable societal accord (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). bell hooks (2015) describes the imagery of Black girls and women that applies: “Obviously, the dearth of affirming images of Black femaleness in art, magazines, movies, and television reflects not only the racist White world’s way of seeing us, but the way we see ourselves” (as cited in Gammage, 2017, p. 727). Cartier (2014) discusses the offering of new perspectives on the representation of Black women in media by using Nelson’s (2002) “Future Texts” as a concept to view texts and images that “reflect African diasporic experience, attend to the transformations that are the by-product of new media and information technology, and create original narratives of identity, technology and the future” (p. 151). Some of this could be satisfied through the representation of Black girls and women athletes in mass media. Bruening, Armstrong, and Pastore (2005) argue that an absence of media representation directly perpetuates the stereotypes about Black women, continues the silencing and marginalization of their experiences, and indirectly challenges the levels of sport participation by African American girls.

**Communication style.** Loud talk, aggressive language, and attitude characterize and singles out some Black female students (Lei, 2003). The construction of the Black female students’ loudness as a negative was a reiteration of a history of regulative norms that repudiate African American females as racialized gendered “Other” (p. 163).
Loudness is evidence of having fun and a strategy to make friends and get attention (Li, 2009). However, Fordham (1993) suggests that loudness reflects Black women's collective denial of socially proclaimed powerlessness. Collectively, the idea of being loud is more about expression to a degree of comfort and satisfaction about the joys and pain one may be experiencing. Sellers, Kupermine, and Dames (1997) provide a sporting example of this type of ridicule in their work that described the expectation for African American female athletes to refrain from raising their voices in a way that threatens university establishments. Their participants described a climate that expected them to “accept their position and fade to the background” (p. 97), even at the expense of sexual objectification or disregard for their priority to develop athletically in athletic spaces. This position contrasted their Black male counterparts who expected to affirm their place when they felt a sense of unjust resulting from a request made of them or negative behavior aimed in their direction (Bruening, Armstrong & Pastore, 2005).

**Physical appearance and body types.** Being judged by one’s hair or the notion that Black women’s natural hair being unbeautiful is not new (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Black hair styling is a political matter because of the indications it can extend about gender, social class, sexual orientation, political views, religion, and age (Bellinger, 2006). While hair politics may seem irrelevant to the field of education, Muhammad, and McArthur (2015) suggest that the topic should be of concern to those who care deeply about the social and academic worlds of Black adolescent girls. Black girls with natural hair navigate issues of self-esteem, identity development, and assessments of beauty while growing up in a social institution that limits the scope of how others might see them and how they come to see themselves (Phelps-Ward, 2016). Seaton and Tyson
Hair scrutiny generates much concern because “wearing one’s natural hair texture is an expression of racial identity among Black women which is devalued by the broader society” (p. 5). Hair scrutiny arises from Whites’ “curiosity” with Black natural hair texture, which may be naturally curly or kinky (Seaton & Tyson, 2018, p. 5). Hair issues for Black women connect feelings of identity, public perception, and how they feel about themselves daily (O’Neal, 2018).

Black girls are often more satisfied with their bodies and rate their overall attractiveness much higher than their White peers, specifying their preferred, larger body shape and size signify power and health among African Americans in general (Duke, 2000; Parker et al., 1995). The hyper-sexualization and objectification of Black girls and women partly because of their bodies is engrained in society when its members attribute sex as a part of the natural role of Black women and girls justifying a “voyeuristic gaze” on their bodies (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015, p. 138). The National Women’s Law Center describes the confessions of Black girls being kissed or touched without their consent while in secondary school (Davis et al., n.d.). A perception exists that Black girls and young women are less innocent and more adult-like, and therefore assumed to need less protection and nurturing (Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2018). The justification of sexual harassment towards Black girls and reprimands for “causing trouble” has been based on their style of dress, furthering their punishment rather than support (Crenshaw, 2018; Davis et al., n.d.). An outward expression or response to these assumptions results in “acting out” when they feel their needs overlooked or disregarded. Statistics show that 11.2% of all high school girls and 14.2% of all college women reported rape, and one in five Black women are raped in their lifetime (West & Johnson, 2013). Consequently,
these individuals are susceptible to mental health concerns, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, pain-related health problems, and low-self-esteem (West & Johnson, 2013).

A stigma exists around bodyweight for Black women that involve attitudes born out of perceptions that include laziness, incompetence, and gluttony and results in unequal and unfair treatment like social exclusion, bullying, teasing, and assault regardless of socioeconomic status (Daufin, 2015). Still, Duke (2000) found that most African American girls were uninterested in striving for the ideal feminine physique portrayed in teen-based media outlets. Some Black girls do suffer from trying to attain this image and resort to disordered eating practices like bulimia and anorexia but misdiagnosed because of how they “present with the disorders at higher weights than White females with the same diagnosis do” (Daufin, 2015; Konstantionovsky, 2014; Meraji, 2019). Physical appearance and body type impact the way YBW see themselves while providing a canvas for others to depict what they might imagine about who they are and who they should be.

Black teenage girls may measure beauty based on attitude and style, whereas White girls attribute their attractiveness to how thin they were (Parker et al., 1995). African American girls tended to evaluate themselves and others on character and personality rather than appearance, while White girls understood personality to be something a girl depended on if she were unattractive. Girls who described themselves in both feminine and masculine ways had higher levels of self-esteem (self-confidence derived from culture, society, others, and self) than those who only reported high racial identity perceptions (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Phelps-Ward, 2016; Seaton & Carter,
Black girls found themselves socially disadvantaged when it comes to social event invitations and dating since Black adolescent girls report fewer interracial and intra-racial dating opportunities (Commodore, Baker & Arroyo, 2018).

Physical appearance and body types are well-researched topics when it comes to women’s sports. Harrison and Fredrickson (2003) found a link between self-objectification among adolescent females aged 10-19 to mental health risks, including body shame, disordered eating, and depression. Students of color showed an increase in state self-objectification in response to “non-lean” female athletes, an expected result of preexisting feminine ideals. These participants disregarded the comparatively skinny look of the lean athletes as personally irrelevant but did link the more massive, fuller bodies of the “non-lean” athletes to thoughts of their body shape and size. An article penned by retired legendary NBA Basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (2015) expressed a concern that beauty standards translate in sports to women being more concerned with a marketable image than athletic ability resulting in a heightened awareness of body type and image.

**Depression and discrimination.** Discrimination resulting from gendered racism results in measures of depression, anxiety symptoms, and psychological distress at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Burton, 2017; Lewis, Cogburn & Williams, 2015; Williams, 2018). Black adolescents have vulnerabilities to reoccurrences of depression especially because they are less likely to seek support based on their perceived public stigma (anticipation of negative attitudes and possible prejudices from others) and self-stigma (an individual’s negative concept of self) (Rose, Joe, & Lindsey,
2011). These barriers to seeking mental health counseling hinder the success of YBW students (Commordore et al., 2018; Malcolm & Dowd, 2012).

Depression in teenagers manifests as irritability, sulkiness, troubles at school, and frequently coupled with co-morbid anxieties, eating disorders, and substance abuse, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2018). Findings from the National Women’s Law Center (2017) provided reports of traumatic experiences faced by Black girls in schools, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, trouble concentrating, and hearing racial slurs in school where they are rewarded socially for pretending that these issues do not exist. Finally, specific life events that predict depression in adult women are childhood physical or sexual violence, parental loss through divorce, death and incarceration, housing problems, humiliation, entrapment, and danger.

**Social Identity Development for Black Women Students and Athletes**

Identity development is a significant milestone during the traditional college-aged years of eighteen to twenty-three when the understanding of multiple layers of identity occurs, and the managing, developing, and making peace with those layers directs who these students are as individuals (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). Black collegiate women athletes build their identities through vulnerable racial and gender lenses because of their non-majority status that potentially exposes them to various oppressions (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). Societal and cultural issues tangle with feelings, thoughts, and fears of subordinate groups like those of the Black student-athlete. This section discusses racial, academic, and athletic identity development
each in the context of being a girl or woman, to conceptualize the identity development process of aspiring collegiate Black women athletes,

Social context matters in how people use identity to create space for their freedom since identity construction is a process designed through commonalities, loyalties, power struggles, and survival instincts involving an intuitive process that occurs from the inside out relating community, acceptance, and comfort (Collins & Blige, 2016; Lei, 2003). Concurrently, it is also a forced process from the outside in, that it imposes fixed categorizations and monolithic depictions (Lei, 2003). Although the theoretical framework guiding this work is not Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), I make mention of it because of the way it uses group membership to help describe the values and beliefs of a person (Michals, 2015). This research study prioritizes group memberships in the orders of gender, race, student, and finally, athletic identities because of the timing for how and when access or assignment to these traditional groups happen. The nature of Social Identity Theory centers on the natural tendency to socially categorize individuals into informal groups where members identify strongly with their group and find themselves against or different from others; a process known as in-group (us) and out-group (them) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Understanding the premise of Social Identity Theory offers perspective and rationale for the intersectional nature of identities creating the experiences of YBW student-athletes.

The essence of Social Identity Theory fits closely with this research study since it looks to explore the experiences of YBW student-athletes being recruited to PWIs, making available the factors of identity development and the role it plays on the in- and out-groups. Development during the teen years involves changes in personality, physical,
intellectual, and social growth (Cleveland Clinic, 2014). Even more so, the classification of athletes in an academic setting is an “intensive socialization experience” that can highlight in-group favoritism and out-group effects because of their subculture on school campuses (Hawley, Hosch & Bovaird, 2016 p. 58). The willingness to align individual identities, commitments and goals to sync with those of the group as described by Adler and Adler (1988) is what allows athletes to develop a strong sense of group solidarity with their sport programs and teams but further isolates them from the general student body experiences and perspective (Hawley, Hosch & Bovaird, 2016). The matter is complicated even more when introducing the variables of race and gender. Therefore, providing an overview of the relevant concepts surrounding racial, student, and athlete identities is critical in understanding their relationship to YBW students.

**Racial identity development.** The importance of an individual's racial group and the meaning attached to it can change, shift, and evolve, especially during the developmental period of adolescence (Chavous, Leath & Richardson, 2015). Identity results from micro-level individual and internal processes that occur as individuals encounter macro-level public policies and other external influences interpreted through the daily experiences of gender and racial differences (Renn, 2012). Specifically, Black identity encompasses the attitudes and beliefs that a young Black woman has about her belonging to the Black race individually, the Black race collectively, and her perceptions of other racial groups (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Growing up and living in a society that marginalizes minorities directly influences the racial identity of members of those various groups (Jackson III, 2012).
Racial Identity Development theory (RID) began by Hardiman and Jackson (1992) to understand group identity dynamics from a non-traditional point of view. RID consists of five stages: naïve, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization designed to demonstrate the linear progression from unconsciousness to consciousness, evidenced by deliberate manifestations (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992). This research primarily focuses on the stages of naivety and acceptance because of the ages in which they occur. First, the naïve stage begins at birth until about the age of three. During this time in life, there is little to no conscious of social identity or awareness of race. Currently, children experience vulnerability to logic systems and worldviews of their socializing agents, physical differences, and some cultural differences and are not “fearful, hostile, inferior or superior” (p. 40). Before transitioning to stage two, the acceptance stage, Jackson III (2012) explains how students begin to learn to adopt an ideology about racial groups, which requires internalizing messages that Black is less than White. Similarly, in this stage, Black children learn that there exists an application of difference when it comes to rules, laws, and authority (Jackson III, 2012).

The second stage of Racial Identity Development is acceptance. This stage accepts the standard social definitions of Blackness and Whiteness and encompasses the public and private lives of Black youth from their teenage years until they reach their mid-twenties (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992). During this time, they tend to struggle with racism and decision to navigate expectations placed upon them from society while also deciding to attach themselves to Black cultural influences not provoked by racism (Jackson III, 2012). Here the meaning-making process of identity development allows YBW to better articulate their identity development process by internalizing and
assigning meaning for themselves and testing beliefs and identity through interactions with others (Porter & Dean, 2015). The remaining three stages of Racial Identity Development include a) Resistance (the rejection of the racist definition of Blackness and Whiteness; b) Redefinition (suggesting the renaming of one’s racial identity), and; c) internalization (the integration of the redefined racial identity into all aspects of self) (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992). Understanding that progression through all stages of RID is not automatic but helps to contextualize YBW as they are developing from high school and throughout their college years.

**Academic identity development.** Student-athletes embracing the identity and role of a student reflects positively in measurable academic outcomes like grades, graduation, and degree attainment (Extra Point, 2013). Still, limited research exists that explores the role of academic identity in Black collegiate women and their academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is a link in a chain of circumstances related to achievement where prior measures of academic self-concept connect subsequent academic achievement beyond predictors of academic interest, school grades, and standardized achievement test scores (Marsh, Köller, Trautwein, Lüdtke & Baumert, 2005). The term academic self-concept refers to individuals’ knowledge and perceptions about themselves within an academic setting formed through experience by interpretations of her environment (Valentine, Dubois & Cooper, 2004; White, 2015). The related concept of academic self-efficacy refers to individuals’ convictions that they can successfully perform academic tasks at all designated levels (Schunk, 1991; White, 2015). Together, they represent academic identity throughout this research study.
The rationale for contributions of academic identity to achievement is the notion that students with favorable views of themselves may strive to behave and perform in ways to remain consistent throughout the various aspects of their lives (Valentine, Dubois & Cooper, 2004). Specific mechanisms for fulfilling motivation for consistency include self-affirmation (acting with the intent of demonstrating to oneself that one’s self-concept is accurate (Steele, 1988) and self-regulation (monitoring current behaviors for discrepancies with the self-concept and acting to reduce disparities by adjusting behavior) (Scheier & Carver, 1988). There are three criteria typically required for high achieving girls irrespective of their social class and ethnicity to successfully approach and exceed academic requirements (Skelton, Francis & Read, 2010). For starters, being highly regarded by their school, affords them high status and encourages their motivation and commitment to academic studies and programming to their benefit. Secondly, they need to feel a part of a supportive group where a vast majority of students discuss the importance of the class improving together. Lastly, girls tend to thrive when they have working relationships with their teachers (Skelton, Francis & Read, 2010). However, for some working-class and ethnic minority girls, there are problems in their engagements with teachers when interactions are constrained by their different positionings which contrast with the shared language, understandings, and experiences between their teachers and themselves (George, 2007; Skelton, Francis & Read, 2010).

Having a teacher of the same race can have positive impacts on a student’s attitudes, motivation, and achievement, and minority teachers may have more positive expectations for minority students’ success than nonminority teachers (Nelson, 2018). However, it appears as though there are supply-side and demand-side economic factors
impacting the Black teacher workforce. D’Amico, Pawlewics, Earley, and McGeehan (2017) reviewed the scholarship on the experiences of Black teachers in the labor market to better understand the lack of Black teacher representation today. Supply-side factors included individual barriers to entry like certification exams and the negative portrayals of Black teachers. Institutional patterns cited the lack of appeal for aspiring Black students to teacher education programs when they lack multicultural pedagogy, and that standardized test constricts diversity in the teacher labor market. They introduced demand-side factors focused on discrimination in teacher hiring, including limited job offers made, and workforce segregation. In 2015-2016, 76.6% or 2,930,000 teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, identified as women and 256,000 or 7% of teachers identified as Black, maintaining a similar distribution reported in 2003-04 (de Brey et al., 2019). Most recently, White teachers accounted for 98% of teachers at schools with less than 10% of minority students but made up only 45% of staff at schools with 90% or more minority students. Black girls experience power struggles with perceived authority or respect and have their intellect questioned or challenged in these academic settings, and as a result, often suffer from their perception of invisibility (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Browne-Huntt, 2010). Others silence Black girls, forcing them to adopt a defense mechanism of self-silencing to combat these power struggles in the various interactions and settings they encounter (Lewis et al., 2010).

Developing a positive internal “schooled” sense of self affirms a student’s position and capacity for academic success (White, 2015). The relationships between persistence, competence, career decision making, and self-realization describe how behaving positively and persistently influences one’s feelings of expertise, which in turn
influences academic and career decision making (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Tao Scott, 2008). Students who have troubled educational history may disidentify with school and create an alternate self that rejects school norms and embraces notions of devaluing considerations of achievement in the academic sense (Griffin, 2002; White, 2015). Therefore, a self-concept developed independently from school may contribute to a cycle of thinking and behaviors that do not support learning or progression, placing the student at higher risk for school failure. The current state of academic achievement for African American girls provides added context to these claims of academic identity.

**Academic preparedness.** In school, African American girls are below the national average on most measures of academic achievement. They are less likely to complete high school on time and are more likely to repeat an academic year and to receive poor grades (Graves, 2014). These outcomes create the “school to poverty pathway,” which results in limited job prospects, concentration in low-wage work, and their disproportionate representation in poverty. To illustrate this claim, I point to the most recent statistics of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) exam to describe the wide disparities in academic preparedness of high school students. Neither of these testing agencies provides data on Black women students. Test-takers are categorized by gender and by race. The mean SAT score for test-takers in 2017 was 1060. Black students averaged 941 while female students averaged 1050. The variables that favored the higher scores are male students (1070), Asian students (1181) Caucasian students (1118), and those whose parents’ highest level of education was a graduate degree (1177). The average ACT scores for all test takers were
21, where females averaged 21.1, and Black students averaged 17.1. Only 15% of ACT
takers score above 28, and 31% of ACT takers score below 17 (NCES, 2017).

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) claims that the SAT predicts first-year
college grade point averages (GPA) (Wolfe & Rossner, 1990). A standardized test like
the SAT, however, may be culturally biased when a minority population performs
consistently lower than the reference population of White students (Gould, 1995).
Cultural bias may also exist if individuals from different ethnic groups interpret critical
terms in many of the test items differently observed in the mean differences in test
performance (Freedle, 2003). Specifically, the verbal section of the SAT adversely affects
African Americans because some of the word types used to construct the more
straightforward analogy items are used less frequently by young Black children, primarily
from working-class homes (Freedle & Kostin, 1988). The increased amounts of verbal
context diminish the number of meanings that high-frequency words can have directly
impacted the scores for the verbal sections of the standardized test. Wolfe and Rossner
(1990) first argued about the gender bias of the SAT and similar exams that dictate
educational opportunities for women. They claimed that the sex-biased test hurt the
educational chances of young women by limiting entrance to four-year colleges and
universities, causing young women to lower their academic expectations. I would be
remised not to mention that while preparing this proposal, David Coleman, Chief
Executive Officer of the College Board which oversees the SAT exam, announced and
defended the new Adversity Score that adds context to the results such as high school and
neighborhood profile data (Coleman, 2019). Coleman (2019) wrote that this Adversity
Score is intended to allow any given student an opportunity to be seen and their achievements honored during the college admissions process.

Research has shown that the most common roadblocks to academic success for Black girl students are disparities in school discipline. African American female students face suspensions at a rate of 12%, six times higher than that of White girls in their peer group. (Smith-Evans, George, Graves, Kaufman & Frohlich, 2014). Nationally, Black students received 13.7% of out-of-school suspensions compared to 4.5% of Hispanic students and 3.4% of White students in 2013-14. Nearly ten percent (9.6%) of Black female students receive at least one out-of-school suspensions (de Brey et al., 2019). Also, Black girls interact with their teachers less than their White peers (Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2013). When taught by same-race teachers, racial minority students perform better on standardized tests, face lower rates of discipline, and more often assigned to Gifted education programs (Commodore, Baker & Arroyo, 2018). Milner IV (2006) adds that a combination of culturally responsive classroom management approaches, culturally informed relationships, mentoring and role modeling, parental connections, culturally congruent instructional practices and, counter-narratives on behalf of Black students are commonalities in creating this connection for academic success. Still, achievement gaps between Black and White students are class (lower and middle), adequate healthcare, and housing community related (Commodore et al., 2018; Rothstein, 2004).

Black students are five times more likely to attend high-poverty schools than White children, Black girls are six times more likely to be disciplined than boys or girls of any other race, and only one fourth of Black girls go on to get a four-year degree before being burdened with student loan debt (Nelson, 2018). In 2016, 24% of Black
children under the age of 18 were in families living in poverty based on the Supplemental Poverty Measure first used in 2011. This rate increases to 35% when there is a mother-only household connecting the association between family structure and child poverty. It is this Afrocentric epistemology that informs what Black students believe to be accurate about themselves and their experiences and reinforces the dominant ideologies that justify, support, and rationalize the interests of those in power as it relates to them (Alston, 2005; Jean Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Mullings, 1997; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Fordham (2016) draws on narrative findings to explicitly describe the widespread and disguised violence between girls of different races in school. The author uses the acronym ABC violence to explain the presence of aggression, bullying, and competition. She details the challenge that comes with sought after links to the norms and values of the dominant group experienced by Black girls with the analogy of headwinds. Headwinds are an invisible constant in the lives of females where they live, work, worship, study, or play, altering everything in their lives when they are away from home.

Despite the circumstances surrounding the current status of academic preparedness of Black high school girls, the findings of the *Unlocking Opportunity for African-American Girls* (Smith-Evans, George, Graves, Kaufman, & Frohlich, 2014) report concluded that African American girls aspire to be leaders more than any other group. The findings suggest that when these young women have the right opportunities, trauma-informed services, support, and encouragement to succeed, they will. Academic and athletic programs need a positive environment for learning, reduction in unfair and excessive discipline, reduction in gender-based bullying, harassment and violence, and support in their leadership development. All these variables are verifiable through
accountability to relevant data segments categorized by race and sex and direct philanthropic support for this specific student representative.

While schools can serve as empowering spaces for Black girls to develop self-knowledge and humanizing critical practices, these places also create intersections of institutional racism, and school discipline that impacts their schooling experiences and significant development through oppressive and dehumanizing spaces where survival and resistance are often antithetical (Kelly, 2018; Sue 2015). The impact of this type of experience on transitioning and succeeding in higher education settings is that first, there is a significantly higher risk dropout among Black high school girls in comparison to White high school girls (Martin & Smith, 2017). Second, it reaffirms to the student that she is more likely to experience exclusionary discipline outcomes for subjective reasons, a theme that emerges through the literature on identity development for Black girls and women (Annamma et al., 2019).

Marginalized students resist oppression using the tools available to them like social or digital media, and schools should foster and support the critical development of these adolescents by building safe, inclusive, and culturally sustaining learning communities (Kelly, 2018; White, 2015). Students understand more fully the complicatedness of identity when they can develop relationships with individuals who are different than they are. Working on tasks with a common goal helps to gain knowledge about their own and others cultural heritage, family background and life circumstances thereby connecting the individuals to the group; groups to society; and individuals, groups, and society all in connection to structures of power (Jones & Abes, 2013).
Table 1: White’s (2015) Influential Themes Influencing Academic Identity Development in African American Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity Development Themes Related to African American Girls</th>
<th>Characteristics of Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>A constant cause of microaggressions experienced in an academic setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight of stereotypes</td>
<td>Infuses with a socially greater responsibility to refute them and represent an entire ethnic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Old Me”</td>
<td>follows and describes the dual process of rejecting negative stereotypes among both Black and White peer groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>initiate action and decisions to make positive changes in school, creating a shift in awareness of personal self in contrast with previously learned norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Real Me”</td>
<td>allows the revealing of the “self” in school as “good” and consciously challenges societal norms of the “bad” African American student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I Am Strong”</td>
<td>marks the presence of mental strength to overcome challenges associated with intelligence as a reflection of one’s educational capacity and stands in opposition to stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing African American Girls in School</td>
<td>carried the responsibility of conscientious decision making about engagement in school by working to build representations of the self in class positively related to academic intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Academic Identity</td>
<td>understood as multifaceted and in schooling and life experiences and involved processing the meaning of feelings and emotions that occur within social exchanges within meaningful contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Athletic identity development.** Athletic identity is the degree to which an individual identifies with their physical role in sport (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). The concept of Athletic Identity established through the work of Brewer et al.
(1993) explains that sports participation and sports development of skills is especially important during adolescence when family influence dissipates, peer approval escalates, and group affiliation develops around sport (Payne & Isaacs, 2005). The advantages of improving the student’s athlete identity are that it 1) narrows outside activities to focus on athletic pursuits, 2) produces better athletic performances, 3) creates positive psychological consequences during training, and 3) enhances body image. Disadvantages include 1) social isolation, 2) decrease in social activity, 3) fewer other sources of self-worth, 4) disregarded alternative career options (the pursuit of professional play), and 5) identity is threatened by an injury that leads to changes in status and emotions (Horton & Mack, 2000).

The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale introduced by Brewer and Cornelius (2001) assists in understanding the psychological, emotional, and behavioral aspects of athletes. The scale provides insight into three dimensions. The initial dimension is social identity, the extent to which individuals view themselves as occupying socially recognized athletic roles. The next dimension, exclusivity, is the context to which individuals perceive that their self-worth and identity are determined only by performance in their athletic role. The final dimension, negative affectivity, is the extent to which individuals experience negative affect in response to undesirable outcomes in the athletic domain. Individuals with high athletic identity place immense importance on their success or failure in the athletic realm, and many attribute sizable portions of their self-worth to these accomplishments (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). The higher the athletic identity, the more severe depression and negative psychological responses are to traumas. Ryska (2002) adds, the higher the athlete identity, the higher the ego
orientation and lower perception of ability and demonstrated a proneness to avoiding challenges. Athletic identity has related to the risk of possible psychological distress when faced with an injury, sport disengagement, delayed career development, burnout, and anxiety (Visek, Hurst, Maxwell & Watson II, 2008).

**Sports participation.** For many children, sports are critical to their identity development and peer and familial relationships. The National Federation of State High School Associations survey results show a surge of 15,000 participants in girl sports programs over the 2017-2018 academic year, marking an all-time elevated level of participation for girls in scholastic sport. Overall, girls make up 42.7% of participants on national high school athletic teams, with the outdoor track being the number one participatory sport for girls (488,592) followed by volleyball, basketball, soccer, cross country, tennis, swimming/diving, competitive spirit, and lacrosse. The states with the highest number of participants were Texas, California, New York, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, and Minnesota.

In 2015, the women’s Sports Foundation published *Her Life Depends on It III*, which highlighted the fact that, even though youth sports are racially diverse, girls of color are significantly less likely than boys of color to participate in sports (Staurowsky et al., 2015). The lack of participation is because barriers to sports participation for Black girls begin early in life. At age six, over one-half of their White counterparts have participated in at least one sporting experience (Sabo & Velez, 2008). However, as Black girls mature, they face hindrances in three broad areas. First, familial roles impact sports participation (Graves et al., 2015). Children contribute as caretakers of younger siblings, may experience a lack of parental support, and are financial contributors to households.
Next, household financial commitments make it less likely for families to afford to enroll in private athletic programs. Instead, they must participate in programs offered through schools. Still, the limitations of school-based and club programming for girls demonstrate the gender gap in physical education in high school (Staurowsky et al., 2015).

Research has similarly supported the idea that sports participation is most often positively correlated with educational attainment and academic achievement, respect for the body (theirs and others), the role of physical activity on life-long health, and, positive reflections seen in self-confidence and self-esteem, (Bailey, 2006; Hartmann, 2008).

Coakley (2015) challenges the simplicity of this notion by explaining that it is not sports participation alone that leads to identifiable developmental outcomes but that outcomes are dependent on multiple factors. Among them are the sports played, the role of the stakeholders involved, the culture of sporting experiences and societal, personal, and cultural influence on them. As an example, Coakley (2014) describes the underrepresentation of Blacks (men and women) in most sports contested at the high school and college levels. Women of color saturate the most significant percentage of participants in basketball, outdoor track, and softball and rarely seen in a country club or field sport like lacrosse, golf, swimming, field hockey, tennis, and soccer.

Further, the overall sport participation rates in predominantly White communities in the United States are significantly higher and vast compared to those in most predominantly Black neighborhoods (Graves et al., 2015). Indeed, girls in the high minority and low-income schools have fewer opportunities to hold a “spot” on sports teams compared to Black boys and White boys and girls (Graves et al., 2015). Nationwide, 40% of heavily minority schools have significant “female opportunity gaps”
compared to 16% of heavily White schools (Graves et al., 2015). High school athletes are 25% less likely to smoke, 2% less likely to use cocaine, and 18.1% less likely to use psychedelic drugs. They also experience much lower rates of high-risk sexual behavior and pregnancy compared to their non-athlete peers. Also, they report a better body image and overall higher quality of life. They have a 7% lower risk of obesity 20 years later, while obesity rates remain high for children of color (Staurowsky et al., 2015). Black boys tend to integrate into suburban settings easier because of the more significant opportunities to play sports that create an integrated experience different than that of Black girls (Commodore et al., 2018).

Young black woman student-athlete identity development. This research study critically examines the role of identity in the decision-making process of YBW during the collegiate athletic recruiting process. This approach to understanding these women’s experiences considers the socio-historical context on the development of their identity. Erickson’s Theory of Identity Development (1958, 1963) helps describe how setting and age influence identity development. It conceptualizes the idea that identity development is a lifelong and intergenerational project that reaches across histories of individuals, families, cultural communities, and societies. The process delivers an opportunity to focus on both the resources and challenges of identity development in the individual, social, community and institutional contexts like those previously described for YBW (Cooper, Gonzalez & Wilson, 2014). Four themes emerged from the work of Porter and Dean (2015) that contribute to the identity development of YBW students. First academic support systems made up of relationships with faculty members, African American women’s group, and socially, culturally, and academic organization involvement.
Second, maternal, and familial influences that are support systems primarily grounded in a mother’s ability to shape the socialization processes and spiritual journey of Black college women. Familial order and the role of other family members also help to create this support system. Third, the ability to articulate racial identity through self-awareness, usage of self-identifying terminology, and personal definitions, that challenges stereotypes and provides points of empowerment. Finally, significant interactions with other Black women as a necessary system of support. While these students are maturing towards womanhood through and beyond their collegiate experiences, it is crucial to conceptualize the gendered and racial identities of collegiate Black discussed in the second section of this chapter. Jones and Day (2017) considered that Black women prioritize their intersectional identity in many ways and, theoretically, defined four profiles of gendered racial identities for Black women. These profiles illustrate the significance, and qualitative meaning women assign to their membership within Black and woman social groups. Table 2 provides an overview of the characteristics associated with each.

Table 2: Jones and Day’s (2017) Black women gendered-racial identity profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intersectional Engaged</th>
<th>Race Progressive</th>
<th>Intersectional Aware</th>
<th>Gender Expressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>views race and gender as similarly and moderately important</td>
<td>Higher levels of racial centrality compared to gender centrality</td>
<td>Recognizes how she is marginalized but prioritizes addressing injustices</td>
<td>Gender centrality higher than racial centrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal evaluation: inner strength</td>
<td>ranks identity on how she is perceived assuming she is seen as Black first.</td>
<td>Personal evaluation: Inner strength</td>
<td>Personal evaluation: Inner strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Engagement: overcoming</td>
<td>Personal evaluation: inner strength</td>
<td>Identity engagement: Nurturing</td>
<td>Personal evaluation: Privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal evaluation: double jeopardy</td>
<td>Identity engagement: nurturing of thier people</td>
<td>Societal evaluation: double jeopardy</td>
<td>Personal evaluation: Privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus: overcoming doubly oppressive experiences</td>
<td>Societal evaluation: double jeopardy</td>
<td>Focus: nurturing one’s own community compared to those in Intersectional Engaged group</td>
<td>Identity engagement: Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements: rich cultural background</td>
<td>Acknowledgements: Constant defense of “self” and individual actions inside and outside of her race</td>
<td>Acknowledgements: the Intersectionality of one’s own experiences</td>
<td>Acknowledgements: strength and that they are the epitome of beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anprivileges associated with Black womanhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a)Distancing oneself from societal evaluations creates overall self appraisal firmly rooted in the privileges of Black womanhood more so than others.

b)Focus: nurturing ones family and specifically contributing to the nurturance of Black women and girls.

a)Acknowledgements: strength and that they are the epitome of beauty
**Black student-athlete identity conflicts.** The role of racial identity plays an essential part in Black student-athlete development (Bimper, 2014). However, research over the last twenty years on racial identity and athletes has primarily focused on Black men. Regardless of gender, however, student-athletes experience identity conflicts through interactions with academic faculty, athletic department staff, coaches, and teammates where their exclusion of opportunities within team activities and development through extracurricular activities outside of athletics collide (Lu, Heinze & Soderstrom, 2018). Efficacy shapes identity, and as student-athletes excel in one area, the positive reinforcement they receive leads to identifying more strongly with that role.

YBW and Black collegiate women navigate various identity conflicts (Means, 2011). For instance, gender best predicted identity status achievement. Identity Status refers to Erickson’s eight-stage of psychosocial development (identity vs. identity role confusion where the concepts of exploration (the search for a revised and refined sense of self) and commitment (the choice to pursue a specific set of goals, values, and beliefs are determined) (Anthony & Swank, 2018).

Gender and athletic identity create conflict in circumstances where a higher athletic identity connects to worse mental health and wellness outcomes for women student-athletes (Lu, Heinze & Soderstrom, 2018). For instance, high school female athletes with high athletic identities are among the most susceptible to experiencing significant emotional trauma following season or career-ending injuries (Padaki et al., 2018). They tend to experience symptoms that extend beyond the fear of injury and include trouble sleeping, poor concentration, numbness, and avoidance of speaking about the injury. The pursuit of continuing to participate in sport is questioned since female
athletes are less inclined to have athletics as the sole focus of the overall identity due to the lack of professional opportunities compared to their male counterparts who participate in high revenue sports. However, Anthony and Swank (2018) found that athletic identity levels were not significantly different based on gender in the context of collegiate athletics.

Regarding racial identity and athletic identity development, Brown, Farrell, and Zorn (2007) found that they may develop along parallel pathways while Anthony and Swank (2018), found a positive relationship between the two. Bimper, Jr. (2014) suggests that higher measures of athletic identity predict lower grade point averages in men in high revenue sports, yet no evidence presented confirms the same for women. Finally, when it comes to race and academics, scholars suggest that considerations of racial identity development measures supplement the assessment of academic self-concept in African American youth (Grantham & Ford, 2003; White, 2015).

Several studies have sought to uncover the relevance of physical activity on academic performance at the high school level and found there to be a positive correlation between academic ability in math and English, greater engagement in homework hours, and higher overall GPA’s for high school athletes (Field, Diego & Sanders, 2001). In a study on interscholastic sports and advanced placement (AP) enrollment, findings also showed overwhelming support for the claim of positive associations between sports participation and academic achievement. The same study concluded that schools with higher participation rates (male and female) in school-sponsored sports also increased students’ (male and female) Advanced Placement (AP) enrollments (Veliz & Shakib, 2014). Brown, Farrell, and Zorn (2007) claim that for many
African American male student-athletes, the development of racial identity and an athletic identity may evolve along parallel pathways. Chavous, Leath, and Richardson (2015) argue that although Black youth (boys and girls) experience challenges to a healthy identity in schools and communities through discrimination and low expectations, they draw on their racial identities to persist and achieve. When the complements between Black people’s heritage and societal achievement are emphasized and valued, Black youth tend to view their own racial identity and academic performance as connected.

A visual representation of the potential identity conflicts of YBW student-athletes who expect to pursue athletics in college based on the research is in Figure 2.1. The ages from birth to age 25 capture the period discussed for YBW. It first includes the relevant phases of Racial Identity Development. The Naïve phase and transition to the Acceptance stage reflect the ages at which they are likely to occur. Second, significant periods designated by the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model specifies the appropriate times to focus athletic training for athletic success (Balyi, Way & Higgs, 2018). LTAD offers a reliable marker for expected changes in athlete identity. Specifically, around the age of 15, the “Learning to Compete” phase begins with the start of American High Schools and introduction to the athletic recruiting process. The age of 18 is the “Training to Compete” phase, the conclusion of high school years, and the end of the recruiting window. The age of 21 marks the “Learning to Win” phase. This phase traditionally coincides with the Junior academic year in traditional undergraduate college settings. Finally, if the opportunity presents itself, age 25 is when “Winning for a Living” becomes a priority in the long-term athlete development plan and reserved for post-
graduates with aspirations to continue in the sport, Olympic hopefuls, and professionally recognized athletes. Lastly, the gender continuum accounts for not only how a person identifies but also how they conform to gender roles, express gender outwardly, and what anatomical or biological characteristic they possess (Rosario, 2017). The continuum is a multidimensional model that asserts that gender identity (woman, genderqueer, man), gender expression (feminine, androgynous, masculine), biological sex (female, intersex, male) and sexual orientation (heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual) exist on separate spectrums to make up the continuum to allow individuals to better describe how they identify (Castleberry, 2018; Rosario, 2017).

![Figure 2.2 Identity intersections of young Black women student-athletes](image)

This section reviewed how social constructs impact the exceptional circumstances related to the academic experiences and athletic pursuits of young Black women. By examining the presence of multiple microaggressions in their lives, I was able to provide
a foundation for the challenges in understanding variables related to the social identity development for YBW student-athletes. After reviewing theories and specifics of racial, academic, and athletic identities, conflicts among them were presented to describe their identity intersections at the time they are embarking on the collegiate athletic recruiting process and ultimately deciding which college or university they will continue their academic and athletic careers.

**Higher Education Recruiting**

Selingo (2018) completed the most recent review on the recruiting strategies and priority landscape of today’s university first-time students in *The New Generation of Students: How Colleges can Recruit, Teach, and Serve Gen Z*. The author describes the making of Generation Z or those born between 1995 and 2012, to be shaped by the Great Recession and experiencing the reign of the smartphone and social media as a testament to the indispensability of technology. Selingo (2018) also explains that today’s students are more skeptical and money conscious, interested in education they can apply, and focused on the value of a degree. The reality that these students require more in the ways of personal development compared to previous generations of students invites a renewed look at the recruiting approach to move forward (Selingo, 2018).

Successful recruiting programs begin with pre-recruiting (Shacklem, 1996). Pre-recruiting is the relationship-building actions taken before scheduled recruiting visits or meetings that identify and increases a pool of candidates for selection, identifies and increases resources that can assist the recruitment of these candidates, and builds a positive image of the organization in the minds of the students and those who influence them. Today, the top of the higher education recruiting funnel, as described by Selingo
(2018), is filled with purchased student names from various testing companies to begin to build relationships and rapport in various recruiting media forms with potential students. Today, technology in the form of social media, virtual tours, typical applications, and net-price calculators has created a constant refilling of this recruiting funnel.

Next, the recruiting phase is related to the interviewing and interaction of the best available candidates. Shackle (1996) defines “best” as the individual who represents the best match for the organization and the open position. The goals of recruiting are to interview, select, and inspire the “best” candidates. Selingo (2018) offers three suggestions for tailoring admissions from the Millennials of the past, to Generation Z of today. For starters, recognizing that they signal interest of college choice in their junior and senior year of high school by using their access to social media is of significant importance. Generation Z students consider the institution's academic reputation, social and extracurricular activities, and, most importantly, their required financial commitments. Next, a checklist or “how-to guide” should accompany them in the admissions process to reiterate what is necessary, why it is required, and how the provided information is to be used. Finally, the involvement of parents from the start of the process is beneficial for sound and deeply committed decisions (Selingo, 2018).

Post-recruiting involves the things done for candidates after the initial interview or meeting and before their official start date. An example is to immediately follow up responses to potential candidates and timely detailed updates of their status as a future member of the team, the processing of required forms or paperwork, and honest and appropriate feedback. Still, a strong orientation contributes to the retention of the prospect. The overall goal of orientation is to develop loyalty by making new members
feel that they are an integral part of the team and help them to personify the team. Finally, organizational support seals recruiting efforts found in a centrally coordinated program, support of the higher education recruiters, and support of the administration. This structure reduces duplication of effort, provides continuity for the undertaking, and is usually more cost-effective than isolated initiatives (Shackle, 1996).

Methods of recruiting begin with the Adoption Method (Shackle, 1996). The Adoption Method identifies specific organizations and institutions or elements within them like individual schools, academic departments, faculty, or students to ensure the development of the best possible public image achieved through additional funding, scholarships, and preferential treatment, to strengthen those areas. Another approach is the Backdoor Method. This method concentrates efforts on courting individuals or groups on campus who can strongly influence potential candidates. The High Visibility Method makes representing the organization whenever large groups of students, campus leaders, or community leaders gather with the primary goal of establishing a positive image in the minds of potential students. Next, the Mole Method occurs when the organization agrees to lend one of its employees to a college or university and places that individual in a position to gather “firsthand” information about the institution and its students. Finally, the Shotgun Method, an impersonal approach aimed directly at the students and not those that influence the students, centers around mass media to expose students and others to the organization and opportunities.

**College Athletic Department Recruiting**

The recruitment and retention of African American athletic administrators, coaches, and academic staff are significant in improving the college experience of
African American students (Martin, Harrison, Stone & Lawrence, 2010). The University of Wisconsin created a Director of Diversity and Inclusion administrative position within the athletic department in response to a nationally televised and racially motivated incident at a football game (Hudson, 2018). The role bridges gaps between the student-athletes, the general campus population, and various departments that would recognize the shortcomings of their system and provide an opportunity to present a diverse and inclusive space. Diversity is “the presence of difference among members of a social unit that lead to perceptions of such differences and that impact work outcomes” (Cunningham, 2007, p. 6). Singer and Cunningham (2012) offer possibilities of this interest, including the changing demographic makeup of society, legal mandates, social pressures, potential adverse effects of diversity, and the value-in diversity perspective. Inclusion refers to the degree to which a member of any group perceives that he or she is a welcome and esteemed member. Welcomed and esteemed membership satisfies their individual needs for belongingness and uniqueness, and the contextual nature of this inclusion predicts the accepted values, norms, and expectations of the setting (Cunningham, 2015; Shore et al., 2011).

Singer and Cunningham (2012) explain that universities that effectively manage diversity typically have a history and culture of valuing diversity, which positively impacts the athletic department. Also, there is an integration of the athletic department into the broader university culture due to an intentional organizational structure. Within the NCAA, diversity, and inclusion efforts monitor and communicate agendas that support the stated strategic goals to create necessary change. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) (2017) produced the College Sport Racial and Gender
Report Card (CSRDRC) and assigned a C plus rating to college sports for racial and
gender hiring practices explaining that while African-American female student-athletes
made up only 12.5% of female Division I athletes in 2017, White coaches held 85% of
Division I women’s head-coaching positions. Since Title IX’s passing, women are only
39.8% of head coaches of women’s teams within the Division. White athletic directors
held 86% of those positions in the 2016-2017 academic year. Factors such as these allow
for the discussion surrounding power and control when attempting to understand student
choice and student success (Lapchick, 2018).

**NCAA Student-Athlete Recruiting Policy and Process**

In this study, I focus on the role identity plays in decision-making for YBW
student-athletes during the collegiate athletic recruiting process. The National Collegiate
Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body that oversees the recruiting process
of college athletes to the nation’s colleges and universities. The NCAA has three
classifying divisions of play. This research centers on Division I athletics. NCAA
Division I institutions have the most massive student bodies, manage the most robust
athletic budgets, and offer the most generous scholarships (NCAA.org). Today, there are
350 Division I colleges and universities, more than 6,000 athletic teams, and 170,000
student-athletes. Athleticism and academic standards propel and generate this list of few
prospects. The NCAA sets academic initial-eligibility standards that consider grade point
averages (GPA), standardized test scores, the core courses taken in high school, and
grades earned in those core courses as well as the standards of the college or university.
Academic success dictates the continued opportunities to play. Evaluation of student-
athletes comes through their grades earned while satisfying minimum credit hour criteria and making sufficient progress towards degree completion.

The collegiate athletic recruiting process begins when the high school student-athlete registers with the NCAA Eligibility Center. The fee to register is $90.00 for students from the United States, United States Territories, and Canada; all other international students pay a nonrefundable fee of $150.00. A fee waiver is available for students enrolled in or eligible for federal, state, or local government financial assistance (College Board, 2018). The eligibility center collects and certifies academic performance through the collection of official academic transcripts and standardized test scores. The current NCAA Division I academic standards began with the graduating cohort of 2010 as an attempt to be more inclusive of minority and low-income student-athletes while maximizing graduation rates of all student-athletes (Petr, 2018). The requirements for certification include graduation from high school, a mixture of core courses that include English, natural and physical science, social sciences, and math higher than Algebra 1 (see Table 3). Once the academic certification is complete, confirmation of eligibility follows the verification of the student-athletes athletic amateurism status. Within the guidelines of the recruiting calendar, the certified student can participate in the complete recruiting process. Once they have committed to an institution, signing of the National Letter of Intent (NLI) by the college-bound student-athlete signifies they agree to attend Division I participating institutions. In return, these schools agree to provide financial aid for one academic year once admitted and eligible to receive funding. Also, the signing of the NLI ends the recruiting process and permits other institutions from recruiting that student-athlete.
Table 3: NCAA Academic Eligibility Standards for Incoming Freshmen

1) Complete a total of 16 core courses in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Natural/Physical Science</th>
<th>Additional (English, math, or natural/physical science)</th>
<th>Social Science</th>
<th>Additional Courses (Any area listed to the left, foreign language, or comparative religion/philosophy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Algebra I or higher)</td>
<td>(including one year of lab if offered)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four years</td>
<td>Three years</td>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Earn an SAT combined score or ACT sum score that matches core-course GPA (minimum 2.300) on the Division I full qualifier sliding scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core GPA</th>
<th>New SAT</th>
<th>Old SAT</th>
<th>ACT Sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once a student-athlete begins courses at their given college or university, the “Student-Athletes commit to academic achievement and the pursuit of a degree, and they are required to meet yearly standards to be able to compete” (Petr, 2018, p. x). The tracking of college athletes’ success uses three measures: grades earned, minimum credit hours per year completed, and progress towards earning a degree. The Graduation Success Rate (GSR) uses the three measures previously mentioned of the first year, full-time students who entered with financial aid and graduated within six years, including transfer students. In March of 2018, the GSR for all student-athletes was 87% (Petr, 2018). For the sake of comparison, White student-athletes improved to a 92% GSR while
Black student-athletes demonstrated a 2% increase from the previous year up to 79%. Meanwhile, from 2002-2018, the GSR for Black women increased by 15% to 86%. This increase shows that Black woman student-athletes on these campuses outpace their student-body counterparts by 19% (70%-51%) within the 2018 cohort (Petr, 2018).

NCAA Division I athletic teams are the most selective when it comes to physical ability. Treme and Burrus (2016) describe the recruiting process of student-athletes to involve a conglomerate of phone calls, text messages, emails, in-home and campus visits to parents, high school coaches, administrators, and club coaches. To provide context, football recruiting budgets are justified by the argument that those budgets ease the responsibilities of faculty hiring, increase first-year applications, generate alumni contributions, influence higher graduation rates, and provide exposure for the university with successful athletics teams. These benefits are neither confirmed nor suggested for women’s sports. Chung (2013) found that while athletic success had a long-term effect on future quality applications, students with lower SAT scores were more likely to place a higher value on a university’s athletic success.

Due to the minimal amount of research conducted on the decision factors of collegiate woman athletes, I used the work of Evans and Pitts (2017) and Dumond, Lync, and Platania (2007) to summarize some of the most significant factors in college football and men’s basketball recruiting as a starting point. In the sport of football, team on-field success, academic prowess, coaching experience, and athletic conference were among the top factors. In the game of men’s basketball, availability of in-state talent, winning percentage, total all-time championships, ranked seasons, recent NBA draft picks, stadium size, and playing in a power conference were the heavy influencers. Collectively,
athletes typically choose programs based on a consistent win of conference titles, no involvement in NCAA enforcement actions, and proximity to the athlete’s home state. To present a clearer picture, Harris (2018) explains the recruiting process using the Two-Sided Matching Model to understand better how economic agents find each other. Brown, Farrell, and Zorn (2007) reveal that good matches in a model such as this improve winning percentages. In it, student-athlete labor is the input, and schools compete for best-quality athletes with non-price competition for unpaid athletes receiving fixed scholarship amounts. Gale and Shapley (1962) proposed that matching is regarded as stable only if it left no pair of agents on opposite sides of the market unmatched to each other but would prefer to be. Therefore, both athletes and athletic departments benefit from improved information about the matching market. Including this NCAA recruiting process intentionally details the requirements to gain access to their advancing to become Black collegiate women athletes. The next section offers historical context for this critical analysis by reviewing the trends that have helped shape the current campus climate where they will begin to live out their decision.

**Student-Athlete Collegiate Experiences**

Good practices that establish a positive impact on essential learning outcomes of undergraduate education for all students begin with Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles; a) Interaction between faculty and students, b) Cooperative learning among students, c) Active learning, d) Prompt feedback, e) Time on task, f) Communication of high expectations, g) Respect for diverse ways of learning. However, student-athletes find adversity in optimally fulfilling these principles considering their dynamic experiences and time restrictions. On average, student-athletes spend 20 hours
per week in college-athletic required activities (Gayles, 2009). Blair and Wang (2017) clarified the NCAA’s limit of a 20 hour per week and mandatory one day off per week limitations. They explain that in practice, student-athletes exceed these limitations when medical treatments, travel, and voluntary practices are considered. Further, they draw attention to the three hours credited for competitions which underestimates the true duration of the event and travel required. Still, student-athletes report 6 hours and 16 minutes of sleep per night (Ryan, Gayles & Bell, 2018), and forego at least one regularly scheduled campus break due to overlapping playing seasons (NCAA Manual, 2017).

Besides the academic and athletic requirements previously discussed, student-athletes also experience mental challenges differently than their peers as a result of their collegiate athletic experiences.

For starters, student-athletes battle mental health effects related to their role as a student-athlete, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse (Ryan, Gayles & Bell, 2018). Mental health affects student-athletes on college campuses resulting from academic pressures, longer playing seasons, pressure from coaches to win, and the commercialization of college athletics (Brown, 2014). Ryan, Gayles, and Bell (2018) list barriers student-athletes face in seeking support with mental health. A lack of time, fear of possible adverse reactions from coaches and administration, and fear of experiencing personal discomfort are among them. Consequently, student-athletes have expressed the need for free mental health services, access to a practitioner with an understanding of the student-athlete experience, and the ability to easily schedule appointments online to protect their image and reputations.
Also, the most recent research on the student-athlete experience describes the impact of bullying was examined by Mishna, Kerr, McInroy, and McPherson (2019) and provides a way forward for scholarship on the topic. They found that experiences with verbal (name calling, shouting or inappropriate remarks related to skill level, poor performance or personal characteristics like race), social (target of gossip and rumors and exclusion from social activities) and physical (hitting, pushing, slapping or scratching) victimization affected participants across gender and sports. Perceived reasons for traditional bullying outside of sport and skills techniques include perceived favoritism, absence from practices or strength and conditioning sessions, poor choices outside of sport, and personality characteristics (Mishna, Kett, McInroy & McPherson, 2019).

When considering personal changes and campus-related challenges faced by student-athletes, it is natural also to consider how these students are able and allowed to adjust in their pursuit of academic and athletic success. Although this research study focuses on the role of recruiting, it is vital to make the connection between the relationship of recruiting and retention by briefly mentioning NCAA transfer policy or rules permitting a student-athlete to leave one college or university for another. In June of 2019, the NCAA adjusted the current thirteen guidelines used to evaluate and grant transfer waivers for student-athletes between NCAA member institutions (McMann, 2019). Of the thirteen guidelines, four changes were made.

1. When a student-athlete has eligibility remaining but no longer has the opportunity to play on their current team, the new school must provide the following: a) proof of good academic standing and that the student-athlete is striving toward graduation; b) a statement from the previous school’s athletic director indicating whether the student-athlete could return to the team, c) a date and reason for dismissal, and/or reasons the student-athlete gave the previous school for not returning.
2. In cases of student-athletes transferring because they feel they were the victim of egregious behavior directly impacting his or her health, safety or well-being, the new school must continue to prove through documentation that is the case, but also provide a statement from the previous school’s athletic director with the reason why the student-athlete said they were transferring, along with proof of good academic standing and progress towards graduation.

3. When claiming illness or injury to an immediate family member, student-athletes must transfer to a new school within 100 miles of the immediate family member within or immediately after the academic year.

4. In cases in which student-athletes ask to transfer closer to home because of their injury or illness, the new school must obtain medical documentation from a treating physician showing proof of debilitation, and that or she is receiving treatment, a statement of the student-athletes need to transfer and recovery plan, and a statement from the previous school’s athletic director with the reason the student-athlete gave for leaving.

The student-athlete experience is challenging regardless of gender, sport, or institution, as the research has indicated, and therefore justifies the high-quality support programs offering varied services to enhance the overall experience of student-athletes on campus (Gayles, 2009). The next section focuses more explicitly on the experiences of Black collegiate women and athletes in this same space and describes further how these circumstances manifest in their marginalized positions.

**Exceptional Experiences for Black Collegiate Women**

Predominantly White Institutions of higher education maintain oppressive hierarchical structures that situate Black women in lower a social position based on both their race and gender, making their academic success and overall well-being susceptible to the discrimination they face (Causey, 2019). Further, Black college student outcomes are influenced by the immediate surrounding social context and their interpersonal relationships, which are represented by the bridge between individual predispositions and the institutional setting or context (Allen, 1992). Causey (2019) adds that the “current
sociopolitical climate is rife with a colorblind, race-neutral ideology that denies the persistent and pervasive existence of institutional racism, which absolves any one form culpability and responsibility for disparities that exist in marginalized and underrepresented groups on college campuses” (p 8). These sentiments support the position that Black collegiate women attending predominantly White institutions have consistently reported substantially lower levels of social involvement that are generally improved by their belief that they have made the right college choice, and positive faculty relationship, and positive relationships with a racially diverse group of peers (Allen, 1992). The student’s academic performance is affected by the quality of life at the institution, the level of academic competition, university rules, procedures, resources, racial relations on campus, relationships with faculty and friends, and the extent of social support networks on campus (Allen, 1992).

Although Black women have outpaced all other marginalized groups in enrollment and degree attainment statistics, their steady improvement has overshadowed their continued need for practical, evidence-based strategies designed to promote their continued growth in all aspects of higher education specifically in relation to Black sorority engagement, cross-cultural mentoring, and population-specific counseling techniques (Bartman, 2015). On college campuses, establishing and developing an identity for Black women students is a matter of navigating and continually adjusting to covert or subtle racism within academic spaces and more overt racism within social spaces (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000).

Nearly 30 years ago, Allen (1992) explained the factors related to African American students and predominantly White campuses in that they reported lower
college grades, higher grades in high school, and had less favorable relations with faculty. At the time, Allen (1992) found that gender identity and economic background were valuable predictors of college outcomes confirming the claims that educational aspirations tend to be slightly higher among students from affluent, economically secure backgrounds. Also, the influence of campus racial composition, social involvement, and occupational aspirations was shown to be consistent predictors of student outcomes (Allen, 1992).

More recently, Bartman (2015) supplemented these issues by recognizing the reality that a lack of critical mass exists. A lack of critical mass exists when there are not enough individuals from a particular group that they feel comfortable participating in conversations, and not enough that other students see them as individuals rather than as spokespersons for their race. Also, the author adds the impact of the gender gap in the social experiences of heterosexual Black collegiate women. Bartman (2015) argued that the gender gap limits equally educated Black male spouses or partners since Black women may feel obligated to date within their race or remain single in order to protect and promote their culture. Next, the lack of Black faculty creates a deficit of Black women mentors, which adds to the isolation, lack of belonging, and stress prevalent with Black collegiate women students (Bartman, 2015). Finally, there is an interaction between imposter syndrome and gender and racial discrimination that worsens mental health when imposter syndrome exists. Imposter syndrome, feelings of intellectual incompetence, is a common phenomenon among students of color attending PWI’s that can create psychological risks for them (Causey, 2019).
Causey (2019) makes a note of the importance of resilience in Black women in instances such as these. Resilience, the process of developing positive outcomes, thriving despite less than favorable experiences, and avoiding negative trajectories that are often associated with risk exposure (Causey, 2019; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience is a result of protective and promotive factors. These factors are positive behaviors and situations that hinder the potential negative influence of risk factors on developmental outcomes. They are indicative of stable adaptive and behavioral functioning and encourage healthy development despite the presence of risk factors and foster resilience (Causey, 2019). One example of such an effort is the development counter-spaces of many types that serve to introduce and maintain a positive collegiate racial climate for Black collegiate students. Counter-spaces can be created within student organizations, Black sororities, peer groups, Black student-organized academic study halls, and those that often include Black faculty and, therefore, can exist within classrooms or reserved locations in academic departments (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso; 2000). These spaces allow their following to foster their learning and nurture a supportive environment wherein the experiences are validated and regarded as necessary (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).

Still, Black women look towards higher education to minimize the effects of some of the most common barriers to social, community, and professional advancement. The National Partnership for Women and Families (2018) affirms that Black families typically depend on the earnings of Black women for survival. Black women with a college degree earned over twice as much compared to those without and the unemployment rate was four times lower than that of Black women with no high school diploma in 2016 (United States Department of Labor). The Institute for Women’s Policy
Research (IWPR) reported that more than six in ten Black women were in the workforce in 2013. Black women’s median annual earnings ($33,555 for those who work full time, year-round) lagged behind White women ($40,586), Asian and Pacific Islander women ($45,000) and Biracial women ($37,846); men on average earned $48,000 in the United States (Dumonthier, Childers & Milli, 2017). These figures show evidence of poverty at higher rates for Black women compared to women from all other racial/ethnic groups except Native American women. Unfortunately, persisting through college arrives with a unique set of challenges. Scholars have worked to address these issues by furthering solutions through the development of guidelines and frameworks that illustrate pathways around common barriers.

Disparities in the attainment of positions of leadership and authority for Black women in the United States have been consistent since the country’s founding (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2015). Circumstances surrounding the slow progression of the advancement of Black women are in variables divided between two categories of causation (Oakley, 2000). The first are barriers created by organization practices and objectives and could be summarized in the invisible, systematic work barriers that impede advancement for women and marginalized people described as the glass ceiling, concrete walls or sticky floor as has been described in relation to Black women resulting in a lack of progressive experiences (Dickens, Womack & Dimes, 2018; Sanchez-Huelles & Davis, 2010). Evidence of this claim is in the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of leadership and inadequate career opportunities across industry sectors. The second category, according to Oakley (2000), is based on behavioral and cultural racial differences between Black women and their counterparts, an extension of the projected
stereotypes previously discussed. Individually, speech and socialization factors manifest in the way that matters of authority communicate and the reception of that communication, making these women less likely considered for leadership.

Successful collegiate recruitment efforts towards Black women genuinely connect with community partnerships they are associated with, innovative communication approaches, evidence of retention, and sound recruitment strategies (Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2006). Issues that affect African American women in higher education are their multiple marginalized identities, lack of critical mass, the gender gap, and sparse numbers of African American faculty (Bartman, 2015). Some Black college women navigate isolation on the college campus, forced acculturation, and relationship challenges. Also, they are deprived of some developmental opportunities due to a lack of quality mentoring because of limited or avoided interactions with faculty, the overall lack of Black women in academia who are overworked and unable to adequately support all students and also the lack of minority administrators (Cohen, 2018; Commodore et al., 2018; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). In the fall of 2016, of the 1.5 million faculties in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, Black women made up 3% of full-time faculty position regardless of rank, equal to Black males and significantly less when compared to White males at 41% and 35% for White females according the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018).

Strategies traditionally used to remedy these issues include the establishment of Black sororities, mentoring, and contextual counseling (Bartman, 2015). Historically Black sororities are intersectional support groups because they provide African American women a unique space where the overlapping of race and gender are acknowledged,
serving as a connection to the University community, social support, and society at large (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated was the first Black Greek Letter organization founded in 1908 on the campus of Howard University (Jennings, 2017). Alpha Kappa Alpha, Incorporated follows the motto of racial uplift for the African American community through service and education. In 1913, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated also established on the Howard University campus by twenty-two members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority out of a desire for social action that would impact women as well as people of color. Jennings (2017) acknowledges that a difference between the two organizations would be to provide members continued opportunities for community service, activism, and fellowship after graduation. Later, in 1920 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated is born out of the impact of sorority elitism and socializing towards the women student body and is governed under the sentiment of “Finer Womanhood” in that a race or nation can rise no higher than its women (Jennings, 2017). Finally, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated created two years later at Butler University, a predominantly White institution that specialized in training teachers. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated presented as an organization that would foster service and fellowship opportunities in addition to encouraging professional achievement in higher education (White, 1971). Jennings (2017) points out that the establishment of this sorority affirms the need to locate a support group to help negotiate the transition to majority White environments. The Black sorority movement created a steadfast community for Black collegiate women that continues to generate opportunities for leadership, social action, and community building in everyday life and politics.
This section provides a historical approach to understanding how these issues and attempts at their solutions have come to be. For instance, Ford’s (2013) Female Achievement Model of Excellence (F²AME) assists by increasing resiliency, self-efficacy, racial and gender pride, by raising awareness in four areas of Black girls' emotional and academic needs. They are; 1) intrinsic motivation and work ethic, 2) internal locus of control, 3) willingness to make sacrifices, and 4) academic pride. The CARE Model (Ricks, 2014) uses connection, awareness, retraining, and encouragement to emphasize the importance of an integrated and integrated approach to working with Black girls in education. However, the Conceptual Model of Black Women College Students (Figure 2.3) helps individual students plan for various barriers to success like racism and sexism and “conceptualizes the most relevant qualities, traits, behaviors, and processes that Black collegiate women students themselves must develop and follow to achieve success” (Commordore, Baker & Arroyo, 2018, Student-Centric Focus section, ¶ 1). Specifically, the model focuses on three distinct timeframes of the collegiate experience: the time before college, the time during college, and the time after college. This research study considers the experiences of YBW student-athletes before college and their decision to embark on, and progress through higher education. Their substantial experiences during college, and their perspectives on the setting and recruiter help illustrate different histories, objectives, and overall dynamics that closes the loop in the recruiting process (Commodore et al., 2018).
Exceptional Access

Movements of people and politics coupled with significant moments of newfound access outline the historical experiences of Black women in college, and within the communities they serve (Breaux, 2010). Driven by a strong desire to “uplift the race” through teaching, social work and politics, African-American women entered higher education to challenge ideas about women’s and Blacks’ intellectual inferiority by claiming public space and taking time for “scholarly endeavors despite social oppression, family responsibilities and community pressures” (Breaux, 2010, p. 160). Although various sources chronicle the history of Black women in higher education, an account of student-athletes undergraduate experiences as it relates to the broader topics of equity through access is required. The U.S. Department of Education (1999) recognized the impact of civil rights laws on groups of people that had traditionally experienced inequalities in attaining an education based on racial, gender, and physical ability limitation discrimination. Specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits
discrimination based on race, color, and national origin, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 operates to prevent sex discrimination.

**Getting to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.** Black male leadership figures were influential in the 19th century in how Black women pursued higher education where female leadership provided the blueprint. First, Booker T. Washington, freed from slavery as a boy in 1863, confronted the traditions of the native south by successfully founding the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers in Alabama in 1881 along with Lewis Adams while ultimately expressing the need for self-reliance for the Black community (Norwood, 2015). White southerners well-liked Washington partly as a tribute to his great works and consistent messages of not seeking political dominance or social exchange by Blacks towards Whites and advocating for the silencing of political and social activism by women (Aiello, 2016). Twelve years younger was William Edward Burghardt DuBois (W.E.B. DuBois), a northern intellectual and future of the call to action for African Americans after Washington’s death in 1915. W.E.B. DuBois edited NAACP’s *Crisis* Magazine in 1910 that highlighted the accomplishments of African-American women and their male counterparts in their pursuit of education (Perkins, 2015) and focused on politics, culture, civil rights and history that continues to seek to educate and challenge its readers about issues facing African-American and other communities of color (NAACP, 2019). DuBois acknowledged and agreed with some of the work done by Washington but described the difference in his message as challenging three of Washington’s fundamental ideas. DuBois’s challenges aimed at; 1) the assumption that economic power without political power is achievable; 2) industry, saving also, business enterprise would decrease prejudice of Whites without further
action or power on the part of Blacks, and; 3) the favorable effect of Washington’s propaganda was to make White people consider negro problems. He argued that since Black people dream about getting rights by individual working and saving, group organizing and strong resistance to aggression was unnecessary (Aiello, 2016). The views of Washington and Dubois equally challenged the mindset of Black women considering their futures in terms of pursuing education and pursuing a family.

The origins of Black women in higher education began in 1862 at Oberlin College when Mary Jane Patterson became the first Black woman to earn a college degree (Perkins, 2015). Oberlin College was founded in Ohio in 1833 by a Presbyterian minister, Reverend John J. Shipard and missionary Philo P. Stewart, both abolitionists with a mission to train teachers and other Christian leaders for the “boundless most desolate fields in the west” (Oberlin College, 2019). Oberlin represented the phenomenon of the bi-racial town in that citizens of both races extended support to any new immigrant (Taylor, 2018). African Americans relocating to Oberlin found educational opportunities for Black children in the local public school and access to higher education (Taylor, 2018). In the early 1850’s Oberlin was home to 174 African American residents making up 9.2% of the population, and in 1860, the population had risen to 422 or 20 percent of the residents there (Taylor, 2018).

Commodore, Baker, and Arroyo (2018) make a critical mention of women at the forefront of leadership in their pursuit of education and their instrumental roles in educating others through their leadership as professors, principals, and religious affiliates. Fanny Jackson Coppin freed from slavery in Washington, D.C. at the age of 12 graduated from Oberlin College in 1865 before becoming the principal of the Institute for Colored
Youth in Philadelphia where she established a classical education for the students and later worked to make technical skills and trades available for Blacks (Coppin, n.d). Mary Church Terrell freed from slavery at the age of six, also graduated from Oberlin College after completing the Gentleman’s course work in classical studies, and continued to earn her master’s degree (Mary Church Terrell, 2019). Terrell dedicated her life to improving social conditions for Black women and accelerated that cause through politics. Anna Julia Cooper became the principal of the M Street School (now Dunbar High School) in Washington, D.C., after graduating from Oberlin College. She proclaimed that the key to achieving social equality for women was education, and she fought for women’s collective right to higher education. She was one of the earliest advocates for rights and supporters of women’s suffrage (Wallach, 2019). Mary McLeod Bethune founded a college in Florida for African Americans and led organizations that represented Black women in the United States (Mary McLeod Bethune, 1999). Finally, Lucy Diggs Slowe described as the foremost spokesperson for Black women’s higher education and leadership training and served as the Dean of Women at Howard University. She believed that Black women should be prepared for the world and not just their communities (Slowe, 2002).

By 1890, thirty Black women had earned baccalaureate degrees compared to 300 African American men and 2,500 White women (Perkins, 2015). Next, a migration to the Midwest in 1900 impacted Iowa Wesleyan College which had more Black women graduates than any other predominantly White institution in the North, Midwest, or West excluding Oberlin College and had been touted by W.E.B Dubois as being exceptional in contributing to the college-bred Negro American during the era (Breaux, 2010). Also, in
1900, 90% of Black college students were in the southern United States, and 81% of Black college graduates were from private Black institutions. At this time, 78 Black colleges and universities operated in the United States, and more than 2,000 Black men and women had earned higher education degrees, 390 of which were from White colleges and universities (JBHE, 2014). This milestone provides the foundation of the growing relationship between education and Black women, as outlined in *Black Women College Students: A Guide to Student Success in Higher Education* (Commodore et al., 2018).

Perkins (2018) describes how this migration led to the education of Black women educated in the north that returned to the south to teach after the end of the Civil War in 1865, joining the literate Black women already teaching there. Educated Black women leaders in the 19th and early 20th century had access to higher education fifty years before Black women in the south (Perkins, 2015). These women in the north trained in racially integrated institutions and characterized as products of middle and upper-class light-skinned families, multi-lingual, well-traveled, and married to prominent and highly educated men (Perkins, 2015). Still, by 1870, 89% of Black college women moved to the south to teach (Perkins, 2015). This shift cultivated the mentality of women to show others who had no means to become educated on their own demonstrated by the eagerness to learn documented by an illiteracy rate of former enslaved African-Americans that dropped from 95% in 1860 to 30% in 1910 (Commodore et al., 2018; Perkins, 2015).

As time went on, federal laws were instrumental in the continued pursuit of education for Black women. The policy creation and their complete list of unintended consequences are outside the scope of this research, but recognition of the continuation to
pursue justice is relevant. The federal laws related to education and race begin with the Second Morrill Act (1890) that designated one college in each state with the combined Black and White public educational system to receive federal funding. These institutions served mostly as teacher training institutions compared to the other colleges and universities that provided agricultural and mechanical education (Perkins, 2015). Among the two- and four-year institutions established during this time was Spelman College (Atlanta, Ga), the nation’s first historically Black college for women and Bennett College in Greensboro, NC (JBHE, 2014).

Next, the landmark federal case of Brown vs. Board of Education deemed the separation of Black and White students unconstitutional in 1954 and coincided with the start of the Civil Rights movement (1954-1968). Desegregation progress was inconsequential, considering that it occurred over twenty years (the 1960s–1980s) in the south (Orfield, Frakenberg, Ee & Kuscera, 2014). Segregation typically results based on race and class categorizations. The Brown vs. Board of Education case (1954) set in motion both individual and collective challenges to racial segregation in an interscholastic sport. The first public school system in the south to integrate also became the first to establish a separate athletic program for White and Black students. Southern districts delayed the process evidenced by the creation of citizen’s councils, the passage of pro-segregation legislation, substituting of private education for public schools, etc. (Wiggins, 2007).

Since the turn of this century, public schools located in central cities of the largest metropolitan areas, central cities of all sizes, and suburbs of the most extensive metro areas were most often the providers of education to Black students. Within these schools,
student populations tend to be a significant majority of poor Black and Latino students compared to White and Asian students who typically attend middle-class schools (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee & Kuscera, 2014). In relating these outcomes of Brown vs. Board of Education to Black girls and women specifically, Nelson (2018) argues that this continued segregation perpetuates the academic achievement gaps based on race as systematic oppression by “placing a series of obstacles in the way of Black women’s educations and careers to hinder their progress toward success”. The U.S. Department of Education could attempt to make the counterargument to these claims with the federal laws that followed.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that in 2016, Black high school graduates enrolled in college at a rate of 36% compared to White students at 42% and that 44% of those enrolled were women. The percentage of graduates aged 25-29 in 2017, with a bachelor’s degree, totaled 36% (McFarland et al., 2018). Actually, between 2004 and 2014, the share of Black women with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased by 23.9%, while less than 12% of bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2015-2016 awarded to women who identified as Black and most often degrees given in the fields of health professions, business, and psychology (Kena et al., 2016). In 2015, 25% of Black women aged 25 to 29 held at least a bachelor’s degree compared to 46% of White, 22% of Latina, 68% of Asian, and 12% of American Indian/Alaskan Native women (NCES, 2018). In 2017 39.3% of women in the United States had obtained at least their bachelor’s degree; 23.8 % of Blacks aged 25-29 years old did the same (NCES, 2018). Black women are graduating from college within six years at a rate of 44% compared to Black men (34%), White Men (61%), and White Women (67%) (de Brey et al. 2019).
**Education Amendment of 1972.** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended eight years after being established to include Title IX which states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX, 1972). Title IX mandates apply to most public and private colleges and universities, as well as most elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978). In 1974 the amendment expanded to include intercollegiate athletics, marking the actual start of women’s college athletics (Rubin & Lough, 2015). At its onset, the Office of Civil Rights defined three specific guidelines to help facilitate the mandate on campuses which were to be in compliance 1) of financial assistance based on athletic ability, 2) with other program areas like academic support and facilities and, 3) by meeting the interests and abilities of male and female students (Rubin & Lough, 2015). Francisco and Schaefer (2016) simplified the legality of Title IX by stating that “the best way to remain in compliance with Title IX is to have as little difference as possible between the proportion of both sexes enrolled in a school and the proportion of both sexes participating in sports” (p 51).

The legislation is said to have performed the task of creating environments that allow diversity in education and sport to help build and foster learning settings (secondary and higher education) that enable schools to empower students to participate without restriction in a heterogeneous democracy and global economy while entirely developing their identity (Thelin, 2004). However, Theune (2019) considers the intersection of Brown vs. Board of Education and Title IX to better describe the effects of
these legislative changes on the experience of Black women athletes specifically. Thune (2019) contends with Fields (2008) in that the language of Title IX focuses solely on gender and further removes YBW from the “full benefits of the law” (p. 7). Thune (2019) also illustrates the possibilities of applying the expectations of Brown vs. Board of Education in conjunction with Title IX to women’s sports. Using them this way maximizes the protection for Black women seeking various athletic opportunities. Thune (2019) concludes by explaining how the persistence of racial segregation in America’s schools has hindered the effectiveness of Title IX by offering more significant exposure to emerging and growth sports. A review of Title IX eras provides context for these claims.

Title IX references and describes emerging areas of focus for a given time. During the Early Era (the 1970s), participants were prideful and rebellious. The first athletic scholarships awarded in the early 1970s benefitted fifty women by 1974 who were attending college on athletic scholarships compared to 50,000 men (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012; Roth & Basow, 2004). Also, in 1974, Kim Sands would become the first African American woman to accept an athletic scholarship and played tennis and basketball at the University of Miami (Jones, 2017). By the end of the 1977-1978 collegiate athletic season, more than 10,000 female student-athletes from more than 460 schools received athletic scholarships.

The Advocacy Era (the 1980s-1990s) followed and fostered a competitive employment arena because of newfound opportunities in the profession of coaching women. This influx of new positions created a drastic change in hiring practices and began the downward trend of women coaching women sports teams. Those who
experienced sport during this time suffered ridicule and resistance based on race and gender tensions. Black women were perceived to maintain a social advantage on campus due to their athleticism due in part to their willingness to take on more assertive roles left vacant by African-American males on predominantly White campuses and their familiarity with assertiveness learned in the home and in sport that led to creating opportunities (Sellers, Kuperminc, Demas, 1997). Harmon’s (2009) review of the experiences of Black women athletes, found that a number of students reported having unfulfilled expectations, echoing the perception of being treated differently from their White peers and the presence of complex relationships and exposure to optimal resistances (involvement, social support, personal strength, advocacy, goals and life purpose) and suboptimal resistances (depression, isolation, and silencing). Most recently, Bernard (2014) noted that addressing the lack of campus diversity, specifically hiring more coaches and staff of color, changing racial dynamics, confronting feelings of isolation, and desiring support for non-athlete identities, was most prominent in combating the challenges of today’s complex climate. Notably, despite the oppressive forces these women have experienced, participation in sport has consistently provided a space that is empowering and allows them to work hard and prove themselves in and away from their field of play (Withycombe, 2011).

The Present Era (since the 2000s) saw the Title IX mandate again expanded to include sexual harassment and sexual violence. Participating as an athlete leaves all women susceptible to the elements of sport and campus culture that include rape, harassment, and assault, which have become barriers to participation in higher education and collegiate athletics (Cooky, 2017). One in five female undergraduates has
experienced some sexual assault while in college (Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, Shook-Sa & Peterson, 2016). Intersectional subordinate-group identities such as women of color and LGBT/gender-queer students are even more susceptible to sexual violence on US college campuses (Mascagni, 2017). According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 20-25% of college women are victims of forced sex during their time in college, accounting for 90% of sexual assault victims that do not report the assault. Also, two-thirds of college students experience sexual harassment, and 27% of college women have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact. Sexual assaults and harassment are relevant considering that throughout much of U.S. history, the rape of Black women was widespread and institutionalized where the legal system offered little protection and stereotypes about Black women's hypersexuality was used to justify limited social support for Black rape victims (West & Johnson, 2013).

A recent example was in the memo written by Candice Jackson, the lead civil rights official at the Department of Education, directing investigators to reduce inquiries over systemic issues and stopped requiring regional offices to centrally report findings on disproportionate minority discipline or campus sexual assault (Harris, 2017). As a result of policies like this, Black women developed and relied on a familiar culture of silence and instead engaged in anti-rape organizing to cope with their victimization (West & Johnson, 2013). The Black Women’s Blueprint and Center for Urban Pedagogy (2017) produced a guide “It’s Not Just Personal” designed to fill a gap in engaging and culturally relevant information regarding Title IX and the Jeanne Cleary Act, a federal mandate for colleges to disclose their campus security policy and campus crime rates (Dixon et al., 2017). Mascagni (2017) advocates that students are better served when
university administrators 1) recognize that sexual assault is normalized on their campuses, particularly in college athletics and fraternities, 2) acknowledge the dignity of student survivors of sexual violence by offering an institutional apology, and 3) initiate substantive cultural reforms that extend beyond Title IX legal compliance.

The Future Era of Title IX (the 2020s and beyond) will deal with at least two significant and intertwined areas concerned with gender and racial equity. The first is addressing gender equity through the execution and offering of growth and emerging sports. The second is the criticism that Title IX’s effect on competition has primarily benefitted White women athletes, an issue of racial equity (Thune, 2019). Pickett, Dawkins, and Braddock (2012) investigated the equity in sport based on race and gender and found Title IX did not benefit African American females equal to White females due to the range of sports offered in the high schools they attend. Coincidently, the effect of Title IX at the high school level maintains the “funneling” of Black female athletes into two main sports (basketball and track & field), whereas White female athletes benefit the most from the addition of new sports and sports programs (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012).

Stone’s (2002) explanation of equity describes the complexity of sport participation through the paradox involving the distributive problems. Distributive problems explain the dimensions of equity through three domains: recipients (who gets and how are they defined), the item (what is being distributed and what are the many ways of defining it), and the process (how is the distribution to be decided upon and carried out and what are the social methods by which placement is determined). Stone (2002) writes that “equity is the goal for all sides in a distributive conflict; the conflict
comes over how the sides envision the distribution of whatever is at the issue” (p. 39). In relation to Title IX and YBW student-athletes seeking recruitment to participate in college athletics, the three dimensions of equity are eligible high school female student-athletes (the recipients), collegiate participation opportunities including potential athletic scholarships and positions on team rosters (the item) and; satisfactory academic and athletic performance that is accessible for recognition (the process). The first concern area for this Title IX era, growth, and emerging sports influence the second of racial inequity, creating a means of distribution focused argument that is significant because process notates fairness and, the outcomes or trends that manifest.

Women’s sports have fewer endorsements, less coverage, and, therefore, smaller platforms. Despite these limited platforms, Black college athletes have used their presence and voices to discuss and advocate for justice of sorts (Harmon, 2009; McCoy, Oregon & Sullivan, 2017). Often, the most prominent athletic space available to Black women in sport is in international competitions, particularly during the Olympic games, where they are cultural ambassadors for the nation (Rose, 2017). Some of the notable and symbolic protesters have been Althea Gibson and Wilma Rudolph (Celebration of Black excellence), Earlene Brown (civil rights and women’s rights), Erosenna Robinson (national anthem protest and tax resistance) Wyomia Tyus’s (equal pay and professional opportunities), Venus and Serena Williams (equal pay and womanhood) and Brittany Garner (LGBTQ advocacy).

Farmer (2016) describes the role that Black woman athletes have played and continue to play in cultivating sports arenas into places of political and ideological protest. Black athlete activism has changed its focus through history and described by
Edwards (2016) as moving through four waves. Activism during the first and second waves gained motivation by both race relations inside and outside of the United States. Later, the 1990s saw the third wave characterized by the social and financial success of professional athletes (McCoy, Oregon & Sullivan, 2017). Today, the fourth wave of Black athlete activism confronts the legitimacy of power available to college and professional athletes (Edwards, 2016).

When discussing gender equity, a look at current trends of generating a gain of women's teams at the collegiate level has been through the addition of sports like soccer, golf, softball, and lacrosse. The strategy of adding “growth” sports for women to achieve gender equity, is expected to close the gender gap in sports participation, but also creates unintended barriers to access and participation in high school and college athletics for non-White women considering the likelihood that they will participate in sports through their schools than through private clubs or organizations (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012). Emerging growth sports in high school has direct implications for sports participation of Black women primarily due to the cost of equipment, lesson, and travel (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012).

Arguments against claims of inequities related to Title IX exist on a hierarchical scale that includes the state, school, and individual levels. At the state level, Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Greene, and Basinger-Fleischman (2005) suggest that gender disparities in athletic participation opportunities (number of sports and teams offered) among states are associated with states per-pupil expenditures and student racial composition. Per-pupil expenditures vary by state but influenced by factors like cost of living, class sizes, and student demographics. The United States Census Bureau lists the top five states and
territories by per-pupil expenditures, and they are New York ($22,366), Washington, DC ($19,159), Connecticut ($18,958), New Jersey ($18,402) and Vermont ($17,873). States with higher average per-pupil expenditures and higher proportions of White students have smaller gender disparities in participation opportunities and participation rates (Wheeler, 2018). Their findings explained how the racial and ethnic composition of a state’s student population is more important than its overall enrollment size in determining gender equity in interscholastic athletic access and participation.

Meanwhile, the school level presents inequities due to lack; lack of interest, lack of access, and lack of resources (Glennie & Stearns, 2012). The persistence of racial and gender gaps in sports participation first include school-level structural resources like surrounding community and school facilities that limit access and marginalize participation opportunities, socioeconomic descriptors such as school financial resources and program costs, and enrollment size (Bopp, Turick, Vadeboncoeur & Aicher, 2017; Glennie & Stearns, 2012). Since Black female athletic participation remains concentrated in basketball and track and field, the additional programs and college scholarships in volleyball, crew (rowing), and soccer may attract and benefit White female athletes at their expense. The implications are that by continuing to provide a narrow range of sports available at the high school level in the schools and communities servicing YBW, this process may also adversely affect the accessibility of college athletics for non-White females who are relying on athletic scholarships to fund their education (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012).

Lastly, at the individual level, racial boundaries established by perceptions of racial identities influence the gap in sports participation so much so that as the percentage
of African-American students in school increases, all sport participation rates drop and at a much faster rate for Black than for White students (Glennie & Stearns, 2012). Bopp, Turick, Vadeboncoeur, and Aicher (2017) provide one explanation where individuals perceive there to be sports in which racial groups “fit” or feel welcome like basketball for Black athletes. Another reason is that racial boundaries create expectations for the behavior of members of diverse groups (Berth, 1969; Glennie & Stearns, 2012). Glennie and Stearns (2012) summarize their findings by concluding that relations among peers tend to be competitive and racial boundaries more pronounced, where the size of the subordinate group is substantial, where racial hierarchy is low, and where there are schools with fewer resources. Subordinate group members develop an oppositional culture when highlighting and celebrating of racial and cultural differences exists (Carrington, 1998). Racial hierarchy is the extent of stratification of the race for students within a school. However, self-selecting out of sports because of race limits effort and performance levels, health benefits, academic achievement, and networking opportunities (Bopp, Turick, Vadeboncoeur & Aicher, 2012, p. 840).

**Exceptional Climates for Black Collegiate Women Today**

The ongoing clash between Black culture and White educational systems has been the focus of pedagogical research for the last century (Tuitt, 2010). In the field of education, Black women have unique experiences. Historically, oppression resulting from colonialism, slavery, apartheid, imperialism, and other systems of racial domination have functioned together to reduce and negate the opportunity for education of Black women college students (Collins 1997, 2002; Jean Marie, Williams, & Sherman 2009; McLean & Johansen, 2006). As a result, college students from marginalized, underserved,
minoritized, and disenfranchised backgrounds continue to feel less welcome than their peers from privileged or majority backgrounds during their educational pursuits (Soria, 2018). This apprehension is an example of what Ncube, Jacobson, Whitfield, and McNamara (2018) describe as significantly affecting Black student perceptions towards campus climate.

A climate for diversity refers to the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential (Rankin & Reason, 2005). To illustrate the climate in college campus settings over the past twenty years, Harper and Hurtado (2007) synthesized fifteen years of research on campus racial climates and found nine themes that call attention to trends that persist there. I have expanded on each of these nine themes below.

First, Harper and Hurtado (2007) discovered that a cross-race consensus regarding institutional negligence exists. Students described their disappointment with university expectations of engagement and interaction among those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. This disappointment in the fact that educational processes leading to racial understanding inside or outside of the classroom had not provided students helps to facilitate this engagement.

Second, “race” was a four-letter word and avoidable topic. Indeed, the infrequency of race-related conversations created a contradiction in the expectation of students to interact across racial lines in the campus setting where “race” was intentionally unacknowledged. As an example of an attempt at combating this problem, Portland Community College instituted Whiteness History Month to advance race
conversations by critically examining the concept of Whiteness (Morris, 2016). Although the attempt encountered some criticism, deKoven (2011) explains possible reasons why. White students in any field are often most resistant to engaging in meaningful conversations about racism and privilege, opting to remain silent to avoid commenting in ways received as racist or confrontational (deKoven, 2011).

Third, the self-reports of racial segregation were consistently apparent. These self-reports were based on observable segregation trends throughout campus and specifically within dining halls and student housing. Tatum (2017) argues that this type of self-segregation is a problem worth addressing and a coping strategy for racial minorities. She explains how the persistent K-12 school segregation does not always prepare college students for the different racial, cultural, and sociocultural backgrounded students they will encounter due to limited cross-group interactions and repeated exposure to cultural stereotypes. Finally, she mentions that whether college students develop the capacity to comfortably self-desegregate depends in large part on whether the institution they attend has provided structures for those learning experiences to take place (Jaschik, 2017).

Fourth, there were gaps in social satisfaction by students of different races. Explicitly, Black students conveyed more overall dissatisfaction with the universities’ social environments compared to White and Asian students, while Native Americans and Latino/ students expressed gratitude more than pleasure for having the opportunity to be and achieve in the space. Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor, and Carpenter (2018) describe the campus experiences of Black students as interconnected to the racial climate of the US society where the racial happenings in society are a mirror of what is happening on their campuses” (p. 469). They argue that White students remiss their social satisfaction
because of their tendency to ignore or remain at arm’s length away from societal racial issues.

Fifth, reputational legacies of racism provided students with negative preconceived notions of their ability to succeed and the likelihood of receiving support, which led to increased doubt and caution in those areas. Coakley (2009) explains that a legacy of racism and discrimination cultivates “aspects of existing social organization and cultural practices” (p. 20). Further, Simiyu (2012) concludes that these macro-level challenges directly impact the micro-levels of faculty stereotype towards Black students, academic underachievement, Black student interaction, and social-cultural isolation.

Sixth, White students describe an overestimation of minority student satisfaction. This overestimation is a result of the little structured and meaningful cross-racial interaction between the peer groups. Byrd (2014) found that no form of interracial contact with Blacks, Asian Pacific Islanders, or Hispanics and Latinos influenced the racial prejudice of White students at elite colleges, citing the plausibility of the racial hierarchy at the elite colleges featured in the study. Also, Byrd (2014) concluded that White students grew closer with other White students outside of their original or own group because of their opportunity to interact with White students from all over the world that had slightly different social origins that could influence their understanding of what it means to be White. Therefore, White students are at a disadvantage of being aware of the dispositions of their minority peers.

Seventh, the pervasiveness of Whiteness in space, curricula, and activities is evident on most campuses researched. The lack of cultural areas conflicted with institution claims of inclusivity, allowing ethnic culture isolated to a single resource
center, designated office of support, or academic major. The pedagogical practices of seeing students as complete human beings, making students visible to each other, and having faculty seen as whole people are active approaches to enhancing the visibility of minority students (Tuitt, 2010). This intentional presence provides direction for overcoming the perception of racial bias as being an obstacle to the participation of minority students in their learning process (Tuitt, 2010).

Eighth, the consciousness-powerlessness paradox among racial/ethnic minority staff erupted out of fear of addressing racism. An acknowledgment of the segregation and dissatisfaction of students could potentially result in a backlash, reprimand, or disqualification of promotion, creating a silence among faculty and staff, private strategizing with students, and peer complaints among each other. Daniel (2019) confirms the adverse effects on racialized faculty members when engaging with students about race. Similar discussions of equity and anti-oppression as it relates to gender receive significantly less scrutiny. Daniel (2019) emphasizes this point by explaining that academicians receive evaluations from ranking faculty, administration, and students on their likability influenced by their intellectual pursuits, a critique of ideas and emotions related to the delivery and reception of race-related topics.

Finally, there exist unexplored qualitative realities of race in the institutional assessment. In other words, it has not been a customary practice to inquire about the stories of students' racialized experiences to improve institution level agendas. Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that their student participants welcomed an opportunity to have their voice heard, citing their assumptions that a lack of interest existed regarding their experiences with race, regardless of how they identify. Chism and Banata (2007) provide
an assessment of qualitative approaches like this in institutional assessment where these methods yield findings that illuminate the live setting and suggest necessary implications in addition to offering holistic aspects of the environment rather than the often narrowly focused approaches.

Gavino, Eber, and Bell (2010) found that although the university climate was trending in a positive direction, it reestablished a baseline that would encourage action that contributes to improving university cultures. Cultures of exclusivity (maintaining dominance of the majority group and is hostile to social justice and diversity), The Club (tolerance for engagement in social justice issues but only if it maintains the privileges to those in power) and compliance (appearance of justice and access to those that have been historically underrepresented is allowed) remained. Three specific approaches assist in cultivating these cultures. The work of affirming seeks justice and diversity by actively recruiting and supporting members of the minority group and redefining manifests when the institution is committed to going beyond tolerating and managing diversity, by shifting the institution towards valuing diversity and creating an environment where members are treated fairly and can achieve their full potential. Multicultural work illustrates an ideal system that represents an institution that serves all members of an institution and has eliminated all social oppression in their experience at the institution (Gavino, Eber & Bell, 2010).

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2012) advanced Gavino, Eber, and Bell’s (2010) findings and other campus racial climate frameworks by furthering the understanding of how students perceive the multidimensional nature of the campus climate for the diversity of race,
gender, and institutional types. This framework determines campus climate where through micro-level dimensions that consider individuals’ psychological and behavioral influences while using macro-level aspects that consist of compositional, historical, and organizational elements to advance both individual social mobility and more significant social equity (Hurado & Guillermo-Wann, 2012).

Considering YBW student-athletes an exception among their peers due to their athleticism and in society as oppressed and marginalized people, allows this research study to investigate how intersecting identities influence decision-making. YBW student-athletes mature through exceptional circumstances created by the families that raise them and communities designed to support their safety and access to education and sport. Psychological stressors connected to stereotypes, silencing, and style intertwines and cultivates how these women see themselves and how others view them. For this research, race, gender, and the social identity of student-athlete construct participants’ identities.

The next section describes the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this research and explains the relationships between identity, society, and history at the time when deciding on college choice.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Recognizing the complexity of identity as a fluid concept assists in understanding the multifaceted lived experiences of YBW student-athletes aiming to become collegiate women athletes. Their identity is strategically essential to appreciating the politics of performing different and multiple identities in various contexts (Collins & Blige, 2016). Also, identities assist in understanding the operations of coalitions and the possibilities among them and, therefore, a lens for understanding groups. Lastly, identities are fluid
and evolving and formed within and shaped by the broader social phenomenon (Collins & Blige, 2016). Based on the research problem, purpose, and significance of this study, I applied Intersectionality as a primary theoretical framework to answer my research question regarding the recruiting experiences of YBW student-athletes.

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see how power arrives, collides, interlocks, and intersects (Crenshaw, 1989/2018). It provides an understanding of how multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage compound themselves and create obstacles challenging to understand within conventional ways of thinking about social justice advocacy problems (Crenshaw, 1989/2018). This theoretical framework offers a basis for understanding, analyzing, and designing strategies for investigating this phenomenon (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

As a secondary theoretical framework, I used Organizational Culture Theory to provide structure for working towards anticipated outcomes of an advanced understanding of recruitment strategies for this group of YBW Student-Athletes. Organizational culture theory comprises attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and values considered valid in the organization. Characteristics of organizational culture combine to control how the organization works within and how it interacts with people and groups outside (Schein, 2010). Manning (2017) explains that using a cultural perspective helps stakeholders achieve a deeper understanding of the complexities within organizations and provides support for decision making, program development, and planning in areas of diversity and the support for identity development.
Intersectionality

An intersectional framework explains identity by focusing on both individual and group identity as influenced and shaped by multiple characteristics (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). For example, Morris (2012) and the African American Policy Forum use Intersectionality to examine how gender and race intersect to influence punitive discipline policies in schools and reinforce the school-to-prison pipeline. Students understand more fully the complicatedness of identity when they can develop relationships with individuals different than them. Working on tasks with a common goal helps to gain knowledge about their own and others cultural heritage, family background and life circumstances thereby connecting the individuals to the group; groups to society; and individuals, groups, and society all in connection to structures of power (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Criticism of Intersectionality typically aligns in three strands, according to Collins and Blige (2016). They begin by addressing the criticism that Intersectionality overuses identity and underemphasizes structural analysis, especially materialist analyses of class and power. Another is the claim that essentialism conceptualizes individuals as having essential identities that they possess within different situations. Finally, they explain how critics claim that collective identity can also hurt group politics when it suppresses differences within a group. Identities that are multi-shaped and have a shared location are political projects achieved through consciousness-raising about shared life conditions within structures of power, and the building of a collective identity as a political project generates identity politics. These Identity politics are a vital tool of resistance against
oppression and rely unambiguously on an understanding of identity as a political location and not merely as an essence (Alcoff, 2006; Collins & Blige, 2016).

Intersectionality is the core of diversity efforts because it offers a way of understanding and analyzing complexity in the world, in people, and human experiences (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Factors shape these complexities in diverse and mutually influencing ways through axes such as race, gender, and social class that works simultaneously and influence each other. At its core, this analytical tool is a derivative of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is broadly distinguished by its focus on dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society (Chapman, Dixson, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2013; Tate, 1997). One general theme of CRT most applicable to this study is that of racism, where the focus is on the subtle and hidden processes which have the effect of discriminating regardless of stated intent and argues that “race” is socially constituted (Blackmore, 2013; Gillborn, 2015). While CRT provides a framework for contextualizing the epistemological worldview of a group of people that have experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalization (Bernal, 2002; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman 2009; Ladson-Billings, & Tate 2000), Intersectionality offers the ability to explore and call attention to the intersecting power relationships that are vital for resisting social inequality for these people (Collins & Blige, 2016). In this way, Intersectionality serves as “a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people and human experience” where many factors generally shape the events and conditions of social and political life in diverse and mutually influencing ways (Collins & Blige, 2016, p. 2). Intersectionality has two organizational focal points,
critical inquiry, and critical praxis, that function in a synergistic manner as a form of investigation and analysis (Collins & Blige, 2016). This research involved critical inquiry through a review of bodies of knowledge, theories, and methodologies about social inequality through the experiences of YBW student-athletes. Specifically, the two themes that govern critical inquiry are: 1) its approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people and; 2) acting as an essential tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals (Collins & Blige, 2016, p. 36).

The 1960’s established Intersectionality’s history born out of racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods and communities. The Black Feminist movement created to combat tension with political changes of the time (Civil Rights, Black Power, Chicano Liberation, and Asian-American Movements) confronted the subordination of women to men and faced equity differences based on race and class (Springer, 2005). In the 1970s, the intersectional analysis developed through social and political movements expressed through various art mediums that communicated their need to address oppression in a way that not limited to singular identities of race, gender, class, sexuality, or religion. The 1980’s and 1990’s documents the response of various social institutions recruitment of formerly excluded citizens into positions of power and influence. Black women gaining access to academic settings in roles as students, administrators, faculty, and support staff enabled them to directly to bring ideas from Black feminist politics with them into the academy through dual streams of Black feminism and race/class/gender studies. A summary of foundational texts that advanced Intersectionality as a concept, conversation, movement, and tool for analysis are in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Sojourner Truth</td>
<td>Ain’t I A Woman</td>
<td>Speech delivered to the Ohio Women’s Convention describing the intersection of women’s suffrage and Black rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Julia Cooper</td>
<td>A Voice from the South; By a Black Woman of the South</td>
<td>Advocacy for the education of African American women, women’s suffrage for Black women and an accurate portrayal of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Frances M. Beal</td>
<td>Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female</td>
<td>Examines racism, sexism, and capitalism as a social process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>edited by Toni Cade Bambara</td>
<td>The Black Woman</td>
<td>Assembled the political perspectives of African American women to show how Intersectionality incorporates inquiry &amp; critical praxis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Combahee River Collective</td>
<td>A Black Feminist Statement</td>
<td>Focuses on how systematic oppressions of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism interlock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>June Jordan</td>
<td>Civil Wars</td>
<td>Personal reflection and political analysis on the intersection of public and private reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Angela Davis</td>
<td>Women, Race, and Class</td>
<td>A study on the women’s liberation movement that demonstrates how racist and classist biases of its leaders have obstructed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa</td>
<td>This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color</td>
<td>Seminal anthological contributions to the birth of third wave feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>bell hooks</td>
<td>Ain’t I A Woman</td>
<td>Provides historical evidence of the specific sexism that Black female slaves endured and how that legacy affects modern Black womanhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Audre Lorde</td>
<td>Sister Outsider</td>
<td>Essays and speeches that explore the intersections of marginalizing identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Dorthy Edith Smith</td>
<td>The Everyday World as Problematic</td>
<td>Emphasis on reflection, action, and accountability; most powerful methodological insight for intersectional research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Floyd Anthias &amp; Niraand Yuval-Davis</td>
<td>Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle</td>
<td>Demonstrate the inadequacies in failing to consider race, gender, ethnicity, or other identity categories of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Chela Sandoval</td>
<td>Methodology of the Oppressed</td>
<td>Demonstrate the inadequacies in failing to consider race, gender, ethnicity, or other identity categories of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Robin Morgan</td>
<td>Sisterhood is Forever</td>
<td>Affirmation of inclusive feminism is the politics of the twenty-first century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intersectionality remains an appropriate approach to understanding the intersection of being a Black woman student-athlete as this study aims to do. Wijeyesinghe (2012) explains how this is possible concerning the idea that Intersectionality addresses populations not represented in the existing literature or discussion of identity, social oppression, or social justice. Thus, it helps to frame the identity of Black women students more broadly and holistically, and the result of the interaction of multiple factors at moments in their life. Next, Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals can simultaneously inhabit positions of social privilege and marginality and that these social positions influence both the experience of an aspect of identity like their social status as an athlete does.

It is important to note that Intersectionality is particularly useful in analyzing problems within higher education because of the competing social divisions there. Indeed, college classrooms are typically the places where students first learn about Intersectionality, and their experiences on and around campus including the dormitories, learning centers, dining halls, libraries, sporting events, social spaces and places of employment become the places where Intersectionality is experienced (Collins & Blige, 2016). Specifically, researchers in higher education tackle questions of how interactions between social inequalities shape the educational experiences and outcomes of disenfranchised people.

Intersectionality is the most appropriate method of theory and praxis for this research study since it critically examines the experiences of YBW student-athletes who have experienced an academic transition to higher education through the NCAA recruiting process. Specifically, it provides a grounding in cases where race and gender
work together to limit access to social services like education. Operating as a social justice intervention, it helps to make sense of the initiatives that involve creating effective strategies that deliver equitable opportunity, security, and well-being to those who have been historically marginalized and underserved. As student populations continue to change, administrators within and in support of the college and university athletic departments can use the intersectional theoretical analysis and practical application presented in this study as a guide to analyzing social problems more fully; 2) shape more effective interventions; 3) promote more inclusive coalitional advocacy specific to their organization, resources, and goals. Viewing identity at the individual (micro) level as complex and complicated and evolving over a lifetime while accounting for the impact of broader social and political contexts at the macro level provides insight into the framing of identity and experienced by Black women student-athletes (Wijeysinghe, 2012).

Organizational Culture Theory

Culture is one of the most prominent contributions to the success of an organization, as is determined by a shared set of values to inform a group’s behavior (Cole & Martin, 2018; Schein, 2010). Shein (2010) details how an organization’s culture depends on the four elements of stability, depth, breadth, and integration. Stability describes the culture and values that are hard to change despite personnel turnover. Depth embedded culture is in everything the group does and does not require conscious implementation. Breadth demonstrated when the culture is present among all organization functions from top to bottom. Integration signaled the cohesion between behaviors, values, and rituals (Cole & Martin, 2018; Schein, 2010). An audit of organizational culture would result in what Longman, Daniels, Bray, and Liddell’s
(2018) call “push” and “pull” to describe the variety of relationships within and outside of the organization. “Push” is the propelling of the participant away from the organization and thus diminishing aspirations or willingness to move into or remain in leadership. To “pull” is to draw the participant into further engagement with the organization, thus increasing the desire to become or remain a leader. Therefore, finding elements of ideal cultures where Black collegiate women student-athletes can thrive under these conditions of multi-directional effort and emphasis is a part of the process of understanding their decision-making process because it is the culture within an organization that strongly influences the treatment of Black women by their counterparts (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000). These counterparts establish the norms and uniformity of rules and regulations that have traditionally oppressed people's compliance (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000). Active organizational cultures provide cues on how to behave and establish reinforcing expectations to influence organizational members.

Schein’s (2004) Three-Tiered Integrative Model of Organizational Culture considers the importance of analyzing and distinguishing between layers of culture by examining artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions to understand the culture of any given organization better. In the model, the least visible layer is organization values. These values motivate and foster behavior among organization members like employees. Values underlie norms, the center layer of organizational culture. Norms are the expectations of acceptable behaviors held by members of the organization and have the force of social obligation or pressure. Finally, the most specific and observable characteristics of an organization are the artifacts. Artifacts are evident in symbols, rituals, language, and physical workspaces or facilities. Collectively, these
layers determine observed patterns of behavior within any organization (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) take a different approach to organizational culture by explaining the six cultures present in academic institutions. First, collegial culture finds meaning primarily in the disciplines represented by the faculty in the institution demonstrated through research and scholarship. It emphasizes competition and striving for prestige and dominance, creating challenges for women in inequalities, lack of supportive priorities, policies, and reward structures, biases embedded in stereotypes or organizational practices, need for targeted mentoring, and leadership development oriented towards women. Second, managerial culture consumes the implementation and evaluation of work directed towards a specified goal and purpose. These espoused values are the norms that provide regular operating principles that guide group behavior toward stated strategies, mission, and vision statements, and philosophies (Schien, 2004). Third, the developmental culture works to support the cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth of students, faculty, and staff. The underlying assumptions that drive organizational behavior provide the mental map that guides individual perceptions, feelings, and actions within a culture (Schien, 2004). Fourth, advocacy culture among students but primarily among faculty and their pursuit of the policies changing and academic freedom. Fifth, the virtual culture represents significant changes in higher education in a globalized world where faculty, staff, students, and the communities that they operate in value open, shared, and responsive educational systems. Finally, the physical culture describes the value-based, face-to-face education in an owned physical
location. Schien (2004) describes the cultural components as the artifacts of an organization heard or felt, such as facilities and resources.

By taking the essential elements of Schein’s (2004) multilayered model, this research study helps to learn more about the importance of complicated processes from cultural values on student-athlete success while focusing on the developmental culture of college campuses and their support of Black women student-athletes by seeking to learn more about the role of artifacts in their decision-making process. Further, these artifacts help to create critical connections to historical and societal influence on the lived experiences of these students.

Norman, Rankin-Wright, and Allison (2018) were the first to use Schein’s (2004, 2010) research to find three shared areas of organizational culture that support the progression of women. First, women benefit from a traditional learning culture meaning that clear, credible pathways for progression communicate and accompany continued support for ongoing opportunities to learn and collaborate. Next, leadership that is inclusive and exhibits gender, race, culture, and religious diversity and practices fair and equitable behaviors are favorable. Diversity as a concept in higher education has adopted many meanings as it relates to practice. Diversity initiatives have increasingly jettisoned the structural analysis of social inequality in favor of individual and cultural interpretations of social problems. They also concern the shift of a less critical analysis of social inequality. Furthermore, diversity initiatives address a linguistic change from “embracing diversity” to becoming “culturally competent,” a method aimed at developing global citizens. Lastly, diversity initiatives that use vertical and horizontal
relationships allow for practicing leadership skills within collaborative and mentoring opportunities (Collins & Blige, 2016).

Combining Organizational Culture Theory with Intersectional Theory and praxis helps to explore vulnerable identity intersections at the societal, organizational, and individual levels. Since the research settings selected for this study are higher education campuses and their athletic departments, organizational culture theory allows me to make sense of how these intersections construct and reinforce marginalization in organizations and among their internal departments and teams from the perspective of the Black collegiate woman student-athlete. Finally, this study produced a multi-level analysis where organizational culture theory is most apparent at the systemic-level (macro) where oppressive, marginalizing, and impactful behaviors are illuminated through the use of “markers of inequality” similar to the work of Castro and Holvino (2016). They explain that “markers of inequality” extend analysis past categories of race and gender to include differences or types (physical, symbolic, discursive, and structural) relevant to the complexity of inequalities in this setting.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework provides an understanding of my research problem, the specific direction the research takes, and the relationship between the different variables involved (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In this study, I explain the competing identities of YBW student-athletes using Intersectionality as a form of analysis and praxis. I integrate this explanation into the Cynefin Framework to create a useful structure for this research that asks questions surrounding their collegiate recruiting experiences. Organizational culture’s values, norms, and artifacts, as well as the
cognitive, affective, and behavioral developmental processes apparent in those collegiate spaces, depicted as the background and boundary of which this intersection takes place. Also, designations of historical experiences and societal influences add emphasis to the critical examination of the topic and the research implications considered in those contexts. The next section discusses the Cynefin Framework and the tools that it offers to clarify my point about decision-making and the challenge of intersecting identities. Together, these concepts establish for the premise of the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities, the conceptual framework created for this research study.

Cynefin Framework: A Sense-Making Model

Snowden of Creative Edge created the Cynefin framework (1999) as a decision-making framework that recognizes the causal differences that exist between system types and proposes novel approaches to decision making in complex social environments. Brougham (2015) summarizes the key components of the Cynefin Framework. The framework separates an ordered system characterized by highly constrained or highly predictable behavior and an unordered system based on causality as either obvious from experience or determined by analysis. To explain further, I begin by describing the ordered system. The ordered system starts with the “simple” domain where apparent causes, the known-knowns, are sensed, categorized, and responded to (S-C-R).

Next, the “complicated” domain requires the use of analysis to solve problems distinguishing it from “simple” in that the difference between cause and effect is time. This complicated domain involves the expertise of a group of experienced people around concern who work towards solutions to these known-unknown problems based on the
average view of the group. The issue of groupthink (the practice of thinking or making decisions as a group in a way that discourages creativity or individual responsibility) can be addressed by engaging diverse groups of individuals and ensuring that some of these individuals come from other domains of expertise and therefore provide a naïve view.

The strategy in this domain is to sense, analyze, and respond (S-A-R).

Now, the unordered system is made up of the “complex” and “chaotic” domains. The complex domain works where causality can be determined in hindsight since no amount of analysis predicts the behavior of this system. This system is stable, and constraints and behavior evolve through the interaction of the components. In the complex domain, there are no clear answers and various competing views. The objective of this domain is not to look for the right answers but to search for a series of testable ideas to find ways to be successful, as more than one plan may be viable. Working through this domain requires the use of utilizing some parallel experiments that test the hypotheses and inevitably maximize the potential of learning. This strategy requires the decision-maker to accept the unknown-unknowns, probe for ideas, sense solutions, and respond with experiments (P-S-R). The “chaotic” domain has few to no constraints, and the behavior is random. The unknowable-unknowns require the decision-maker to act, sense, respond (A-S-R) quickly and work to return to the complex domain.

Finally, Snowden considers two additional opportunities within this framework. The first is the space for “disorder,” which holds systems that have not yet been determined to encourage users of this framework to consider that systems are not always stable, and the state of the system may change over time. The second is a clear distinction between the boundary between “simple” and “chaotic,” a dangerous place where a
decision-maker begins to believe that past success prevents them from future failures. It is in this space that decision-makers move towards complacency and eventually fall into crises, an expensive and time-consuming misstep to correct.

**Figure 2.4: Snowden’s (1999) Cynefin Framework**

**Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities**

Dill and Zambrana (2009) emphasized five components used to create their Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity that also applies the theoretical interventions of Intersectionality. First, context, a necessary tool for macro-level analysis represented as interlocking systems of inequality or a matrix of domination, always influence an individual’s life circumstances, including the construction of their identity. Second, identity salience suggests that a social-historical context impacts the status of socially defined ranks in a way that it is different from the importance the individual may assign
to the same identity. Third, the concept of “core” represents the intentional placement of the lived experiences of marginalized groups at the center of the framework and raises the level of analysis to a structural one rather than one only focused on individual identities. Fourth, an intersectional framework presumes not only the existence of multiple identities but also that they are intersecting in mutually reinforcing ways. Finally, the intersectional view of the filter illuminates the relationship among context, social identities, and their salience, and meaning-making capacity where the meaning-making filters allow the broader socio-historical context to shape the filter based on structures of privilege and oppression.

I developed the conceptual framework for this research study by first considering the identity of YBW student-athletes (context). Next, I accounted for the integration of the biological intersectional relationships of gender and race and added the self-selecting identity of student-athlete (multiple identities) to learn more about the space in which these identities contrast and reflect off one another. Then, these intersections are inside (core) the boundaries of the Cynefin Framework’s complex domain. Organizational cultures that exist in any given setting make the boundaries. In the case of this research, it implies the organizational culture of higher education with a primary focus on the developmental culture that exists there. Next, directional arrows reference the work of Snowden (1999), where he mentions the direction within the framework that decision-making practices take towards a simple and automatic process (from chaotic to complex and from complex to complicated). Finally, seeing as how this research study is intended to be critical, I accounted for the influence of history (identity salience) directly on top of the entire domain to describe the weight that it carries not only on the part of the
decision-makers but also the organization as a whole. Also, I account for the influences of society (identity salience) on the organization and the people within this complex with the multi-directional arrows indicating that movement (filter).

![Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities](image)

Figure 2.5: Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities

**Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter examines YBW student-athletes transitioning from high school to higher education settings through the collegiate athletic recruiting process. Research on YBW students and student-athletes in a secondary education setting is limited. It tends to be rooted in stereotypes and biases and centers on discouraging gaps in academic achievement and related disciplinary matters about their gender peers or racial counterparts. To present a counter and affirming narrative, I use exceptionalism to recognize and ground their experiences by showing the contrasts of
performing exceptionally as an athlete and navigating society as an exception as most minorities do.

This research study asks an initial question of “What is the experience of YBW student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions?” and creates an opportunity to understand the influence of identity on decision making. A review of the separate identity components related to this research revealed a racial identity scholarship dominated by the experiences of men and academic and athletic identities studied through a gendered lens. Research on the development of the multiple and competing identities of race, gender, academics, and athletics is virtually nonexistent. I provide an explanation of how these identity intersections collide and the conflicts that emerge among them at milestones related to the academic and athletic careers of YBW student-athletes. Also, I present the significance of these crossing points about their decision-making process during recruiting.

Finally, the campus climate of the institution connects to the college choice decision and satisfaction with it. A historical review of campus climates and brief federal policy analysis frame the nature of today’s campuses that assert equity and access but fall short on inclusion and support services based on the findings of current research. Pursuing this research contributes to the existing scholarship of intersectional scholars, sport sociologists, and diversity and inclusion practitioners by furthering the understanding of the transition between organizations for these women, their pursuit of exceptionalism, and how they confront the decision-making process when they are empowered.
Chapter three details the qualitative and critical phenomenological research methodology used in this research. The research design was developed to answer my research questions that intentionally recognize, solicits, and values the voice of the young Black woman student-athlete and works to detail her experience as one that satisfies the criteria for exceptional performances and existence in society. Intersectionality guides a multi-level analysis with a system-, process- and group-centered approach to understanding identity intersections in a socio-historical context. Organizational culture theory identifies “inequality markers” within them. Finally, the Cynefin Framework and the path to analysis it offers are reviewed to understand better the need for the adapted Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities used in this research for practical social justice application. Collectively these steps detail critical analysis and praxis plan towards discovering and developing strategies for action related to the findings of the study.
Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Black women suffer the consequences of gender and racial ideologies (Coakley, 2010) and are historically omitted, devalued, and misinterpreted (Collins, 2000). Understanding the experience of YBW student-athletes provides an opportunity to contribute to scholarship about the transition of YBW student-athletes from high school to college and offers value by helping to explain the unique experiences of this student sub-population to institutions of higher education looking to attract high-performing Black women student-athletes. This research plans to understand better the collegiate athletic recruiting experiences and decision-making processes of YBW student-athletes who choose to attend predominantly White institutions. Through the consideration of their personal experiences before college, and how the promises made during the recruiting process are meeting the reality of their student-athlete experience during their time on and around their college campus, this research aspires to understand what factors were most important to them when deciding between colleges and universities and their experiences as college students.

By drawing on their experiences and the characterization of effective and ineffective recruiting practices, I aim to influence three distinct areas of diversity and inclusion efforts in higher education and their athletic departments. First, I expected to provide an illustration of YBW student-athletes in general, and specifically student-athletes’ preferred recruitment strategies. Second, I looked forward to findings that generated specific areas of concern and support that administrators within organizations can consciously cultivate to influence the recruitment efforts of higher education
programs by offering a narrative that describes what is essential to YBW student-athletes, allowing them to become better utilized and valued in those spaces. Third, I illuminated the effects of power structures within a team, athletic department, and university on YBW student-athletes within American institutions. To accomplish this, I produced an image that has the potential to clearly describe the need for adjustments to those structures that create a setting that has a positive effect for both the student-athlete and the organization. To do this, I used a qualitative research design that incorporated an interpretive perspective and analysis known as critical phenomenology.

Welton (1987) described Critical Phenomenology as a philosophy rooted in the classical phenomenological tradition (Salamon, 2018). This methodology focuses on both lived experiences and the political, economic, social, and cultural forces that inform them and create our interpretations of them (Cleaveland, 2013). The research questions asked about the experience, perception, understanding, and telling of YBW student-athletes recruited to predominantly White higher education institutions. Critical Phenomenology seeks not only to describe what people feel, think, or experience, but also to grasp how the process of sensing or experiencing comes about through multiple, interlocking interactions (Desjarlais, 1997). This chapter has three main objectives. The first is to detail classical phenomenological tradition. The second objective is to explain how critical analysis changes research boundaries through intentional data collection methods and data analysis allowing me to capture the essence of the phenomenon more holistically. Finally, the third objective is to demonstrate how applying a critical lens in research results in social justice plans for action.
Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings’ experiences using a humanistic, interpretive approach. Specifically, it encompasses all forms of social inquiry that rely primarily on non-numeric data and all types of textual analyses such as content, conversation, discourse, and narrative (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Qualitative methods enrich empirical findings by highlighting the meanings behind the numbers used to describe people and experiences as well as cultural distinctions between and within groups (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2018). Stake (1995) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative research designs based on the data collection and methodology approach taken or the identification of the best strategy for addressing a theoretical or practical problem. Further, qualitative methods are well suited to research focused on understanding the lives and experiences of marginalized populations of which YBW athletes are one (Tilley & Taylor, 2018). Hatch (2002) describes how qualitative research helps to make sense of the lived experiences of real people in real settings. When engaging with marginalized communities, as this research intends to do, qualitative research demonstrates a commitment to study such individuals as full human beings (McGuire, 2019). My research design for gaining the understanding of the YBW student-athlete followed the guidelines of social inquiry, meaning-making, and methodological approach. The next section describes why a qualitative research approach is most appropriate for this study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is most fitting for this research study because of its usefulness in gaining information with intricate details, the capability to empower
individuals, and understanding of contexts and settings (Creswell, 2013). Disadvantaged students are vulnerable and marginalized and benefit from research that assesses their experiences, backgrounds, and assets (Auerswald, Pratt, & Mirzazadehi, 2017). Qualitative data collection methods are inclusive ways to obtain this data. The fact that this study depended on the opinions, values, and resources of YBW, traditionally considered a marginalized group, a qualitative research design was the most appropriate.

Understanding the philosophical assumptions behind qualitative research begins with assessing where and how to put philosophy and theory into perspective (Creswell, 2013). First, the philosophical assumption underlying this qualitative research embeds social justice theory and seeks to bring about change to address social justice issues in education. Using social justice interpretive frameworks in qualitative research provides an understanding of the “conditions that serve to disadvantage and exclude individuals or cultures, such as hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, unequal power relations, identity, or inequities in our society” (Creswell, 2013, p. 34). Second, these assumptions align with those of other critical researchers who look to examine social institutions and their transformations through interpreting the meanings of social life by considering historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggle (Creswell, 2013; Morrow, Morrow, & Brown, 1994). Third, this critique of society results in the envisioning of new possibilities within these settings. This research study is intentional about satisfying these three philosophical assumptions. Indeed, while assumptions of other critical researchers acknowledge their examination of the relationship between social institutions and historical oppression, I have accounted for the effect of these elements on the individual and the organization simultaneously. Finally, new possibilities made available for both
the organization and the individual in synthesizing the experience of YBW student-athletes work to combat feelings of uncertainty and isolation.

Philosophy in qualitative research helps to formulate research questions and inform methodologies (Creswell, 2013). Questions that qualitative research best addresses are “oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” making the qualitative methodology ideal for informing the various dynamics that influence decision making based on personal identities as this research intended (Patton, 1990, p. 206). Therefore, I applied qualitative research due to the nature of the research questions and the subjects of the inquiry. This study asks discovery and exploratory questions to describe the recruiting experiences of YBW student-athletes at predominantly White institutions. Specifically, there is a single overarching research question with three supporting sub-questions:

1) What is the experience of young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions?

   a. How do young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions perceive athletic departments’ consideration of their experiences during and after the recruiting process?

   b. How do young Black women student-athletes experience and understand the college recruiting process?

   c. How does this experience and understanding of the recruiting process inform or shape the college experience for young Black women student-athletes?
Qualitative research is rooted in a phenomenological paradigm, holding that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definition of the phenomenon (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The fundamental purpose of this qualitative research method is to reduce individual experiences of YBW student-athletes who have experienced exceptionalism as I use it in this research to a description of the universal essence. This description consists of “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the analysis of exceptionalism, as used in this study, reviewed a concept or characteristics from the reality of YBW student-athletes.

**Understanding Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology and has origins from the 1890’s work of Edmond Husserl (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Phenomenology is the study of “phenomena” or the appearances of things in human experiences, or the meanings things have in the human experience (Smith, 2018). Primarily, it provides an understanding that offers a positive impact on issues related to perception cognition and general meaningfulness of human lives (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Merleau-Ponty (1962) discusses four central themes related to phenomenological philosophy: description (describing things as one experiences them), reduction (the need for researchers to temporarily suspend taken for granted assumptions and presumptions about the phenomena so the things themselves return), essences (core meaning of an individual’s experience), and intentionality (constant consciousness of things) (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2013). One critique of phenomenological methods is that it is insufficient for describing the relation of self and applying it back to the world (Salamon, 2018). Subscribers to this
thought recommend using critical phenomenology, a subset of phenomenology, to satisfy this concern (Salamon, 2018).

There are several types of qualitative inquiry and modes of qualitative data collection that align with the humanistic tradition, including the critical phenomenology method utilized for this study. The next section explains the foundations of critical phenomenology, the role of situating phenomenon in a social context, and the critical theories that guide the analysis of the data. Specific considerations of critical phenomenological research design follow.

**Critical Phenomenology**

Melançon (2014) explains that when acting upon experiences, critical phenomenology offers the ability to think of these experiences embodied in society and history, therefore, creating social and political consequences. This study followed Willen’s (2007) three-dimensional critical phenomenology approach to effectively capture the production of broader circumstances within which locally specific and dynamic configurations of the recruited YBW student-athletes. The first dimension required critical scholarship on the dual concept of exceptionalism as it relates to the marginalization of YBW student-athletes, and the implication it has on their ability to excel academically and athletically. The second dimension focused on policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion under the guise of recruiting. The third dimension considered attentiveness to the embodied and lived experience of these YBW college students.

To begin, Heidegger’s foundational scholarship, *Being and Time* (1962), is a phenomenology of everyday human life and an exploration of the transformations of self
that can take place in encounters with the most extreme existential challenges that human beings confront (Blattner, 2006). The intricate work offers a starting point and platform for critical analysis when working to understand a given phenomenon with consideration of how “being,” “time,” and “language” relate. Heidegger describes how the understanding of “being” is always comprehended regarding “time,” although time is an abstract theme – a process he calls the “temporality of being.” Meanwhile, Heidegger explains that discourse is essential to familiarity with the world and, therefore, central to “being-in-the-world.” It comprises not only words and grammar, but also covers body language, art, dance” (Blattner, 2006) and in my case, athletics. The central concept indicates an inseparable connection between mind and body, lived experiences, and historical or social context (Heidegger 1962; Standing, 2009).

However, Melançon (2014) credits philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) with creating the foundations of critical phenomenology and argues that phenomenology aims to give an account of perception. Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world” argument influenced the work of Merleau-Ponty, who expands on the idea of making the body the centerpiece of his theory where Heidegger was less likely to mention its actual role. He argues that the way we are directed at the world, our intentionality, is a motor-intentionality grounded in our physical abilities. Motor-intentionality describes the subject and the world as influencing each other, where one cannot conceive of a subject without a world (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Similarly, Breivik (2017) discusses the work by Merleau-Ponty, and its relation to a sport where the concept of motor intentionality is interpreted as primary bodily attention and relatedness to the surrounding world by athletes and intensionality of the body includes a form of knowledge that exemplifies in many ways
on the sporting field. It is based on a direct practical understanding of what one can do and how the world functions.

Saukko (2005) uses three perspectives to help situate phenomenon in a social context. They are a “hermeneutic focus on lived realities, a (post) structuralist critical analysis of discourses that mediate experiences and realities, and a contextualist/realist investigation of historical, social and political structures of power” (Saukko, 2005, p. 343). Historical moments, long-term goals, and matters of circumstance help to understand the commonalities within experiences of YBW student-athletes’ relationship with recruiting. As a result, presumably accurate descriptions of YBW student-athletes undergoing and living through this experience provides the basis for a critical phenomenology research study as described here. The intensive exploration of this phenomenon, therefore, examines not only how YBW student-athletes experience and perceive it, but also the structural relations through which those meanings manifest (Hood, 2016). Therefore, Intersectionality functions as the lens through which this critical phenomenological study takes. Combining the critical lens and the phenomenological methodology works to generate findings of greater depth and plausibility due to their varied perspectives resulting in the use of multiple points of view to answer the research questions (Auerswald, Piatt, & Mirzazadeh, 2017; Hood, 2016).

Applying Intersectionality to Research Design

Intersectionality is an attractive approach to understanding college student development because of the potential for a more holistic portrayal of the complexities of identity. The framework of Intersectionality links together individual, interpersonal, and structural domains of experience related to achieving a more socially just society (Jones
Abes, 2013; Renn, 2010). Jones (2009) lists four central characteristics of intersectional research. First, intersectional research is a primary emphasis and centering of the lived experiences of individuals. Second, it is an exploration of identity salience as influenced by systems of power and privilege and the interactive nature of systems. Third, it unveils the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression. Finally, a larger purpose and goal of intersectional research is to contribute to a more socially just society.

The critical use of intersectional thinking, as advanced by scholars of color, has helped to uncover and critically analyze the multiple realities of Black women (Ratna & Samie, 2018). The critical nature of Intersectionality derives from projects that “seek to analyze and criticize social injustices that characterize complex social inequalities, imagine alternatives, and propose viable action strategies for change” (Collins & Blige, 2016, p. 40). Determining specific social actions is critical and based on historical and social context (Collins & Blige, 2016). Intersectionality functions as critical inquiry and critical praxis together. Specifically, Intersectionality extends first an approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences of disenfranchised people; secondly as a tool linking that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals; and finally, in how scholarship and practice are intimately connected (Collins & Blige, 2016).

Points of concern in Intersectionality include a focus on the experiences of women of color, a researcher’s ability to place themselves within the narrative, an understanding that the needs of women of color cannot be met by looking at one category of analysis, a priority of social justice action, and that Intersectionality contains an
emphasis on relationality (Crenshaw, 1991). Jones and Abes (2013) highlight the challenges of applying Intersectionality to research design based on Bowleg’s (2008) cautions about the need for the researcher to make explicit the often-implicit experiences of Intersectionality even when participants do not express the connections. Also, Warner (2008) emphasizes a need to focus on the structure of guiding research questions and the research methods used to answer them. The research questions guiding this study align with Warner (2008). The theoretical and conceptual frameworks, study procedures, and data analysis included the application of Intersectionality as advised by Jones and Abes (2013).

Choo and Ferree (2010) describe three methodological approaches to intersectional research. They are system-, process-, and group-centered research strategies needed to establish relational methods, transformative processes, identifiers of select interactions and, the ability to imply a multi-level flow of knowledge and power. When designing this research study, it was essential to consider the most appropriate ways to take advantage of Intersectionality theory and settled on inclusion and voice of participants, the consideration of interaction effects, and systems of interactive processes as urgent priorities when considering the initial research questions.

I stack these three approaches to understand how power affects decision-making on marginalized women. Beginning with a system-centered research approach guides my understanding of the macro-level context, specifically the higher education climate. For this reason, I applied gender as the primary form of oppression or the society determining relationship (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009). Yuval-Davis (2006) explains this methodological choice to mean that gender as the primary form of
oppression allowed this research study to ask how this dimension of inequality is itself subdivided and connected to other axes of power and exclusion. Next, a process-centered approach focused on the meso-level context or the policies and procedures of institutions related to collegiate athletics recruiting. Therefore, the student-athlete identity established the secondary process forming relationship. These approaches help to comprehend a limited set of intersectional identities and experiences of inequality central to a particular time and place at a micro-level through the group centered-approach (Tapia & Alberti, 2018). The racial identity makes up the tertiary comparative relationship.

**System-centered research.** At the macro-level, a system-centered research approach typically sees gender and race as fundamentally embedded in, working through, and determining the organization of systems of inequality where the researcher considers the environments of these organization systems (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This approach gives no primacy to any process, leaving it as an open question to highlight how processes feedback on and construct one another. Bowleg’s (2008) work describes the importance of considering data within a “macro sociohistorical context of structural inequality that may or may not be explicitly or directly observable in the data” (p. 320). System-centered approaches focus on conceptualizing dynamic, complex social systems that this research intended to do, evidenced by the conceptual framework that is guiding this work (Crockett et al., 2011). This research study aligns with Velez and Spencer (2018) in the way that it adds complexity by de-emphasizing any effects and focusing on interactions and sites of interaction.

This research study uses the Cynefin Framework to recognizes causal differences between system types and proposes novel approaches to decision making in complex
social environments. Execution of the Cynefin Framework analysis for the complex
domain determines causality in hindsight and searches for a series of testable ideas that
find viable ways to be successful. This system-centered research approach requires the
higher education decision-makers to accept the “unknown-unknowns,” probe for ideas,
sense solutions, and respond with experiments. Implementation of equity policies related
to this research study, according to Suarez, Anderson, and Young (2018), can occur
through university-wide professional development initiatives, centers for advancement
and diversity and inclusion offices that empower and connect through knowledge
acquisition, curriculum development, mentorship, and community engagement.

**Process-centered research.** Process-centered research incorporates a
comparative analysis and a premise of relationality that demonstrates the context and
comparisons of different intersections to understand structural and organizing processes
of inequality better (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This approach examines how individuals are
“recruited to” categories and yet have choices in the “subject positions” they adopt in the
complex location (Adams & Padamsee, 2001). Also, process-centered research is
sensitive to issues of identities by considering that identities are constructed through or
co-constructed with macro and meso categories and relations (Adams & Padamsee, 2001;
Choo & Ferree, 2010; Prins, 2006). Process-centered research designs have the most
imposing methodological design. They produce dynamic models that privilege feedback
loops and overlapping interactions rather than additive models (Crockett, Anderson,

This research study focuses on how participants’ multiple collective categories of
identity (race, gender, student-athlete) interact with institutional (collegiate athletics
governing bodies, higher education institutions) and structural power sources (racism and sexism). Viewing identity this way increases the visibility of the dynamic intersection of these processes and how it transforms by its intersection with others to bring forth a more abundant consideration (Crockett et al., 2011). As a result, the framing of YBW student-athletes as exceptional provides an opportunity to look for the effect of how assumed power positions transform marginalized populations. This study applies an intra-categorical approach that is mindful of the different experiences of subgroups within the same category and considers multiple dimensions of exclusion among the subordinated groups. My intent, like Tapia and Alberti (2018), was not to assume homogeneity among group members and instead reveal the range of diversity and difference within the group while maintaining a critical stance towards the boundaries of social categories as historical formations. In other words, intra-categorical approaches can show how not all YBW student-athletes experience the recruiting process the same way.

**Group-centered research.** Methodological emphasis on inclusion sometimes fetishizes the study of the difference without necessarily giving enough attention to its relation to unmarked categories, especially to how the more powerful groups of people define normative standards (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Group-centered research brings in the experiences of marginalized groups by giving them a voice that highlights their unique realities and standpoints to understand inequality better. Designing research that highlights unmarked categories involves sampling and data collection procedures that capture vulnerability and power. Comparative designs that include multiple samples from multiple data collection sites both inside and outside the researches specific sample population or in various communities of varying composition allow for centralizing the
perspective of YBW student-athletes (Crockett et al., 2011). An intersectional perspective on the YBW student-athletes participating in the research study, decision making as a process would “place her structural location into relation with others, eliciting counterfactual questions that disturb the naturalness of existing arrangements” (p 139) by emphasizing the inclusion of perspectives, not only persons from the margins of society. The textural-structural description (discussed later in this chapter) meets the locational standard of Intersectionality by allowing the perspectives of the collegiate Black woman athlete to move from the margins of the student population to the center.

These multi-centered approaches converge in this research similar to that of Velez and Spencer (2018) who use Intersectionality in a phenomenological study to better understand identity formation and address the exchange between the person and social location with emphasis on power relations among those various social locations. While they focused solely on the systems-centered approach, they explain how this approach can be leveraged to bring critical elements of Intersectionality theory into developmental identity research by emphasizing youth’s experience of their social positions and power structures (sources of risk and support) as linked not only to those structures but also to development-based, phenomenological processing.

**Critical Phenomenology as a Research Design**

According to Husserl (1931, 2012), the process of searching into the meaning of something involves the intentional efforts of Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). The intentional experience incorporates real content and an ideal content, in and through which people dwell in thought, perception, memory, judgment, and feeling, in
comprehending essences. Naturally, it refers to consciousness and that individuals are always conscious of something.

**Epoche.** Phenomenology aims at retrospectively bringing to our awareness s to some experience we lived through to be able to reflect on the meaning of this lived experience (van Manen, 2017). Husserl called this freedom from suppositions the epoche, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain (Moustakas, 1994). It does not eliminate, deny, or doubt all things, only the natural attitude, biases of common knowledge, truth, and reality. Epoche allows me to set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceptions. Miller and Crabtree (1992) explain that the epoche enables researchers to enter the participant's lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter. Further, the epoche is the way we, as people, take for granted our bodies, the culture, gravity, language, logic, and various other aspects of existence, making up every individual in every moment.

In practicing epoche, I used reflective meditation until experiencing an inner sense of closure, as Moustakas (1994) recommended. Writing and labeling my prejudgments during this process was necessary to account for the range and diversity among them. Finally, I reviewed the list until I experienced inner readiness to meet someone or something and listen and hear what they present.

**Phenomenological reduction.** Fink (1995) explains that epoche and the action of the reduction proper are the two intimate fundamental moments of the phenomenological reduction process that are “mutually required and mutually conditioned” (p. 41). The reduction proper is the second moment within the process that recognizes the acceptance found in the epoche. The phenomenological reduction is a technique that allows one to
sustain the captivation of the unfamiliar so that the concept voluntarily cognition carries throughout the intentional analysis (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The four steps of phenomenological reduction include bracketing, horizontalization, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing the themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

First, bracketing refers to the deliberate and purposeful need for individuals to temporarily suspend taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions about phenomena, so the things themselves are returned to their meaning (Fouche, 1993; Groenwald, 2004; Hycner, 1999; Merleau-Ponty-Ponty, 1962). The world that I bracket was “cleared of ordinary thought and is present before me as a phenomenon to be gazed upon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This pre-reflection is also a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening myself up to the phenomenon.

To better understand the socially constructed nature of experience and the need to think in critically reflexive ways, I incorporated the use of critical reflexive journaling before settling on my research questions (Cunliffe, 2004). This method of personal reflective analysis facilitates the creation of order and connections. Critical reflexive journaling sustains a reflexive stance during the research process and answers questions about my reasons for undertaking the research, my assumptions regarding the demographics, and the characteristics of those I choose to understand better (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Critical reflexive journaling also addresses my place in the power hierarchy, personal value system, potential role conflicts, and even the writing style I incorporate to tell their story. I have included my positionality as the researcher in the next section to address these assumptions and presuppositions appropriately. Also, I used
memoing as an additional technique of bracketing throughout the data collection and analysis process as a means of examining and reflecting upon my engagement with the data. A combination of theoretical notes (cognitive process of conducting research), methodological notes (procedural aspects of research), and observational comments (feelings about research endeavor) were added to the reflexive journal to maintain the bracketing process as a priority, which is fundamental to useful and meaningful qualitative research (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Second is the identifying process of horizonalization. “Horizons” (perspectives) are unlimited, equally valued, and consumed in a never-ending process that offers the condition of the phenomenon and gives it a distinctive character (Moustakas, 1994). To determine the horizons, I tested each participants’ expression to verify that it contained a moment of the experience that is necessary and enough for understanding once decided that it meets that criteria, the participant’s expression is abstracted and labeled. The non-repetitive and remaining statements qualify as horizons of the experience.

Third, horizonalization lists and groups every expression relevant to the experience. Horizons are clustered into themes where I continuously looked and described them to report characteristics of varying intensities within the context of how they are experienced. Clustering and thematizing the horizons established the core themes of the recruiting experience of YBW student-athlete participants. The term “participants” indicates the most active role of the YBW student-athletes and is used in a qualitative inquiry such as this to describe the relationship between myself and the participant as an equal one (Morse, 1991). Qualities recognized and described as “non-repetitive constituents” were linked thematically (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). To connect the themes
appropriately requires an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon. Verifying horizons are explicit or compatible with the participants’ records, validates them, and completes the process.

Finally, the construction of a complete textural description provides meaning and discovery of experience. Individual textural descriptions are an integration, descriptively, of the invariant textural constituents and themes of each research participant. A composite textural description is an integration of all the individual textural descriptions into a group or universal textural description (Moustakas, 1994). This reflective process aims at grasping the full nature of the phenomenon. Reflection becomes more exact and fuller with continuing attention and perception, and the adding of new perspectives.

In order to create the textural descriptions for this research study, I created poems using the participant's words from their interview transcripts to provide rich poetic content. Once the interview transcripts were reviewed and approved for use by participants, I reorganized key phrases, events, and verbalized feelings into categories representing the three phases of the recruiting process (before, during, and after). The italicized text within the poems are my words used to serve as a transition between thoughts, link together two or more ideas expressed by the participant, complete a thought inferred in the interview, and concisely present a series of statements on a specific topic. The poem shape used is that of free verse, where I employed conscious line breaks to govern the reader’s pace, to emphasize particular words, and to weave together the appropriate historical and societal context (Bradley, 2009). Each participant received their respective poem with instructions to read for accuracy and approve for my continued use within this research study. Every participant was excited to have received
the poem and affirmed that the structure, organization, and use of their words was faultless.

Spoken-word poetry is weaved throughout the African diasporic oral traditions and accurately reflective of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920’s, the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s, and the rap music era of the 1990s because of its ability to connect the oral and literate traditions of African Americans through poetry, prose, music, dance, and theater (Fisher, 2003). Spoken word poetry constitutes an important site, in a public venue and within a supportive community that shares the content of identity narratives used to help heal from injuries of varying and combining forms of oppression (Collins & Blige, 2016). Fisher (2003) calls these venues African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities (ADPLC’s) made up predominantly of people of African descent, like those who participated in this research study, who participate in literacy or literacy-centered events outside of traditional school or work settings and operates an invitation to self-expression and creativity. Bradley (2009) adds that historically, people recite poetry to give shape to their feelings. Henery (2017) summarizes it all in that primarily related to this research study, writings like these “intimate how our lives and persons, in an ongoing confrontation with racial, patriarchal, and economic hierarchies, continue to seek others not simply for rights and justice but for the intangibles of understanding, intimacy, solidarity, and other ways of being” (p 436).

**Imaginative variation.** Imaginative variation encourages the seeking of “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, various positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). These
structural themes help to see what experiences about the themes detail what is happening. The critical approach to this process heightens when imagining the “possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and others” as Moustakas (1994) recommends (p. 99). The four steps of imaginative variation include:

1) Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings.

2) Recognize the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon.

3) Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings thoughts concerning the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others.

4) Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon.

This research study derived structural themes from the textural descriptions through Phenomenological Reduction. The critical nature of this study bound the approach to this structure, although I recognized that the process is open to a free-range of possibilities. The specific tenets of Intersectionality, and Organizational Culture theory, as I have discussed them, led me towards the individual structural descriptions for each participant, which integrate the structural qualities and themes into an individual structural description. The Composite Structural Descriptions are an integration of all the individual structural descriptions into a group or universal structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).
**Synthesis of meanings and essences.** The last step in the process and outcome of the phenomenology research design is the intuitive integration of the textural and structural description in a consolidated statement of the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (2012) refers to the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is as its “essence.” Essences are unlimited and refer to the familiar, universal, and core meaning of an individual’s experience of any given phenomenon that makes it what is. Sadala and Adorno (2002) explain that this writing is a transformation of participants’ common expressions into expressions appropriate to the scientific literature supporting the research. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis developed from this research represents the essences at this time and place from my vantage point as an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon previously discussed (Moustakas, 1994).

**Positionality of the Researcher**

The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument and requires that I am retrospectively acknowledging my awareness of the relationship to this phenomenon (Bourke, 2014). It is reasonable to expect that my beliefs, political stance, and cultural background are variables that may affect the research process. Before working to understand and explain the data, I bracketed my lived experience by describing my exposure to recruitment as a student-athlete and as a recruiter of student-athletes for participation in higher education athletics. Creswell (2013) explains that “this practice is important in an attempt to set aside the researcher’s subjective experiences (which cannot be entirely done) so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study” (p. 193).
To honestly consider my most current stance as it relates to this study, I evaluated my position about the three interrelated dimensions presented by Hopkins, Regeher, and Pratt (2017) in their “3+1” framework. The name of the framework is representative of the three aspects of tension within the field of phenomenology. Within each of the three tensions are a variety of positions I could have taken described in this chapter. They are first, the “general and the particular,” where I have stated the purpose of this study to understand the lived recruiting experiences of individual YBW student-athletes and applying a critical lens to facilitate a generalization of what this experience is and why it happens to be. Second, reduction and reflexivity, which addresses how exactly one goes about adopting a phenomenological attitude to see the experiences of others from a fresh perspective rather than through my natural attitude and taken for granted assumptions. Third, is description and interpretation, where I describe the essence of the phenomenon of exceptionalism for YBW student-athletes by telling “what” it is and “how” it is experienced with the intent to gain knowledge and awareness. At the same time, I have a responsibility to interpret the experience as a means toward a greater understanding of the same phenomenon.

The “3+1” frameworks final component (the “1”) is writing, the feature of phenomenological research that overlays the three dimensions described above (Hopkins, Regeher & Pratt, 2017). Writing and research are aspects of a single process that enables the useful articulation of and reflection on the issues related to the phenomenological study (Hopkins, Regehr, and Pratt, 2017; van Manen, 1990). Bourke (2014) cautions qualitative researchers to address positionality with all participants of the qualitative study, being careful not to assume positionality based on physical attributes any more
than a participant could. Also, he recommends researchers be intentional about clearly explaining and understanding any real or assumed motivations for collecting data related to positionality. Significantly, since I have experienced the recruitment for college athletic participation directly, I reflected phenomenologically on the living meaning of it and defined and explained my position as it relates to those who informed this study. Next, I described my current position as the sole researcher for this study and my prejudgments, attitudes, and beliefs about the people with whom I had the opportunity to interact.

**Where I Stand: My Position as the Researcher**

As a high school student-athlete, I knew without a doubt that I would compete in college athletics upon graduating. I can concede to the fact that my parents groomed me academically and athletically, and with good intention to do so. Although my list of higher education institutions options was plentiful, my college decision primarily centered on the sense of shared identity I felt with the people I met on campus. After four college visits, I settled on an institution that fostered an aspect of my idea of success for Black students (who were present and active on campus and not just confined to the spaces reserved for athletes). I did not know to what degree that would matter at the time, but it was more important for me to see representations of myself across the campus instead of on any promotional materials. I wanted to believe that I would somehow receive support directly and indirectly during this stage in life because failure was not an option.

Growing up with an athletic director as a father is the exact recipe for developing a person that is not only competitive but compassionate when it comes to the experiences
faced by athletes. By my sophomore year in college, I knew that I wanted to pursue athletic administration in higher education as a career. Working with a policy for the sake of equity spearheaded my approach towards learning and professional opportunity. I continued to earn my master’s degree in Sports Management and have served four higher education athletic departments supporting student-athletes for 13 years.

My interest in this specific research topic emerged from my experience as a Black woman NCAA Division I collegiate coach, where I learned that one of the real keys to success is recruiting exceptional athletes that could satisfy graduation requirements. Although I helped to accomplish remarkable things with all of my teams, there is nothing that can compare to the individual impacts I made on the athletes that I both inherited and recruited. I believe that most coaches and teachers think this is true. However, at that time, I learned and observed the differences in recruiting strategies when it comes to our perception of how a student identifies. It was often frustrating to listen to the “best ways to get them” and discourse about assumptions of shared needs and wants of students. I would argue that an enormous disservice towards an exceptional person and experience is to stifle their exception by putting it in a box.

I enter this study with some biases, prejudgments, and preconceptions summed up in a saying I once heard. “The biggest decisions you make in life are 1) Where you go to college, and 2) Whom you marry.” Although it sounds simple enough, these two decisions layer exceptions for the Black woman student. I have assumed that Black woman student-athletes have restricted opportunities to experience the many fruits of higher education based on the compounding effects of their biological and social identities primarily based on their previous secondary education experiences and
limitations of time and accessibility to campus culture due to athletic time commitments. I believe that Black women student-athletes are coached and mentored on perseverance and resiliency where sacrifice is rewarded rather than overall personal development and identity exploration that leads to an inner desire to present an affirmed self through sport participation. I am anxious to discover how collegiate settings and athletic departments are introduced to this population of students to entice their commitment and if that presentation is relevant once they arrive and experience campus climate. Finally, I believe that recruiting Black women is a complex task that reveals pieces of a disheartening story left cold and unconsidered because of the constant negotiation of self-identities in changing settings. I anticipate a declaration and encouragement of “being one’s self,” and I am confident this attitude is instrumental in progressing through the experience but wonder how long it lasts before she is reminded of who she is not. Still, I know that inviting a Black woman to a space that celebrates, leads, advocates for, and encourages performance, bears fruits of her that are undeniable.

I assume that, based on how I describe my position that I may be considered an insider by the participants associated with this study. An insider is someone whose biography gives them a lived familiarity with and prior knowledge of the group participants (Holmes, 2014). Advantages of being an insider give me the ability to have easier access to the Black collegiate woman athletes culture, the ability to ask more meaningful and insightful questions, and the ability to understand the language and non-verbal cues where disorientation is removed due to the absence of presumed culture shock experienced by outsiders (Holmes, 2014). Also, it assists me in making more accurate and authentic thick descriptions and understanding of the culture due to the
expectation that I would be trusted and, therefore, more likely to secure honest answers and feedback. Expectedly, disadvantages are also present in this insider position. Among them is the possibility that I may be unable to bring an external perspective to the process and therefore relied on my critical phenomenological research design to provide irrefutable and factual contextual evidence to support this research analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection involved a series of interrelated activities aimed at intentional, ethical, and effective qualitative research practices (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology traditionally uses interviews with multiple participants who have experienced the phenomenon and who meet specific criteria for sample selection. Since this critical phenomenology study worked to understand the impact of social institutions on the various identities of individuals, I was careful not to marginalize the participants further and recognize the power imbalances during all facets of the research process. Explicitly, suggestions for scholars conducting qualitative research with Black women recommend monitoring symbolic power in the representation process, triangulating multiple sources of data, and caring for participants in the research process (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2018). Black feminist researchers recommend being creative in devising multiple strategies to assist the participant in uncovering and confronting “unarticulated meanings or subjugated knowledge instinctively hidden for survival and political purposes” (Few et al., 2018, p. 211). Overall, I respected the participants for contributing to the research by giving back to those who participated and made way for the use of multiple perspectives. When considering the practical realities of giving back as a responsibility, it is my aim for the research results from this study to improve the lives of those I have studied where
interviewing is considered a part of the healing process for those who desire to have their voices heard and stories told (Gupta & Kelly, 2014). In the remainder of this chapter, I move towards referencing this group of students as Black collegiate women athletes because the methods used and described are for students over the age of 18.

**Research Sites**

This critical phenomenological study aimed to understand the athletic recruiting experience of YBW student-athletes to predominantly White institutions of higher education and its effect on the lifecycle of their collegiate-athletic experience. I engaged with ten Black collegiate women student-athletes competing among eleven athletic conferences across the United States of America governed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Student-athletes at these institutions on average have access to 22 NCAA governed sports (17 women’s championship sports, three mixed team championships sports, and four emerging sports for women). This research study focused on the championship sports. Table 1 provides an overview of the athletic conferences included in Division I minus the Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
Table 5: NCAA Division I Conferences and Number of Members Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletic Conference</th>
<th>Number of Public Institutions</th>
<th>Number of Private Institutions</th>
<th>Total Number of Member Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Athletic Conference</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Conference</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Coast Conference</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big 12 Conference</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Ten Conference</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference USA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-American Conference</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain West Conference</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pac 12 Conference</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern Conference</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunbelt</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General description of research sites.** For this study, participants selected from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletic institutions across the United States allow for diverse perspectives based on regional cultures, norms, and expectations. Within Division I, there are 351 colleges and universities. 59% of all student-athletes receive some level of athletic scholarship (NCAA.org). The median undergraduate enrollment is 9,629 students, and the average number of the student body participating in athletics is approximately 4%. Characteristics of NCAA member institutions related to this research study include the NCAA Academic standards, Graduation Success Rates, and Division I subdivisions.

The NCAA has two subdivisions within the Division I category, the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), also known as the “Power Five Conferences” and the Football
Championship Subdivision (FCS). Although this distinction only applies to the sport of football, it impacts the recruiting budgets of athletic department sponsored teams directly. The Atlantic Coast, Pacific-12, Big Ten, Big 12, and Southeastern Conferences make up the “Power Five Conferences.” The colleges and universities making up those athletic conferences are available in Table 3.3. The average recruiting budget of the athletic department’s for women’s teams at these institutions was $339,477 in 2016, according to The United States Department of Education’s Equity in athletics analysis tools (n.d.).
Table 6: FBS Conferences and Member Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Atlantic Coast Conference</th>
<th>Big Ten Conference</th>
<th>Big 12 Conference</th>
<th>Pac 12 Conference</th>
<th>Southeastern Conference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston College</td>
<td>University of Illinois- Urbana Champaign</td>
<td>Baylor University</td>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemson University</td>
<td>Indiana University</td>
<td>Iowa State University</td>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>University of California- Berkley</td>
<td>Auburn University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida State University</td>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>Kansas State University</td>
<td>University of California- Los Angeles</td>
<td>University of Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>University of Oklahoma</td>
<td>University of Colorado</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Louisville</td>
<td>Michigan State University</td>
<td>Oklahoma State University</td>
<td>University of Oregon</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Miami</td>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>Texas Christian University</td>
<td>Oregon State University</td>
<td>Louisiana State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Carolina</td>
<td>University of Nebraska</td>
<td>University of Texas</td>
<td>University of Southern California</td>
<td>University of Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina State</td>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
<td>Texas Tech University</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>Mississippi State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
<td>West Virginia University</td>
<td>University of Utah</td>
<td>University of Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse University</td>
<td>Penn State University</td>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>University of South Carolina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>University of Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Polytechnic</td>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
<td>University of Wisconsin- Madison</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute and State University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake Forest University</td>
<td>University of Wisconsin- Madison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vanderbilt University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Notre Dame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.1: Number of NCAA DI Athletic Programs within Each State

Access. Qualitative research involves the study of a research site and its people and requires gaining permission to study these places and people in a way that enables the collection of data. Establishing trust with participants requires gaining permissions (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). Research method, design, and objectives matched with my desired sample and required written consent obtained from all participants in addition to compliance with necessary ethical approval bodies. In working to gain access to participants, I leaned on the work of James, Horville, Efunbumi, Babazzadeh, and Ali (2017), who propose best practices when conducting sampling among women of Color, which I describe in the next section.
Sampling

In this critical phenomenological study, I aim to engage with ten Division I Black woman student-athletes representing the five FBS athletic conferences listed in Table 6 or until I reach saturation with the data with the collected data. Tesch (1984) recommends that the number of participants in a phenomenological study depends on the nature of the phenomenon where 10-15 participants are usual, and 6-25 participants are appropriate. The limiting criteria for participation in this research study are Division I Black women Athletes enrolled on college and university campuses. The use of these criteria helps to narrow the range of participants (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, & Duan & Hoagwood, 2015).

Sampling for variation (breadth) before sampling commonalities (depth) is a strategy that used to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest in qualitative research (Bernard, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015). I used purposeful sampling for breadth by incorporating a strategy of selecting cases with a maximum variation for three reasons. First, it is my goal to identify Division I Black Women Athletes because of their presumed knowledge gained through experience relating to exceptionalism as a Black woman student-athlete (Creswell, 2013). Second, this strategy helps to document unique and diverse experiences that have emerged in adapting different conditions and identifies important common patterns that cut across these experiences (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom & Duan, et al. 2015). Third, this sampling method can ensure the inclusion of various subsets of a population since the characteristics of the people are well known and described in chapter 2 (Auerswald, Piatt, & Mirzazadeh, 2017).
Next, I carefully chose the Division I Black women athletes in the study so that I can forge their shared understanding of being among the most visible and sought-after athletes of their peer group. Therefore, to achieve depth with sampling, I engaged in snowball sampling since Groenwald (2004) recommends that a critical aspect in recruiting a sample of young participants of color, age 18-29, comes from within social groups and through trustworthy gatekeepers. Snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking one participant to recommend others that have similar characteristics to contribute to the research (Creswell, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling method targets are hidden populations and are useful for recruiting disadvantaged, vulnerable, or marginalized adolescents who may be hard to reach but know each other (Auerswald, Piatt, & Mirzazadeh, 2017).

To achieve my desired sample size, I used social media corresponding to recruitment. Groenwald (2004) views social media as an excellent method of recruitment for this demographic. According to a recent study, internet users worldwide spend an average of over 109 minutes per day on one of the many social media platforms. As of January 2016, an estimated 31 percent of the world’s population was using social networking, with 59 percent of North Americans active on at least one social media platform. North America also placed first in a global ranking of mobile social media penetration according to geographical region (Statista, n.d.). Specifically, Smith and Anderson (2018) add that younger Americans (age 18-24) frequently use YouTube (94%), Snapchat (78%), Instagram (71%), and Twitter (45%). While many social media platforms are highly interactive and allow individual users and communities to share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Piller, Vossen, & Ihl, 2012), the
overarching issues with using social media research include privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, authenticity, and rapid changes with related technologies (Hunter, Gough, O’Kane, McKeown, & Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). I created and maintained social media accounts specifically for this research study on Instagram and Twitter and used their features to introduce myself, this research study, build report and create community among those that choose to “follow” these accounts. Hennessy (2018) offers insights when courting brands or associations on Instagram, including posting often, being inclusive, and avoiding negativity. She also recommends controlling content by scheduling and joining internet communities to increase followers and gain feedback for new or small (less than 2,500 followers) accounts.

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social networking tool established in 2010 that allows users to upload pictures and videos of which they can attach captions and create connections to other accounts of people, organizations, or ideas (Instagram, 2012). Today, there are a reported 60 million photos uploaded to Instagram daily, partly because the majority of social branded content is shared there (Hennessey, 2018). As of June 2018, there were an estimated 1 billion Instagram monthly active users worldwide and an estimated 105 million Instagram users in the United States alone, a number forecasted to grow to over 130 million in 2022 (Statista, n.d). A recent survey also shows that the social network is most popular among the global youth, where nearly 16 percent of 16 to 24-year-old persons with internet access claim to be using Instagram actively. In 2020, the photo and video-sharing site projects to reach 120.3 million monthly active users in the United States, up from 104.7 million users in 2018 (Statista, 2019).
Twitter offers the most considerable amount of data reaching a diverse spectrum of individuals among their reported 300 million monthly users. Twitter (2006) is an online news, and social networking service that allows its users to; 1) see what’s happening in the world at that moment, 2) know every side of the story; 3) show the world what’s happening and; 4) spark a global conversation in 280 alphanumeric characters or less. Statista.com ranks Twitter as the 12th most famous social network site worldwide as of April 2018. The two social media graphics used to introduce the research study to participants are available in Appendix A. The captions used for those posts read: “Division 1 FBS Black women student-athletes needed to participate in research that describes their recruiting experiences. Please respond to this invitation using this link, http://bit.ly/ExceptionalRecruiting.”

Also, since student-athlete names are public on websites maintained by University athletic departments; I contacted student-athletes using their names to search for their public social media profiles. My strategy for selecting participants was to create an initial list of fifteen names by using a number randomizer on ResearchRandomizer.org to generate three sets of listed numbers that correspond with identifiers for the athletic conference, institution, and sport. From there, I reviewed online updated student biographies to select a student-athlete from that team roster. I was aware of the possibility of misidentifying someone based on a photograph only. Therefore, my Invitation to Participate included an electronic link for those that were interested in learning more and had customized responses based on the identifiers selected. When I was unable to achieve my desired participant amount using the first randomized number set; I repeated this strategy three times to generate a new randomized number set to assist in filling the
remaining slots. After the third attempt, I become more active by increasing the number of posts containing the Invitation to Participate graphics through social media platforms in soliciting participants from the connections of others. This approach allowed for the representation of different sports and institutions from each of the five FBS conferences. I used Table 7 as a guide for verifying the appropriate mix of athletic conferences and sports. I chose a pseudonym by which to be identified in transcripts controlling all labels, and verbal mentions of their contribution. I intentionally chose to use African names to magnify African culture and embrace Hodari’s (2010) assertion that many traditional and modern African societies tend to rely on and emphasize oral communication and including these names and their meanings into the written records. Also, their representative colleges and universities were de-identified and referenced by the athletic conference instead.
Table 7: Participant Sampling Representation Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC</th>
<th>Big 10</th>
<th>Big 12</th>
<th>PAC 12</th>
<th>SEC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| School Sport Participant 1 | | | | |
|----------------------------| | | | |
| School Sport Participant 2 | | | | |
| School Sport Participant 3 | | | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Sports</th>
<th>Winter Sports</th>
<th>Spring Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Golf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Swimming &amp; Diving</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Indoor Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>Softball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To create an opportunity to connect, I used the method of adding “followers” to my private network from the student-athlete rosters. Upon their acceptance, I sent a “direct message” introducing myself, research question, and a hyperlink to my Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent for those that were interested in getting involved. I requested to have participants forward my Invitation to Participate and research details to others within their network whom they thought would be willing to contribute. Bailey (1996) recommends providing informed consent to avoid counterproductive deception on the participants and observes that fraud might prevent insights, whereas honesty coupled
with confidentiality reduces suspension and promotes sincere responses as cited in Groenwald (2004). The electronic link and transcript of initial social media correspondence are available in Appendix A. The result of this sampling method generated 10 Black collegiate women participants for my critical phenomenological study. Their profile summaries are available in Table 8.

**Table 8: Summary of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Age started in sports</th>
<th>Sports Played</th>
<th>High School GPA</th>
<th>Recruited Sport</th>
<th># Recruiting Visits (Official/unofficial)</th>
<th>Distance between hometown and college or university</th>
<th>United States Region</th>
<th>Academic Classification</th>
<th>Academic Major</th>
<th>Professional Athletic Aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Adil</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Track and Field, Softball</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>1 Official, 3 Unofficial</td>
<td>Short: &lt;75 miles, within 1 hour</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Buli</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>0 official, 0 unofficial</td>
<td>Extremely Long: &gt;1,000 miles, varies</td>
<td>Pacific Coast</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Dalib</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soccer, Cheer</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>1 Official, 1 Unofficial</td>
<td>Short: &lt;75 miles, within 1 hour</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Gasaria</td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Notball, Soccer, Track</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td>0 official, 0 unofficial</td>
<td>Extremely Long: &gt;1,000 miles, varies</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Hali</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gymnastics, Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>2 Official, 4 Unofficial</td>
<td>Extremely Long: &gt;1,000 miles, varies</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Iyora</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Volleyball, Basketball, Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td>5 Official, 0 unofficial</td>
<td>Moderate: 75-260mi, within 4 hours</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Jila</td>
<td>Survivor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td>1 Official, 2 Unofficial</td>
<td>Moderately Long: 260-520mi, within 4 hours</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>International Real Estate and Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Macaria</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Soccer, Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td>2 Official, 1 Unofficial</td>
<td>Short: &lt;75 miles, within 1 hour</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Nia</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Soccer, Basketball, Swimming, Track</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.0-3.9</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>1 Official, 10 unofficial</td>
<td>Long: &gt;521 miles, -1,000 miles</td>
<td>Pacific Coast</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Siyana</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, Tennis</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Above 4.0</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>0 Official, 2 Unofficial</td>
<td>Moderate: 75-260mi, within 4 hours</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Participants

Adil. Adil is pronounced AH-deel and means just. Adil was raised along with two siblings by her parents in an affluent and predominantly African American community on the east coast of the United States. She attended a private school for the duration of her primary and secondary education. Her parents were supportive of her endeavors to begin and continue in softball for the community it insulated and later for the opportunity to compete collegiately. She admired the success of her peers as students and athletes while in high school and contemplated attending a Historically Black College or University before ultimately committing to an NCAA Division I institution. From the beginning, she found varying levels of comfort, validation, and support through her sporting and academic communities. When her idea of community was disrupted in high school, and again early in her college experience, it ignited a new way to satisfy her previous desires for justice through criminal justice to a space for justice reserved for students and their rights to development in education settings.

Buli. Buli is pronounced boo-lee and means gratitude. Buli traveled to the United States from the continent of Africa, where she was born and raised in the village just outside of the town where she attended school. A psychology major and future nurse, Buli decided to pursue sport and academics later than most at the age of 18 after learning from a friend that scholarships were available in the United States. Although she has excelled to the greatest of heights athletically, there was a time in her transition of deciding between pursuing nursing and pursuing athletics. Nursing is a career in demand in her home country due to growth in the population. The country has a rich history in distance running, and some could argue a global dominance in the event.
**Daib.** Daib is pronounced DAH-eeb and means outstanding daughter. Daib grew up in the deep southern United States and developed athletically through the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), a multi-sport organization dedicated exclusively to the promotion and development of amateur sports and physical fitness programs. She was able to use her older brother as a guide in navigating the athletic process and had the support of her parents to oversee her development as a student and basketball player. Her relationship with her father experienced tension when it came to sport and recognized that the two together could not coexist. Daib describes herself as extremely likable, and a people’s person but recognizes that as a result, she has sacrificed her opportunities to celebrate and be happy for herself for the comforts of her teams. She is currently contemplating graduate school to pursue a career in media and marketing so that she can regain some of the time she feels was lost in athletics to gain practical experience and opportunities she is now interested in.

**Gasira.** Gasira is pronounced GAH-see-rah and means bold and courageous. Gasira was born and raised on the island of Jamaica. The country has a global influence, and it is internationally prominent in sports, most notably cricket, sprinting, and athletics. She was raised by her grandparents and remained committed to making them proud through her pursuit of education. Gasira took up running after she proved herself to be a high performing student, giving her confidence that she could manage both. After encountering her current coach through the recruiting process, her motivation to continue to excel blossomed, and her dreams of representing her native country on a world stage has already begun to manifest. Gasira is now pursuing her graduate education in environmental science and concentrating on land and atmospheric science.
**Hali.** Hali is pronounced HAH-Lee and means character. Hali grew up in the southern United States. She was born to two parents who competed at the highest collegiate levels. Hali attended private school during her K-12 years both for academic advantages and flexibility in her pursuit of athletics. Sport specialization began at the age of three for the gymnast and remained her sport of choice throughout her time as a college student. She learned the value of social media while working to catch up with her sports recruiting calendar and the systems in place that help to secure team positions based on the graduating class. Injuries and image are things she battles in her sport but has found a way to overcome them both. Hali measures her success by the ways she makes a difference for others and how she has bettered herself. She has professional ambitions to support the physical development of youth interested in pursuing sport through various forms of coaching and education.

**Iyora.** Iyora is pronounced ee-YOH-rah and means “I am not a stranger in this community.” Iyora is an artist who performs as a track and field athlete. She excels in her sport partly because of her ability to find and follow any rhythm while she works. Her younger days were consumed with her passion for music, theater, and acting, a family love affair. She is an example for her two younger siblings and the product of her mother’s strength and determination. Her father was absent most of the time from her childhood memories but, her mother’s unwavering persistence for academics and athletics fueled her drive towards a career goal in chiropractic medicine. At the same time, her very realistic quest for All-American status, National Championships, and a position on the Olympic team lay the pathway for her journey.
Jilo. Jilo is pronounced JEE-loh and means survivor. Jilo was born and raised to appreciate the courtesies of southern hospitality and tradition. She is the only child of her mother, whom she genuinely admires and respects for her honesty, strength, and pursuit of the best she can offer. Jilo did not grow up with her father and admitted that a lot of her feelings of needing to be independent stems from his absence. Still, one commonality between her parents is the elite athletic abilities they share. First, Jilo participated in soccer and was then introduced to track and field in 5th grade, quickly excelling on a national level. She quickly advanced as a student in college when she transferred credits from her time as a high school student. Currently, she aspires to pursue entrepreneurship in the international marketplace and the reason she remains at her institution despite the ongoing conflict with her male coach. She is proud of the academic program she is completing and uses that as her motivation to continue with athletics.

Macaria. Macaria is pronounced MAH-sah-ree-ah and means seeker. Macaria grew up just outside of one of the nation’s western metropolitan areas as the youngest sibling and daughter to her mother and father. In about 3rd grade, she began participating in sport as a competitive gymnast, and due to the mental and physical strain it caused her, she grew tired of it half-way through high school. She benefited from the compassion of a private club coach to lead her while she transitioned sports at no cost to helping her earn a scholarship in the sport of track and field. Her older sibling was a seasoned athlete, although their difference in age left her unfamiliar with their college athletic recruiting experience, and as a result, Macaria feels that the recruiting experience was a bit of a façade. Macaria remains focused on her goals of graduation and excelling in sport at the national level and pursuing work in the fields of criminal justice as a lawyer.
**Nia.** Nia is pronounced NEE-ah and means purpose. Nia is an aspiring clinical psychologist with a budding passion for diversity and inclusion practices in sport. Her commitment to athletics has spanned the minimum ten years required to be an expert and has supplied a perspective of difference and a desire for change. While growing up in a family of five, she developed an armor of love and respect for herself and the team. Pursuing a sport that is monoracially dominated was neither a motivation or deterrent but has settled into the foundation of defining a purpose for her life in the short term and only a part of her identity in a lifetime. Nia is conflicted by the rational she feels is used to limit her development as a student-athlete by coaches now compared to the praise she received for being well rounded before college. Throughout her time in college, she has been targeted by teammates as her accomplishments grew and caused her to battle with her mental health as a result. She is confident about moving forward and on a quest for redemption and excellence.

**Siyasa.** Siyasa is pronounced See-YAH-sah and means politics. Siyasa has been a nationally ranked soccer player since before earning a driver’s license. She expressed her willingness to dedicate time and energy to pursuing success in her sport by committing to her University at the age of 14. As a second-generation college athletic recruit, Siyasa prioritized her time between athletics and academics while juggling the impact of sacrificing significant social endeavors. Having grown up in one of the affluent areas among the nation’s southern liberal cities, she recognized the benefits of genuine support from a highly educated friend group, and their families despite their racial differences. This community encouraged her aspirations for governance. She believes that driving national inclusive agendas elevates the global sport that has helped to cultivate her
identity. She embodies the complexities of authority and order when her desire to create change collides with the limitations placed on her voice as a student-athlete.

**Data Collection Strategies**

Phenomenology is an ongoing, creative, intuitive, and relational approach that challenges pre-determined rules and research procedures (Crowther, Ironside, Spence & Smythe, 2017). Creswell (2013) mentions there being room for innovative research methods coupled with standard data collection techniques such as observations, journals, various forms of art, and formally written responses. The strategy of triangulation wedds the assumption that data from multiple sources, methods, investigators and, theoretical perspectives must necessarily converge or aggregate to reveal the truth (The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, n.d). Therefore, this research study used two forms of data collection: in-depth interviews and written narratives. Capturing the lived experiences of Black women through these forms of narrative allowed their histories to establish the issues, make sense of what is happening in their experiences, and uncover other matters that are likely to be raised.

**In-depth interviews.** First, I conducted ten hour-long, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used data collection method in qualitative research because of its versatility, flexibility, and ability to enable reciprocity between myself and the participant (Galetta, 2012; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Docent, 2016). When considering the purpose of this research, I found that the semi-structured interview method was most suitable for studying people’s perceptions and opinions of complex or emotionally sensitive issues and concepts of values, intentions, and ideals (Astedt-Kurki & Heikkinen, 1994). By applying Bevan’s (2014)
phenomenological structure and Windsong’s (2016) approach of intersectional questioning to the interview process helps to manage to question participants in three domains. An overview of this method is available in Figure 3.2. To begin, contextualizing questions enabled her to reconstruct and describe her experience as a form of narrative that was full of meaningful information, offering insight into her natural attitude and lifeworld. Next, descriptive questions supplemented structural questions that aimed to show how individuals structure their experience apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing, natural attitude). Finally, clarifying the phenomenon generated variational questions from the interview itself (imaginative variation and meaning). Therefore, the primary questions used to guide the conversations were: 1) Tell me how you came to be a young Black woman student-athlete at your college or university (narrative); 2) Tell me how you prepared for the recruiting process as a young Black woman (modes of appearing), and, 3) Describe how the recruiting experience would change if you did not identify as a Black Woman student-athlete (imaginative variation). The complete interview protocol is available in Appendix B.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological Attitude</th>
<th>Researcher Approach</th>
<th>Interview Structure</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Example Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological Reduction (Epoche’)</td>
<td>Acceptancy of Natural Attitude of Participants</td>
<td>Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)</td>
<td>Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions</td>
<td>“Tell me about being ill” or “Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self</td>
<td>Apprehending the phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)</td>
<td>Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing</td>
<td>“Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit,” or “Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning through Imaginative Variation)</td>
<td>Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions</td>
<td>“Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor were present at all times.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Written narrative.** Narrative submissions were the second source of data for this research. Narratives are written by people of color to help to shatter the complacency that may accompany privilege and challenge dominant discourse that serves to suppress people on the margins of society (Creswell, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This method of storytelling helps to “name one’s reality” and offers a means of presenting a different reading of the world (Delgado, 1989). Narratives are not neutral but political expressions of power relationships where characters can explore and challenge the operation of racism, sexism, and other means of categorization in society (Zamudion, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). Participants interviewed responded to the narrative writing prompt, “Describe a discrepancy in your recruiting experience versus the reality of your life as a college student.” Participants gained access to the writing prompt at the time they schedule their interviews.
Explication of the Data

The intersectional experience faced by Black women is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, and analysis involving them should consider their complete stories. The explication of my critical phenomenological data implies an investigation of the constituents of the phenomenon of exceptionalism for YBW student-athletes while keeping the context of their experience whole (Groenwald, 2004; Hycner, 1999). I used the three dimensions of 1) critical scholarship on the dual concept of exceptionalism (addressed in the review of literature in Chapter 2); 2) policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion under the guise of recruiting and; 3) attentiveness to the embodied and lived experiences of YBW student-athletes. As a result, the qualitative methodological analysis approach for this study used the Cynefin Sensemaking Framework, which helped to address phase two, and Moustakas’ (1994) modification of van Manen’s earlier method of analysis of phenomenological data, to address phase three. The combination of these methods allowed for effectiveness when synthesizing data and was essential to the critical nature of this research study, which required analysis that resulted in not only the “essence” of the phenomenon but also providing action-oriented outcomes in which the Cynefin Framework is designed to do.

As previously described, this critical phenomenological study collected data from ten individuals in the form of in-depth interviews and narrative submissions aimed at describing their lived experiences as YBW student-athletes who shared the knowledge of the collegiate athletic recruiting process were compensated with a $20.00 Amazon gift card delivered directly to them by email. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and uploaded to a password-protected computer. Each participant file was saved
so that no identifying information was present. All interviews were uploaded to a transcription service. Once I received digital copies of the transcripts, they were immediately shared with and checked for accuracy by the participant and then saved alongside the audio file. Next, the transcriptions of collected data were uploaded and reviewed using Dedoose software because of the secure information keeping through secure encryption and overall functionality. Also, transcriptions were re-read, and audio files played back to obtain a sense of the complete set of data (Creswell, 2013).

**Cynefin Framework**

The Cynefin Framework is a phenomenological framework that helps to explain how people perceive and make sense of situations to make decisions (O’Connor & Limpets, 2015). The development of the Cynefin Framework was for use by leaders to investigate their facing of complex sets of fundamental social, political, economic, and ethical value issues (French, 2013). For instance, scenarios that describe “hierarchical values seeking to control and regulate behaviors” offer stakeholder groups a better understanding of how different strategies play out against conflicting and opposing ideas (Douglas, 2013; French, 2013, p.559). This method of inquiry offered several solutions to my research objectives. It provided an opportunity to identify what methodologies might be suitable for the problems faced by YBW student-athletes during the recruiting process; student-athletes themselves can use it to gain insight into the qualities of the issues they face following the recruiting process; and improved my categorization of methodological options within this decision analysis (French, 2013).

The Cynefin Framework is comprised of five domains representing the types of situations or environments that student-athletes, for the sake of this research, typically
experience and need to respond to and manage. The domains on the right of the quadrant, labeled “Simple” and “Complicated,” are ordered. The domains on the left, “Complex” and “Chaotic,” are unordered, where cause and effect are deduced only with hindsight or not at all. It is essential to understand that the domains do not offer a more desirable position, only a “sense of place” from which to analyze behavior and make decisions (Brougham, 2015).

The five domains described in Figure 2 are summarized this way. First, the “Simple” domain is home to circumstances the decision-maker has seen before, and its solutions are apparent and are only a matter of what resources are needed and accessible. The consequences of any course of action can be confidently predicted using the decision-making process of SENSE, CATEGORIZE, and RESPOND (French, 2013; Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). Second, the “Complicated” domain or the Realm of Scientific Inquiry, involves a group of diverse experts or knowledgeable people who could determine what desirable is based on sensing and analyzing the environment. It is the role of these experts to predict the consequences of a course of action with certainty. This process of determining is known as the SENSE, ANALYZE, and RESPOND decision-making process. Third, the “Complex” domain or the Realm of Social Systems expects to move or evolve in a particular direction. In this domain, causality cannot be determined initially, but managed by PROBING, SENSING, and RESPONDING. I am approaching the collegiate athletic recruiting process of YBW student-athletes as though they were operating in the complex domain. Qualitative data contributes to this domain by untangling the relationship between cause and effect. Fourth, the “Chaotic” domain does not exist for long and expected to have obstacles moved to complex or complicated
domains but requires novel action. Situations in this space involve events and behaviors beyond current experience and rationale. Decision making in this space is characterized by ACT, SENSE, and RESPOND (French, 2013). The “Disorder” domain is just for items whose domain has yet to be determined. A final note is a shift from an ordered state to a complex one regularly to prevent the various forms of complacency, which can reduce the possibility of catastrophic failure (Snowden, 2005).

The Cynefin Framework is useful for this research because it provides understanding as to which domain YBW student-athletes are operating in and, therefore, the competing approaches to understanding college athletic recruiting. Although it is out of the scope of this research, the Cynefin Framework uses categorization techniques that offer situational perspective to recognize which domain YBW student-athletes are in and, therefore, which approach, ACT, SENSE or PROBE is most appropriate. Also, the contextual aspects establish a checkpoint and help when deciding what the student-athlete wants to do as it relates to this phenomenon. Overall, it is about making sense of the broader situation while acknowledging that not every challenge or opportunity is obvious.

**Phenomenological Data Analysis**

Although I have discussed the steps of Moustakas’ (1994) Method of Phenomenological Data in detail earlier in this chapter, it is necessary to briefly summarize the expectations of organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data for this study as it relates to this method. First, I reviewed all collected data for “horizons” or significant statements, sentences, and quotes that provide an understanding of the phenomenon. This process is known as horizontalization. Second, I developed clusters of meaning from these horizons into themes. Third, these themes constructed a written
textural description of what the participants experienced. Fourth, I created the structural
description that details the context and setting that influenced how participants
experienced the phenomenon. Finally, I prepared the structural-textural description that
presents the “essence” of the phenomenon that accurately describes the underlying
structure of being a YBW student-athlete.

Coding Guide

Coding helps make qualitative data research work by categorizing data in a way
that leads to interrelated concepts that are conceptually rich and share a densely
interconnected integration of experience. According to Strauss (1990), coding scrutinizes
the data at higher analytical levels, develops specific concepts linking them to a particular
phenomenon, and provides provisional answers that satisfy questions that emerge from
the data. Before considering the coding approach, I recognized my involvement as the
sole researcher for this study and its role in the way I would perceive, document, and
code the data (Adler & Adler, 1987; Saldaña, 2016). Butler-Kisber (2010) reminds me
that the phenomenological process generally consists of extracting significant verbatim
statements from the data (Horizons), formulating meanings about them through the
researcher’s interpretation, clustering these meanings into a series of related themes then
elaborating on the ideas through a detailed written description.

This research asks ontological questions that address the participants’ lived
experiences and the exploration of personal interpretive meaning found within the data.
Saldaña (2016) recognized that some scholars feel that more than one coding method, and
at least two different analytic approaches, should be explored in every study to enhance
accountability and the depth and breadth of findings. Considering the research design, I
understand the requirement of sympathy, empathy, and the need to infer underlying
effects with the participants and throughout the handling of the data. As a result, I
followed the recommendation of Saldaña (2016) to couple the elemental coding methods
of “In vivo Coding” with “Description Coding” to add context. These codes were further
analyzed using the affective coding method called “Emotion Coding” to cultivate themes.
Coded data is complete when the theming of the first-level coded information made up of
equally relevant, non-overlapping significant statements (Creswell, 2013). These themes
are a product of interpretation and involve categorization to develop theoretical
constructs. This research uses the integrative theme approach that weaves various themes
together into a coherent narrative to capture the boundaries of these constructs.

The horizons that were identified in the phenomenological analysis process
functioned similarly to InVivo codes where In Vivo coding identify and includes the
actual words used by participants themselves and indicates the existence of the group’s
(YBW student-athletes) cultural categories (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005;
Saldana, 2016; Strauss, 1987). Also, they were the starting point for the coupled
Descriptive Coding identifiers of identity (race, gender, or social) and phase (before,
during, or after). The description is the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and its primary
goal is to identify and link comparable contents. (Saldaña, 2016; Wolcott, 1994).
Descriptive coding helped to satisfy the critical nature of this research by discerning
which identity is more dominant during specific periods or experiences and adds context
for the research findings in an organized and categorized narrative portrait of the
environment for further analysis. This research used emotion coding to advance the
analysis.
Emotions are a complex chain of loosely connected events that begins with a stimulus and includes feelings, psychological changes, impulses to action, and specific, goal-oriented behavior (Plutchik, 2001 p 345). Emotion Coding explores the intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions, specifically in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgment, and risk-taking (Saldaña, 2016). Acknowledgment of these emotions provides deep insight into the student-athlete perspectives, worldviews, and living conditions and the underlying mood or tone of society, organization, or team. Considering how language introduces ambiguity and makes it challenging to describe mixed emotions, I relied on Plutchik’s (2001) “Wheel of Emotion” to limit my coding to the primary emotions he identifies and describe the relationships among them as his framework shows in Figure 3.2 and Table 9. Also, Table 10 provides the descriptions of the mixed emotions also used. Both the descriptive codes and associated emotions become the foundation of the themes for this research study and the contributing labels to the Cynefin Framework’s complex domain. Figure 3.3 illustrates the multi-level coding process and its relationship to the greater analysis process, while Figure 3.4 describes the data collection and analysis procedures together.
Figure 3.2: Plutchik’s (2001) three-dimensional circumplex Wheel of Emotion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus Event</th>
<th>Cognition</th>
<th>Feeling State/Subjective Language</th>
<th>Purpose of Emotion</th>
<th>Coping Language</th>
<th>Functional Language</th>
<th>Overt Behavior</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>&quot;Danger&quot;</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>&quot;Protect us from danger&quot;</td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacle</td>
<td>&quot;Enemy&quot;</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>&quot;To fight against problems&quot;</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>Attack</td>
<td>Destroy obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain of valued object</td>
<td>&quot;Possess&quot;</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>&quot;Remind us of what is important&quot;</td>
<td>Reversal</td>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>Retain or Repeat</td>
<td>Gain Resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of valued object</td>
<td>&quot;Abandonment&quot;</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>&quot;Connect with those we love&quot;</td>
<td>Replacement</td>
<td>Reintegration</td>
<td>Cry</td>
<td>Reattach to lost object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of one's group</td>
<td>&quot;Friend&quot;</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>&quot;Connect with people who help&quot;</td>
<td>Minimalization</td>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>Groom</td>
<td>Mutual Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplatable object</td>
<td>&quot;Poison&quot;</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td>&quot;Reject what is unhealthy&quot;</td>
<td>Fault Finding</td>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Vomit</td>
<td>Eject poison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Territory</td>
<td>&quot;Examine&quot;</td>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>&quot;To look forward and plan&quot;</td>
<td>Mapping</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Map</td>
<td>Knowledge of Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected event</td>
<td>&quot;What is it?&quot;</td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>&quot;Focus on new situations&quot;</td>
<td>Help Seeking</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>Gain time to orient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11: Judges’ Attributions of Words Appropriate to the Description of Mixed Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Emotion Components</th>
<th>Labels for Mixed Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy + Acceptance</td>
<td>Love, Friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear + Surprise</td>
<td>Alarm, Awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness + Disgust</td>
<td>Remorse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contempt, hatred, hostility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgust + Anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy + Fear</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger + Joy</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear + Disgust</td>
<td>Shame, Prudishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipation + Fear</td>
<td>Anxiety, Caution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3: Multilevel Coding Analysis Guide

**Phase 1:** Critical Scholarship on Phenomenon (Literature Review)

15 Young Black Women Student-Athlete Participants

| In-Depth Interviews | Narrative Submissions |

Horizons (1st level Coding: In Vivo followed by Emotion)

Moustakas (1994) Analysis of Phenomenological Data

Step 1: (Horizontalization)

**Phase 2:** Policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion

Cynefin Framework (labels in complex domain)

| Step 2: Textural Description | Step 3: Structural Description |

Themes (2nd level Coding: Descriptive)

**Phase 3:** Attentiveness to the embodied and lived experiences

Step 4: Textural - Structural Description

Recomendation for Future Research

**Figure 3.4:** Data collection and analysis strategy using Willen’s (2007) approach to Critical Phenomenology
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness establishes the nature of reality, the nature of the inquirer-object relationship, and the nature of truth statements (Guba, 1981). Guba (1981) raised four trustworthiness concerns addressed in qualitative research designs. They are the concerns associated with truth value (How do we know if the findings presented are genuine?), applicability (How do we know or determine the applicability of the findings of the inquiry in other settings or with other respondents?), consistency (How can we know if the findings would be repeated consistently with similar (same) participants in the same context?), and neutrality (How do we know if things come solely from participants, and that bias did not influence the investigation, motivations or interests of the researcher?) (Anney, 2014). I am accountable to Standing’s Critical Framework (2009) and Lincoln’s (1995) quality assurance for emerging criteria where the criteria groups areas of standards and responsibilities of the researcher, participants, and supporting participants. Together they offer a synthesis of evaluation to guide and assess trustworthiness and rigor in the phenomenological study while accounting for new relations with respondents and a vision of research that enables and promotes social justice (Annells 1999, Howe & Eisenhandt, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski 1986). Research participants were considered at every stage of the design and execution process. Participant criteria are presented and justified to strengthen the validity and generalizability of results. However, the roots of qualitative research trustworthiness criteria intentionally address concerns of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981).
Credibility

Anney (2014) recognizes that credibility defines the confidence placed in the truth of research findings. This research study achieves credibility first by requiring the satisfaction of expert recommendations of scholarly peers from my research committee (Anney, 2014). As the sole researcher for this study, I elected to use two types of narrative inquiry, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and written narrative submissions, to allow for greater participation, diverse perspectives, and preferred styles of communication. The advantage of narrative investigations is that it can exploit self-signification from skewing the results (Brougham, 2015). Also, I eliminated confirmation bias through purposeful sampling methods, strategic interviews, and narrative prompts, and triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods, sources, and theories and allows me to reduce bias and cross-examine the integrity of participant responses. Also, member checks, where I distribute my interpretations and analysis back to the participants, extended an opportunity to eliminate researcher bias during the explication of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the process of member checking as crucial and the heart of credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the results of this qualitative research can transfer to other contexts with other respondents (Anney, 2014). The research study called for two methods of data collection from ten Black women student-athletes evenly distributed around the United States. This purposive sampling approach helped me to focus on critical participants to generate more in-depth findings by requiring the consideration of the characteristics of the individual members as it relates to the research
questions (Anney, 2014; Devault, 2018). I have provided descriptions of the research process, data collection, and context of the study, along with my strategy of achieving a purposeful sample to help facilitate the transferability of my inquiry. The progressive nature of the strategy that governed this study, as described in the data collection and analysis plan alleviates mental bias (Brougham, 2015). Together, the methods of data collection and analysis helped to construct the scene of the daily lives of participants in the context of their surrounding social and cultural environments allowing researchers and readers to make appropriate transferability judgments.

**Dependability**

Dependability considers the stability of findings over an extended period. Participants evaluate the findings, interpretations, and recommendations of this critical phenomenological study to make sure of their inclusion and support. Participants were sent copies of their transcripts before beginning the coding process to allow for member-checked responses (Patton, 2002). I chose to use a Code-Recode strategy that demands a period of gestation between coding attempts to verify consistency in findings (Anney, 2014). I proposed standard procedures of phenomenological data analysis recommended by Moustakas to synthesize all collected data. A document containing the pseudonym and its meaning, biography, selected quotes and assigned gender identity, phase of recruiting, selected emotion, and final textural and structural synthesis of the phenomenon was provided to the participants to confirm its accuracy and gain its approval for use. This aspect of member checking and peer review minimizes cognitive bias (Brougham, 2015).
Confirmability

Confirmability suggests that the results of this research study are confirmed by other researchers (Anney, 2014; Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Confirmability is achieved through triangulation, which I have previously discussed, and reflexive journaling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through reflexive journaling, I bracketed myself as the researcher to better understand the experiences of the participants objectively by reflecting on and describing the genesis of my interest in this topic. Also, I presented my biases, prejudgments, and personal conflicts with the research. As I moved through the data collection and analysis process, reflexive journaling created rituals of reflection on and an interpretation of my interaction with participants and the participants themselves.

Ethical Considerations

The Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching (n.d) states that ethical considerations in qualitative research help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors on the part of the researcher. Further, there are ethical complexities associated with research involving vulnerable and marginalized population groups like this study does (Block, Warr, Gibbs & Riggs, 2012). Indeed, Block et al. (2012) mentioned three sets of issues to consider when working with this population. They are first developing research processes that maximize the benefits of involvement for participants while reducing harms; enhancing capacities for participants to give informed consent. Second, adapting research methods to heighten their relevance to the circumstances of the participant's lives. Third, strengthen their engagement in the research. The design of this research study satisfies these criteria for ethical consideration.
through the selection method of participants and communication with them. The critical analysis strategy intentionally considers individual circumstances in a societal context.

From the start of my interaction with participants, my social media profile was set to the most private settings to not divulge an individual’s interest and participation in this research. An invitation to participate in a video-conference interview, and narrative submission was sent to introduce the research study directly to the desired participants. The dual opportunities to contribute offered the potential for autonomy and inclusion (Block, Warr, Gibbs & Riggs, 2012). Next, upon opting in, participants received an informed consent that described the details of the study. Each student-athlete accepted an electronic copy of the informed consent before choosing their method of participation. Interviews were scheduled electronically, and narrative submission reminders were sent based on the choice of the participants. An additional copy of the informed consent was sent to participants before the start of the interviews. Narrative submissions were accepted by a secure and encrypted email to a private email address explicitly established for this research. An automatic reply was returned to the sender with a statement of confidentiality attached and read receipt. Gaining informed consent also involves seeking permission to use the information in the requested demographic survey for evaluation. It was imperative to explain the voluntary nature of consent and the meaning of confidentiality as well as the encouragement of student-athletes to ask questions so that I can directly address their concerns. Block et al. (2012) explain that these considerations of the consent process improve the potential for a research study to provide the autonomy and capacity of the participants by empowering them to make decisions that are appropriately informed. Finally, my choice of critical phenomenological research design
was intentional to generate higher engagement by the participants to “articulate considerably more sophisticated views and concepts” related to their lived experiences of Black collegiate women athletes at predominantly White colleges and universities (Block et al., 2012, p. 82).

As it relates to confidentiality, data storage includes audio recordings and narrative submissions. Groenwald (2004) and Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) explain data storing methods based on a review of best practices. For instance, I made participants aware that Skype has the authority to record and share typed content or spoken words while the program is in use according to the user agreement. Sullivan (2012) recommends including this full disclosure of security issues in informed consent. Each Skype interview was recorded on a digital tape recorder and transcribed through services provided by www.rev.com. Participants were encouraged to validate that my summary of their transcript reflects their previous experiences as YBW student-athletes and current perspectives regarding those experiences as current Division I Black women athletes. Identifying codes made of participant pseudonym and date of interview was assigned to audio files. A password-protected computer, external hard drive, and encrypted software secured all notes and transcripts. There was no collected data placed on public websites. Participants were made aware of their ability to withdraw from this qualitative research study at any point and for any reason.

Summary

Chapter three presented methods designed to provide an understanding of the essence of YBW student-athletes in the collegiate athletic recruiting process. Also, this qualitative project used an interpretive lens that leads to the call for action and
transformation aimed at social justice and therefore concludes with a strategy to achieve suggestions of reform and incitement to action. Intersectionality, as a method of critical inquiry and critical praxis along with Cynefin principles, function together to understand decision making and strategy development in the dynamic and challenging situations of Black women student-athletes.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this critical phenomenological study is to first examine and update the lived experiences of YBW student-athletes in a changing society as a group. Second, it describes the challenges experienced in the recruitment process and retention of “othered” women in organizations. Finally, it provides a tool to examine and progress systemic diversity and inclusion efforts for all people in a way that meaningfully considers their combination of multiple marginalized identities. This study explored the decision-making process and experiences of ten YBW student-athletes recruited to compete in intercollegiate athletics at NCAA Division I-FBS colleges and universities. Collectively, I present the complete findings of this critical phenomenological reflective prose to generate suitable material for training programs, strategic planning, or more detailed discussion.

A void in earlier research explaining this phenomenon compelled my interest in investigating how YBW student-athletes negotiate their multiple identities during the decision-making process and what effect it has on their experiences after that. Studying the underpinnings of how exceptional circumstances before college, and exceptional experiences for Black collegiate women bridged by the NCAA recruiting policy and process, influenced the creation of this critical and qualitative study. Methods conventional in critical phenomenology include guided data collection and analysis. The results are a culmination of YBW student-athletes voices’ that share an in-depth perspective into their collective lived experiences. To study how YBW student-athletes experience and understand the college athletic recruiting experience, I established my
research framework on a single, overarching research question and three supporting sub-questions:

1) What is the experience of young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions?

   a. How do young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White institutions perceive athletic departments’ consideration of their experiences during and after the recruiting process?

   b. How do young Black women student-athletes experience and understand the college recruiting process?

   c. How does this experience and understanding of the recruiting process inform or shape the college experience for young Black women student-athletes?

**Summary of Themes**

During data analysis, seven themes or horizons emerged related to the research questions. Themes serve a dual purpose as the starting points to execute the Cynefin framework’s consideration of related social experiences and environmental factors involved in the decision-making process. Themes were determined by the most prominent emotion used to describe an experience common to the participant's experiences. Original codes were categorized based on the specific phase (before, during, after) in the recruiting process and based on the identity (gender, social, race) used to communicate the participants’ stories. After nine codes captured the most significant elements of the shared stories for each participant, they combined for 68 unique codes.
(20 gender identity, 22 social identity, 26 racial identity). The first round of coding resulted in 24 themes, the second round of coding reduced the number of unique codes to twelve, and the final round captured the final seven emotion represented themes. To support the integrity of the multi-level analysis approach, themes are categorized by the designated research level (macro, meso, micro) and therefore associated with society forming relationship (gender, social identity, race). The description of those themes are listed in Table 12.
Table 12: Summary of Codes and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Codes</th>
<th>1st Round</th>
<th>2nd Round</th>
<th>3rd Round</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Significance and the role of community in the development of Black girls and individual goal achievement</td>
<td>Abandonment from community related development</td>
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<td><strong>Negative Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Support gained in Black family membership, community, and communication</td>
<td>Misunderstanding the value of maternal roles in sport for Black Athletes</td>
<td>Disadvantaged Development Remorse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Trends in the ways Black women regain community and connect to fulfill desires for personal development</td>
<td>Misunderstanding the power of voice</td>
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<td><strong>Negative Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Loss of community</td>
<td>Blindness to the Remorse felt from abuse in college athletics</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Competition within the In-Group</td>
<td>Level of Competition Anticipation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Joining and experiencing In-Group and Out Group Dynamics</td>
<td>Tolerance for finding joy in culture and beauty</td>
<td>Hair Expression Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Sport specialization and Recruiting</td>
<td>Optimistic Preparation</td>
<td>Optimistic Preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Media, Marketing and Recruiting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Education system quality and access to sport participation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Politics and College Athletics</td>
<td>Disappointing Experiences</td>
<td>Disappointing Experiences</td>
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<td><strong>Negative Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Money and the College Athlete Experience</td>
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<td><strong>Positive Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Purpose of the Black Student Union in connection to community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - Before Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Considering community at PWIs</td>
<td>Surprised by campus communities</td>
<td>Surprised by campus communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Diversity beyond race on college campuses</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - During Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Trends in diversity recruiting and marketing</td>
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<td><strong>Positive Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Bullying in organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotions - After Recruiting</strong></td>
<td>Racial characterization and association for in-groups and out-groups on college campuses</td>
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<td><strong>Community and access to healthcare</strong></td>
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<td>Submission to community and class</td>
<td>Submission to community and class</td>
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<td><strong>Role of pell grants in degree attainment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Cost of higher education in relation to socio-economic status and race</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Trends and attitudes of Black adolescents in sports, and predominantly White dominated sport</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Silencing marginalized groups</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Communication methods for minoritized groups</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Social media communication among marginalized populations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Traditions of food and music in Black community exchanges</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Music and arts in Black culture</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Racial Identity vs. Ethnic Identity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Benefits of diverse communities on tolerance and the origin and the role of Black Student unions in High schools and colleges</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Parental Roles in Sport for Black Adolescents</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Coaches as parental figures</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Humbleness and Honor in Recruiting</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Expectation of Coaches as Parental Figures</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Racial Hierarchy and Related Responsibilities in the workplace</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Racial access and power within institutions</strong></td>
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System-Centered Macro-level Gender Identity Themes

1) **Disadvantaged Development Remorse**: This theme broadly addresses the lost connection to a healthy community and the rejection that is felt as a result. It describes the significance and role of that lost connection in the development of YBW and their abilities to achieve individual goals. This theme addresses how YBW experienced new group dynamics on college campuses as student-athletes, highlights the perception of avoiding solitude through student organization membership, and recognizes the value of Black maternal roles in supporting Black athletes and the impact of their absence on college campuses.

2) **Hair Expression Joy**: This theme describes the ways in which young Black women athletes exercise control when they uphold and embrace their standards of beauty and cultural ways of being in a space where they are minoritized and subjected to stereotypes related to feminine ideals. It discusses the ways that they have a relationship with their hair that develops in a manner similar to developing for athletic performances.

Process-Centered Meso-Level Social Identity Themes

3) **Optimistic Preparation**: This theme describes the anticipation and joy found in preparation for the actual recruiting process. Accurately, it illustrates the relationship between strategizing K-12 education options and their effect on sport participation. Also, it describes the process, benefits, and sacrifices of sport specialization and improved recruiting options.
4) **Disappointing Experiences:** This theme reveals the sadness and surprise found in the actual collegiate athletic experiences compared to what was anticipated during the recruiting process. It addresses common student-athlete considerations and includes discussion on dysfunctional athletic communities and the impact of money on the collegiate athletic experience.

**Group Centered Micro-Level Racial Identity Themes**

5) **Submission to Issues of Class:** This theme primarily illustrates the fear and acceptance of socioeconomic class related to accessing society's institutions like health care, K-12 education, and higher education. Also, it recognizes the relationship between socioeconomic class and attitude towards pursuing sport and sport choice.

6) **Surprised by Campus Climate:** This theme addresses group experiences with campus diversity and inclusion efforts. It addresses the response of Black student-athletes to unexpected events and uncomfortable circumstances, as well as the role that ethnicity plays on campus. Further, it introduces an argument to expand the reach of diversity programming for athletic demographics.

7) **Acceptance Through Communication:** This theme describes the way YBW connects with like people who help. It addresses how they circumvent the silencing of marginalized groups by using social media and why it operates as an excellent communication method for marginalized populations in large spaces.
Outline of Findings

Participant’s Textural Descriptions

System-Centered Macro Level Social Identity Themes

A. Disadvantaged Development Remorse
   a. Sadness from community abandonment
   b. Avoiding solitude through sororities
   c. Black maternal experiences in supporting Black athletes

B. Hair Expression Joy

Process-Centered Meso Level Social Identity Themes

A. Optimistic Preparation
   a. Strategizing within education systems to gain access to sport participation
   b. Sports specialization and recruiting

B. Disappointing Experiences
   a. Day-to-day student-athlete considerations
   b. Dysfunctional athletic community
   c. Money and the collegiate experience

Group-Centered and Micro Level Racial Identity Themes

A. Submission to issues of class

B. Surprised by campus climate

C. Acceptance through communication
Participant’s Textural Descriptions

To begin to address the overarching research question, participant’s poetic narratives are presented ahead of the codes and themes to describe their individual lived experiences for two reasons. First, this provides the narrative descriptions of what participants experienced, known as a textural description (Moustakas, 1994). The explanations of the emerged themes and horizons provide an examination of how they experienced it or the structural description. When combined, the textural-structural description conveys the essence of their individual experiences. Second, it captures the historical significance of poetry for Black women. Black women have written to express their self, society, and their self in society (Royster, 2000).

Adil

Adil’s experiences center on the ways in which development takes place within and through the community. Even before the recruiting process, her experiences point to the significance of physical development in the space of Black youth excellence in sport as a grassroots pipeline for more advanced levels of success. Tied directly to this is the positions of access that parents can create through their various resources and their impact to either encourage or deter participation in youth sports based on their level and intensity for participation. The need for understanding, identifying, and connecting with the community is echoed through her transition and collegiate experiences, specifically concerning overcoming inevitable challenges and adversities but also for the celebration and acknowledgment by peers, approval by elders, and mentorship opportunities to youth in those communities.
Adil

I. Before Recruiting
I come from a very diverse side of town. 
Shades of Black and Browns always felt comfortable when they were around. 
Both of my parents were involved in law enforcement to a certain degree. 
That and their experience in sport greatly influenced me. 
I was able to attend private school and had access granted in sport. 
Resources to travel and compete in different areas and all of the camps of many sorts.

The first team I played for was majority Black athletes and Black coaches too. 
We would hang out, go eating, and we were a crew.

If we beat a team that was all White, the parents would be shocked!

It was like…, “Yeah, Black girls do this too.” Black Girls Rock!

II. During Recruiting
Before they changed the rules, there were 6th graders committing to compete for colleges. 
That is how early they start to follow us. 
“Let’s get this done,” I thought, 
“Let’s get over this whole recruiting process.”
It began when I was looking at the rosters online, 
“Wow. No one looks like me.”

Let’s see if there is an assistant coach or a head coach that is Black or Brown, 
I realized that wasn’t likely.

Being a woman of color minimized my options,
since I didn’t want to have to explain myself to everyone and educate them on things.

Use Google to look it up to find out what “it” means.
I understood people, for whatever reason don’t have knowledge of different cultures, races, ethnicities,
but at a certain point, they should know it gets tiring.

I was already attracted to the name. 
They took me to the game, 
they showed me the facilities and the gear, 
and how things change from year to year.

Coaches say things that are not complete truths. 
Like… “We’re going to make you feel like you’re home” and “We’re going to take care of you.”

“We’re going to be your new mom or dad and family.”
That’s not always the case when you get there, actually.
You’re signing your life away. You’re signing your life away
That’s what people say
Every year on signing day
I was nervous; I didn’t know what was coming next
I didn’t know if it would be love or hate
But still, I felt accomplished

**III. After Recruiting**

Coming into college, I was very young and oblivious.
*It wasn’t* the courses I took in my first year; they were very similar to high school.
I was used to this.
Within my first few weeks there, while sitting in the locker room
*comments were aimed in my direction*
Other students singing songs and saying the N-word made me feel my presence was neglected
The memory persists, *and for these people*, it changed my perception
It was shocking; I had no idea that was possible for someone where we are from
I felt excluded, isolated, and unwelcome

Do you understand that when we compete, I’m usually the only Black girl on
either team?
Having to explain myself to people and not always feeling included in a space where I should be.
It is just a weird feeling sometimes.
*My support reminds me that I’m more than halfway done, but looking for other options is fine.*
They say, “you’re involved in extracurricular things now, and it will be worth your time.”
Sport, I realized, is just a piece of the *pie*.

To the Black girls that reach out to me on social media about getting where I am today
I make it a priority to respond because I would have wanted the same
*I tell them*
Your mental health is important
Feeling included is important
And giving back important
*And you are worth it."

**Buli**

Buli’s experiences supply a well-rounded account for the circumstances leading up to, and conditions for, international athletes creating a way to further their education and, compete globally by way of American colleges and universities. Buli’s story shows
the relay like the structure of being connected with trusting and safe environments and people to assist in orchestrating the nuances of international access as well as access to higher education. I appreciate her commitment to “living a Kenyan life in the United States. Culture is a significant part of her experience. The most impactful consideration was the unintentional distinction of socio-economic class when it comes to student-athletes, international student-athletes in this case. Socio-economic class is about categorizing people based on their economic position in society. When considering the role of student-employment, currency exchange, and athlete success, Buli’s story provides a valuable starting point.

Buli

I. Before Recruiting

Kenya is really, really big!
Some parts of Kenya are really, really, really good!
You would love to be there,
Kenya is really diverse, and it is so beautiful.
It is the same as here.
There are some great places, and there are some poor places.
Some parts are ghettos, too.
It depends on where you are coming from and where you have roots.

I came from a very humble background.
I grew up in a small town,
in the valley, I came from a village.
I wasn’t that lucky to come from a rich family.
I don’t have that much money
I’ve been through a lot!

Attended primary and high school on scholarship,
and after I graduated
at eighteen,
I decided to start running,
running to get scholarships,
Scholarship to the United States.
I heard from a friend that there are a lot of scholarships there to take.
I think most assume everyone in Kenya is an athlete.
That is not true, but for my friend and I, we wanted to compete. I was training along with my friend, her brother came here for a scholarship, and she wanted to do the same. We trained together, following people’s programs, actually, we didn’t know what we were doing. We were just running…Marathon, 10K. You don’t even know; you’re just running. You are just moving. When I started to run, I wasn’t sure what I was doing. My parents and my friends asked if I was sure I was running for the scholarship I was pursuing. My mom suggested I should join a nursing school in Kenya instead.

II. During Recruiting
One day I was doing workouts, and one of the coaches saw me. He said I was going to be a good runner, and with the process of coming into the United States, he was helping. I didn’t do good on my SAT’s. He organized it for a Junior College, and transfer after graduating. They sent me an acceptance letter, and I was accepting.

It was amazing! Getting a Visa from Kenya was so hard. The process was long, all the paperwork and everything. This was my first time to get out of the country. It was another journey. It was exciting and scary at the same time; I’ve never been on the plane before. I didn’t want to get lost in the connection; my flight was one hour less than 24.

III. After Recruiting
The first time I came here, I had never competed before, my first race, it was kind of alarming. It was so hard, but I broke the school record. I’ve gotten only better. It was really an eye-opener, and since then I have really gotten into running,

The weather, so hot during the summer, really cold during the winter, “Oh my God, what is this place”? I used to speak Swahili back home. Now, I speak in only English. Most of the food that I make here is Kenyan. I still listen to Kenyan music. Another adjustment, surprisingly, is the impact of the time difference.
I wish there were Kenyans around here, so we could share experiences. I haven’t met any Kenyans here. There is nobody here like this. I had people from South Africa on my team, so we had similar experiences. I see a lot of people I know at different track meets. I see a lot of friends from back home. I had somebody to have the experience of the transition with. I was not alone.

We don’t have a lot of Black students; I think we are the minority here. I haven’t gotten any trouble, and I think we’re being treated good. I think most of the Black people here are student-athletes. I think everyone is treated the same here in school.

People ask, “Is that your real hair,” “Why do you change your hair color all the time?” I don’t like people asking me questions about my hair. That really bothers me sometimes. That is the only thing I don’t like about being a minority, being a Black person who is here. Back home, they know it’s a braid, they know its extensions, and nobody cares. Here they don’t understand, the trouble of Black women’s hair.

I’m an international student-athlete, and I only depend on my stipend, I don’t work. I can’t get a job off-campus. Maybe sometimes I braid people’s hair so I can make some side hustle. Comparing Kenyan currency with United States Currency, the value is really low. And I don’t know, I can’t expect my parents to send me money from back home.

They should provide jobs to international students, to help them financially. Years before I went home… It was three. I’m planning to go home this year or maybe next. That’s why I never go home; I couldn’t save enough.

Putting on my school gear is amazing, you feel proud, and you feel accomplished. Overwhelming because you don’t want to be last. With the school history, everybody experiences greatness. I never regretted coming here, I feel like this is home. The best choice in life that I’ve made to come.

Keep doing what I do and believing in myself,
Everything that you believe in and you work hard for, you are going to achieve it. I’m not going to stop; I’m going to train until I get something more. I think I’m in the right direction to greatness.

**Daib**

Daib’s experience offers a detailed description of the roles that parents play both intentionally and unintentionally in the preparation and execution of the recruiting experience. Early on, we can discuss circumstances related to school district zoning and the quality of education related to those zones and the students that attend school there. In a sporting context, the characteristics of sport participation by race, gender, and sport type can be explored in relation to those school zones. Connecting these zones to the role parents play is most commonly related to socio-economic status and a household’s ability and willingness to reside in these zoned districts. During the recruiting process, parents are described as being supportive of their children’s success over the team, although society holds up team players over individual successes. Finally, after the recruiting process, there is a desire to be developed in ways beyond athletics. Diab expressed a desire for that development as regretfully missed.

**Daib**

**I. Before Recruiting**

I grew up in a city with many diverse places, Thankful to be around so many different races. Started off playing soccer, then it was cheerleading. I hated it…and I quit after one season. I was really girly, no, I don’t want to play basketball. I thought it was for boys and men. But by 8 or 9, I learned I was super-fast, that’s really how my career in basketball began. I didn’t know the fundamentals or have the skills…just go as fast as I can.

I didn’t really know of all the benefits when I started my first AAU team in sixth grade.
My first real taste of competitive basketball even at that young age. My coach was very, very competitive, and he was very strict. I switched teams because of the politics. I have a brother, four years older than me. My dad coached my brothers’ team, but he never coached me. That would have never worked; he wanted it for me too badly. He couldn’t express it, technically. It came off aggressive and messed up our relationship a little bit. During those years, when I was really competitive. My mom was the person I would go to if I needed something more certain. Always motivational, an encouraging person.

The older you get, the more politics. Politics mostly between the parents. Parents always want the best you see. You can see their jealousy. Parents are in the ear of their child, candidly. The parents feel their daughter’s team is better, and hold themselves in that way, purposefully. And treat the lower teams as such, a lot of drama, unnecessarily.

II. During Recruiting
I went to high school out of my district, With girls from my AAU team, our homes were separated by about 20 minutes. Our parents agreed, we could build a really good high school team, If I made a decision in middle school to leave. If I was going to go to that high school, it was really bad. I would have been the best player, I wouldn’t have gone anywhere; I just wouldn’t have!

In AAU, I feel like Black parents put so much pressure on the kids. It’s way more competitive. I had a couple of White teammates, I didn’t see their parents putting as much pressure or emphasis on it. It was different how we were treated. Our parents sacrifice a lot and put out a lot of money. They want their investment to be worth something.

After achieving a milestone, they said I wasn’t a team player. Girls I would consider best friends; I saw their true colors. The younger girls were like, “Oh my goodness”! They were happy for me, The girls my age, their reaction wasn’t what I was expecting. It made me feel kind of bad, guilty for some reason.
It wasn’t given to me; I’ve worked hard since the beginning. 
So, I tried to suppress my emotions because I didn’t want to make them feel things. 
I didn’t let it bother me; at that point, I knew I just got to do me.

The pressure, the pressure to be a recruit... 
It is sad, but it is true. 
I think that happens in a lot of sports too. 
The older you get, 
It becomes more of a business 
You are playing to get this money. It’s not a game anymore. 
As early as becoming a sophomore. 
I feel like everybody believes it is out of love in their heart. 
Everybody knows there is a point you can push someone to the point, 
where almost every student-athlete ends up hating the sport.

Colleges started coming to our practices, and the parents started to take heed and notice. 
When the coaches are there, it makes you kind of nervous. 
The parents were really shady; congrats weren’t genuine; it wasn’t sincere. 
I felt like the coaches were really genuine, and they wanted me to succeed. 
I wanted the campus feel that I would see on TV! 
When I committed, there was a scandal about the coach that recruited me and physical abuse, 
It was on the news. 
She called and told me it was a lie, and It wasn’t true. 
They want that Division I look, everybody wants to go to the biggest school.

III. After Recruiting 
I would ask others, did they really enjoy their college experience 
I have friends that say; I’m ready to graduate, I’m over this. 
A lot of my friends grew out of their love for the game in college 
It’s your mental health, are you going to be happy where you are at? 
Honestly, I think about an offer from a JUCO; maybe I should have taken that. 
Coaches preach academics first, sports second… 
I feel like coaches should let players invest in their future steps then 
Give student-athletes a chance to earn experience 
I’m not going overseas; I’m not going pro. 
That’s what most jobs are looking for, and it makes a difference.

Gasira

Gasira’s experience helps to communicate the story of pursuing a measure of excellence. I am reminded of the bold and courageous pursuit of international student-athletes in general and those from nations in the African diaspora specifically. Gasira
allows a discussion to occur on the value and description of race and ethnicity and what it means in the context of how an individual moves in the world. Despite the differences in origin, her experiences are similar in ways to Black women student-athletes born in the United States. For instance, consideration of survival, humility, and humbleness and how they manifest in interactions on a day to day basis. Finally, Gasira allows us an opportunity to celebrate the similarities of those we share groups with and respect the difference of those in occupying the “out-group” space.

Gasaria

I. **Before Recruiting**

If somebody asks me about myself, first I’ll say I’m Jamaican.
If I say something that may not be what you think it is
Give me the benefit of the doubt. I just don’t know because I’m from another nation.
We celebrate our independence *tomorrow*, August 1\(^{st}\) and August 6\(^{th}\).
On campus, I’ll be wearing my full Jamaican outfits.

My mom was young when she had a baby.
My grandparents were working hard while they raised me.
Anything I can do to have them work less, will benefit them and me, so I was always willing to do my best.

I was always competitive If someone beat me at something, I’m always like, “I’m going to beat you back” …
That was your first, and only time you will *ever be doing that*.
In primary school, my big competition was academics.
The person with the highest placement score, *I would be the one to get it*.
My family used incentives, and I would ask for a computer at the end of the year.

Then we did the GSAT Exam in secondary school,* With my scores, I was able to choose the absolute best High School.*
In Jamaica, you have this thing called sports day.
We all present our colors, and then we race.
My cousin reminded me that school alone will not take me everywhere.
*So, at 13 I decided* I can do sport for real.

The aim was to dominate the conference and then the girl’s championships, tryout for Jr’s and go to the CARIFTA games,
I did not make it to the final day.
In Jamaica, we all want to be sprinters; it seems like what we should do.
I was disappointed because, on that day, I felt like it wasn’t true.
My coach taught me that there is a strategy to this race.
So, I went back sometime later tried it again
Because of my success, college recruiting began.

II. During Recruiting
I mean, I’m in Jamaica right, so anything I hear about a scholarship…for sure.
Getting me to college, my mother and grandparents couldn’t endure...
Once coaches were coming along,
I was really interested and willing to improve.
I could travel the world, and that was the plan,
I wanted to go to school.

It was amazing and nice to have someone coming, interested in your talent,
interested in you.
Motivates my other teammates, and it was good for our coaches, and it was good
for our school.
Recruiters coming in from all over the world looking at athletes…that was really
good.

When coaches start telling you about all the different money and things, they will
give you,
they will tell you the good things to get you on board.
You must understand that is how they recruit you,
but my college coach, he was down to earth.
He showed me interest from the start, saw potential, and wanted to work with me.
He told me what to expect, and he was there from the beginning.

I didn’t have a Visa; I couldn’t travel internationally.
Luckily, there were Jamaican girls on the team.
I had a chance to talk with them and see what they see.
When you talk to a person from your home country,
I wanted to know what it was like and how she transitioned,
learn what she has been through and if it was a good place to be.
They will be real with you about the ups and downs,
about what to expect, and how they overcome.
They’re going to tell you everything!
She gave me peace of mind; she survived.
I’m glad I put my nerves aside.

My mom wanted me to go where she thought I’d be comfortable and taken care
of.
Make sure before she got news I was sick; I’d be somewhere being monitored.
Make sure I don’t get lost, there will be somebody to show me what to do.
Make sure I will still keep my scholarship, If I get injured, too
You’ll get your degree, compete for the team.
If something happens, they ensure I won’t die
She will be too far away; she can’t really do anything; it is too expensive to fly.
I took forever to sign this thing because it’s like signing your life away.
But with my family, I trust everything they tell me to do
They have never failed me, and I don’t think they will, so I finally said okay.

III. After Recruiting
I had no mom, no dad, when I came here, only two suitcases.
Other students had their parents move them into their residential places.
Just my coach and a teammate.
My coach as a person he’s a father figure, he is amazing to me.
Sometimes honestly,
when I look at my coach, I don’t see a White man. I only see my coach.
Sometimes to him, I say, “You know that you’re Black” as a joke.
He and I relate as if we are equals in a sense,
there’s nothing dividing us, no color, no nothing different.
He accepts me like a daughter, and not just me, all of us on the team.
If there are 80 girls, then he has 80 daughters, plus his own family.

When I came to college, racism was not really something I know.
Status in Jamaica is based on money.
doesn’t matter your color, not how well you speak…
just your connections and your money.
I had a Black roommate; she was American.
I felt dumb because I had to explain that I really didn’t know this culture of racism.
She knows what racism is like.
She will see things happen all of the time.
In Jamaica, I don’t experience these things.
I try to learn; I didn’t know what she was feeling.

My freshman year, I didn’t really talk much; my accent was really deep.
I had to talk super nice and really slow. I wouldn’t engage unless it was necessary.
I understand that they want to hear me clearly, and I feel like I would be doing my best.
White girls, they talk so fast when they’re like in a group.
I’m like you’re talking that fast, I don’t understand, but it’s a different kind of fast, I guess.
I feel like as I grow and years go by, maybe I lose my accent a little bit too.

One girl from Trinidad and one from the Bahamas, they were really good at doing hair.
We kept getting Jamaicans, we kept getting Caribbean people, so my hair was always in good care.
So, it is appearance we want to look good no matter what.
We put effort into taking care of our hair and our nails and face and *sometimes makeup*.
I would see White girls have them do their hair for them because they like the way they do it too.
We don’t want to see a teammate out there looking nappy, so we’re going to take care of you.
When you look good, you perform good because you feel good. *It’s true.*

My first time going to South America and going to Europe, I was like dang is this me?
Going to the Olympics and wearing my national colors, standing in that lane, would be mind-blowing.
It would be a dream come true, representing my country!
Maybe I’ll even cry when they announce that. It sure will be something.

**Hali**

The experiences shared by Hali describes the value of character in a Black woman’s pursuit of sporting success. Character is defined as the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. Hali shows the development and depth of her character and points to instances of the work needed to adjust to enhance herself for her team. The value of character is manifested in the themes related to the separate instances described. Early on, evidence on personal sacrifice on the part of an athlete and the role and influence of the family to continue with or avoid those sacrifices. Later the experience provides support for the needs of healthy communities for this population of students. Finally, there is a two-way street in the community described by a willingness to access new and beneficial spaces and share of their contribution to your life with others.

**Hali**

1. **Before Recruiting**
I began in sports around the age of three
Growing up in a home full of athletes.  
*For the next fifteen years that is how it would be.*  
*Every other week* of the season, I was competing. 

*The flexibility of private school helped to manage training demands.*  
They were able to work with me a little bit better, *and my travel plans.*  
Having to miss some class days for my competitions,  
It helped to make sure that I had everything in order, *and nothing was missing.*  
*It helped to make sure* I focused on myself, and *I didn’t feel overwhelmed.*  
*It helped to make sure* I was committed to it all, and *we had a plan.*

II. During Recruiting

I started my recruiting process a little later,  
*I was supposed to get started as an 8th grader.*  
I put it on the backburner, didn’t really understand how important it was.  
I needed to put myself out there more than before *because*...  
Club coaches helped with recording things for YouTube and opening my social media *“doors.”*  
to post more... *videos, more pictures, more stats to see,*  
So that other college coaches would be able to find me.

*See, for my class,* spots had started to fill up  
Recruiting was a challenge because I didn’t particularly know where I wanted to end up.  
One visit was eye-opening, the culture was something I had never experienced growing up  
Getting out of my comfort zone, *true enough.*  
I was already a minority  
and *even more so,* because there’s also different cultural changes.  
I would also *be the one to* have to adjust!

I was definitely excited,  
I was nervous,  
I wasn’t sure what to expect.  
I was exposed to the people that I would need at that time,  
They would help me grow and understand.

My parents helped me understand  
that being a young Black woman, a lot of things aren’t going to be easily handed to me.  
I was going to have to probably,  
work a little harder to become what I wanted to be.  
*Picking up my pen to sign my NLI* was something that I had already wanted *for me.*
III. **After Recruiting**

Now, everything is more team-based.
You’re more focused on how you better yourself to better your team’s place.
It was a little bit of an adjustment,
just to be able to kind of change my personality,
be a little bit louder
then the adjustment started to get easy.

The atmosphere made it easier for me to open up,
show that I know what I am capable of.
Helps to have a team behind me,
Boost me up!
Especially when I was having those doubts.
Doubts whether I was good enough.

The coach’s doors are always open if you just need someone to talk to.
We try to be very close to each other and open up too.
Whenever somebody is struggling or needs help, there’s at least two.

*Sometimes I think about* what am I going to look like when we are on T.V.?
*Sometimes I wonder* if I’m in the best shape I feel like I can be.
*Sometimes* I think about what I’m going to do to my hair for competitions and photoshoots.
Sometimes I need to think about it for weeks.

Athletes, we are in our own little bubbles
*To celebrate our successes and manage our struggles.*
Once I got the hang of everything,
I decided and realized we have another escape, another place for being.
Not wanting to be stuck, I started venturing out.
share what I have learned with other athletes in the fieldhouse.
*For instance, I* try to get involved with the Black Cultural Center
Organizations meet during practice and team times
*But, I don’t have a lot of extra time until well after winter.*

I have power to have that voice,
and grace to understand.
I want to feel like I accomplished everything I could.
I want to make a difference for my team when I can.
Teach them that there’s always a way to make a difference.
Tell others, “Do not feel discouraged because you are different.”
Demonstrate it in my actions
Improve on the little things
*This is my real experience,* not just my opinion
Iyora

When considering the interaction of race, gender, and the social identity of student-athlete, Iyora’s experience perfectly describes the role of community for individuals with multiple marginalized identities (Race, Gender). She was impacted through mentorship during a crucial point in adolescent development (middle school) and found multiple communities on the teams (sport and art) that she participated in. In relation to the community for athletes in higher education, Iyora understands how rigid time commitments can impact the ability to create or join a community that helps them develop in ways different than athletics and academics.

Iyora

I. Before Recruiting

My childhood was good, growing up in Texas. I’m the oldest of three now. Ten years ago, my mom and dad became exes. They met sometime before my mom was headed to compete for the University. And before it was time to leave, she found out she was pregnant and stayed home for me. Today, I do have contact with my dad. Well, I hear from him months apart… yeah.

Still, my mom and dad were athletes. So, excelling in sport comes naturally. In middle school, around the age of 12, I did a lot of different things. I was on a volleyball, basketball, track, and step teams. ended up staying with sports and not acting, it was part of my identity.

Coach suggested that I give up the other activities. They didn’t understand it was a comfort thing to me. I couldn’t just stick with one activity. That was just not how I did things.

II. During Recruiting

At the start of my senior year, all of the college coaches were coming for me. To feel wanted and to know you have options was a good feeling
Only after the first signing day ended
and my high school coach admitted
that they needed to “get me out there” and started reaching out
Why did she wait so late? What was that about?

The first coach that visited represented a school that I felt wasn’t really for me
I didn’t know how to say no to his offer to visit; I didn’t know what his reaction
would be.
Then I finally said no, and he responded with “Whatever” and hung up on me
I cried to my mom, why would they treat you like that? Is this how recruiting is
going to be.
It gives me anxiety.
Having that kind of power was not a good feeling
You don’t want to turn anyone down
That power was nerve-wracking
I exhausted my allowable visits but still wasn’t convinced
Then I met a coach at the meet who showed me what I missed.

III. After Recruiting
Excluded but included is how I feel
Included to participate
Excluded by my peers with their disrespect and hate

We had a lot of racial tension on campus one season
White Students doing Black faces, blowing up the campus, for their own reason
Having that stigma attached to us during the season was kind of weird
I knew I still had to compete for the school because they already paid for that
year
This school is technically making us look bad
We still have to go out and smile for the people, who are ok with us being sad
Do things for the school
Wear those colors
Wear that logo

Knowing the other students are disrespecting
Yet, we have to watch what we are saying
The school doesn’t want to be shamed
That influenced how I participate in the game
See, The Black football players help make the school money
Basketball men and women are playing for the school too
We have no representation, and we still have to do what we have to do

I’d like to find a community
When I arrived, they told me about gender and equality
I asked about being in a sorority
My coach said my sport is my priority
There aren’t a lot of people like me here; they’re hard to find
I’ve gone to gender equality and LGBT groups; they are mostly white

Jilo

The foundation of Jilo’s experience is rooted in the role of parents in terms of
access and success in sports. The description of Jilo’s mother is crucial to the significance
of development in young Black women making a case for the need to create and
empower Black women in organizations such as this because of their ability to guide and
support students in a way that is necessary and unique compared to White women and
men of all races. There are elements of self-care and access to health care and what it
means to pursue them and the need for that presence on college campuses and
specifically in the athletic department.

Jilo

I. Before Recruiting
My mom raised me to be independent. I would do things for myself
I get things on my own. I didn’t need any help
Just me and my mom, always been me and her
My dad,
He was never really in the picture
If my grades weren’t right
she wouldn’t let me run
Mom is a stickler for academics
I played sports for fun

II. During Recruiting
In 10th grade, I was first recruited
Honestly, I didn’t know how to really do it
My mom ran track, and she was recruited too
Decided to follow her boyfriend, and didn’t go through
Then, absent from my life was my dad
And the truth is,
I was the first D1 athlete my coach ever had.

But standing with a handwritten letter, I felt cared about
Finally, someone notices this girl from the south
It was really exciting,
and I verbally committed, sight unseen
Since I was able to shine at the National meets
I didn’t realize that I didn’t have to do it that quick.
I definitely would’ve taken my time, visited more schools, and improved my pick.

Looking back, I didn’t know I was so naïve
I was completely oblivious, and I couldn’t see
I loved the coach, and he seemed like he cared
He came to my house,
Sat on my couch
He showed me all of this gear,
I thought, “Oh my gosh, this is going to be me in a year.”

III. After Recruiting
I actually performed better in high school
Hard transition between, keeping up with practice and keeping up with school
Traveling from Wednesday to Sunday isn’t easy
My friends and my professors, they don’t really see me

I’m always tired, and my energy is low
As a Black student, there aren’t many places to go
Not really many Black people
Most of them are athletes or their Greek
If you don’t want to be either, then you should probably re-think
I wouldn’t come here; it will be hard for you

Really any other race here, they kind of just don’t know how to act
They are kind of just wild and do stupid things
Most of the time you don’t normally see
White people hanging
with Black people, we don’t really mesh well as a whole
Except the Black student organization still has a goal
We always talk about how we can make it more diverse
We definitely feel like the ratio of minorities to the majorities is the absolute worst

Being a student-athlete, you lose independence
You’re not mature enough in your mind to realize
That it is just a business
The coaches tell you anything to get you to come
When you get there, it is 85% never what you thought of
That’s why you have all these students transferring
It’s true; everyone has the opportunity to improve.
Coaches are not the same people after you sign
They don’t really care about you most of the time
He doesn’t know how to talk to women
He said I don’t belong here, and couldn’t cater to our emotions
It really made me just sharpen my focus
Because now I have to worry that I might not get signed,
and everything I do, from now must be right

Now I’m really here just for my degree
I have dreams of growing my agency
Internationally
So, I can be
The survivor, my mom, expects of me.

Macaria

The experiences of Macaria describe the ways in which young students seek out
opportunities to change their environments and or pursue their dreams. Macaria
highlights the significance and challenges in Title IX as a means for gaining access to
high school and college athletics. At the same time, it offers some perspective on the role
of Title IX that neglects the role of women and administrators in gaining access to
positions of influence and authority in those spaces. Another theme is the role of finances
(individual and family) and when, where, and how to pursue sport.

Macaria

I. Before Recruiting
I didn’t even want to do gymnastics anymore.
It sucked! I stopped liking the sport.
It’s hard on your body, and It was mentally tough.
I had a coach I didn’t really like, and going to practice every day was rough.
The coaches are really tough.
I wanted something new, so I changed sports.

My high school was not very big on academic preparation.
They didn’t really do anything to help us prepare to receive a college education.
My high school coach helped me to find a club.
He felt that a lot of coaches don’t know that much,
and they just charge a lot to be a part of their program
We never found anything good enough.  
Then we found Coach V  
He was really good, and we didn’t have to pay for anything

II.  During Recruiting

The recruiting process was very stressful, pressure to sign somewhere.  
They showed us the campus, and the nice dorms to make you think you will be staying there.  
We talked about how much we travel, restaurants, facilities, and fun trips.  
*One campus* was huge; I felt like I wouldn’t fit.  
Sometimes recruits forget,  
they are recruits on these trips,  
they need to ask more questions to see how they fit.  
And *speak with* other athletes to see what fits the *closest.*

It was scary and cool at the same time  
Wow, they’re going to offer me money  
Wow I’m going to go to college  
Wow I’m going to be a collegiate athlete  
Wow, *this was* nerve-wracking.

I think recruiting is different based off of TITLE IX *anyway*  
Figuring out how much money they’ll give you  
And what you may need to pay  
Women’s sports usually have more money than men.  
*It matters how many full scholarships your team has to begin.*

III.  After Recruiting

I struggled; it was hard academically and in sports.  
I needed to keep doing really good and keep proving myself.  
I was doing terrible, not performing at all.  
*I think to myself…* you’re not always going to do great, *and it’s ok to fall.*  
You’re going to have to bounce back; everybody has an offseason.  
I need to focus more *and remember my reasons.*

You have to go to study hall at least once a week  
to get help with assignments *when you feel weak.*  
Your normal advisor helps with classes, and my mentor lady, she was super good.  
We had a good relationship based off of school.  
We actually had a personal relationship. That helped a lot, *more than I knew it would.*

The coach that recruited me she was really intimidating, and she was kind of rude.  
It was the way she said things; I don’t think she was aware *of that truth.*  
She is not here anymore; we have a new coach, a Black coach now.  
*Your voice just changed, you said.*  “It’s a Black coach too!”
Oh, I didn’t notice, I just thought it was cool.

I love being a student-athlete; I just feel like they glamorize a lot of things. 
*Questions I’d like answered would give me clarity*...
Do they tell you the truth, or do they just lie about things?
Do they make it seem like it’s all peaches and cream?
I wonder if the recruiting process seemed as fake.
Do they make it seem like being a student-athlete is really fun, and it’s great?
If you have a bad grade, do you still travel or participate?
Do they take your academics seriously?
Do you have time to be a part of the Black Student Union, or are you too busy?
*Black staff members or administrators in your athletic department?*
I don’t think so if I’m being honest.
*Any Black professors?*
Two my freshman year. They were both males.
*Where do you engage with, or have community with Black women?*
Just my teammates.
I wish I had more contact with Black women on a regular basis

That is why I thought of transferring to an HBCU
Being around people who share my culture *and maybe see like I do.*
It would help me grow as a Black woman better
Since I don’t really want to say, we are looked down upon or whatever.
It would help me grow more into who I am.
I want to do something with my life,
I don’t want it to be just based on sport
I *have been* putting in work
I know what I’m capable of.

Nia

Nia’s experience highlights the impact of mental health in general on identity
development and the ways in which problems or concerns are covered up, missed, or
hidden when compared to the level of their athletic success. Also, her story raises
awareness of the fact that there should be a protocol for really training athletic
professionals to recognize, acknowledge, and respond to traumatic events and their
related triggers. I really value the willingness of Nia to share this story because it details
the process any individual may experience when negotiating their success or willingness
to succeed and their safety and comfort. Athletes of all ages are often expected to endure
pain, discomfort, and uncertainties when it comes to physical development. However, I cannot think of a time when that same willingness is encouraged in a social context. It tends to surface in a reactive form of care after performance has declined. One of the more significant statements, although it was brief, was the value that self-care (taking a break, rejuvenation, or connecting with the community) brings to an excitement needed to meet goals.

Nia

I. Before Recruiting

My hair and I are unique; our relationship is a bit complicated. Despite how long and healthy and kinky and natural it was, when I was younger, I hated it.

You may be wondering why this matters and how this will describe more about me...

Growing up, I learned more about myself while I learned to love my hair in all its beauty!

I was surrounded by people with a system and crown that were easy to manage. Today, I am proud to rock mine natural, accepting all of its baggage.

Like compliments on how “springy” and soft, and of course, the occasional “Can I touch it”?

A chance to touch and feel my experiences and memories of sorts.

I still struggle with managing it all, and styling while doing sport. I feel the prettiest when my hair is “done,”

But that is reserved for maybe weekends and vacations.

I grew up on the West coast. Neither of my parents had experience in the sport.

My brothers and I started before I could remember. Their only concern was our safety, us not being hurt.

Me, being competitive with my brothers, I was always challenging them, one of those things that just stuck with me.

Then, I wanted to really focus on competing, probably around the age of twelve or thirteen.

In my area, I had three teams to choose from. The first was a bit more pricey, and the people a little different than me. I didn’t go to the same schools that they went to, they went to the private schools and were a little bit boujee.
The second, *I was familiar with*, they started recruiting me when I was like *in third grade*. The third, the culture was welcoming, my best friends were there, and I loved going to practice every day.

I entered a year-round team,  
It was definitely,  
like a family,  
except there are no seasons.  
I started in the fall  
when school came along.  
I really loved it *for many reasons*.

I was super well-rounded,  
Busy with student-focused organizations and leadership.  
My main goal has always been just to compete in college.  
*My second* goal was paying for *it*.  
I didn’t want to burden my parents,  
I wanted to be kind of independent.

II. **During Recruiting**  
I did look at a lot of school’s demographics, just to see if I would be super out of place.  
I looked at other teams that the college is popular for, to see if there was a similar face.  
It would have been a very big culture shock  
to go across the country, *out of the blue*...  
My peers don’t look around for similar faces in the way that I do.  
Coaches will tell you, “Oh the girls are super nice and everything,”  
But you don’t know really until you get on the team.

*Some coaches* told me, “You’re not good enough right now.”  
*So, I was at a point where I had to narrow it down.*  
They made me the offer right there. Told me I had 10 days to decide.  
10 days wasn’t enough for me; personally,  
there was still only one downside.  
I didn’t feel like it was as diverse as I wanted it to be.  
10 days was hard for me!  
On the sixth day, though, I decided to just call and be like, “I’m going to go here.”  
I ended up committing *and would be there next year*.

*I mean*..., they had the majors I was looking at,  
It made the most sense for me.  
The best of the best and I wanted to make myself the best,  
That was exactly where I needed to be.  
It was like a dream come true.
All of my family was there, grandparents, uncles, cousins, it was crazy. My senior year was just a breeze. I thought I am already going to college. I still focused on my GPA, but it felt nice having that relief.

III. After Recruiting
As soon as I get off the plane, I feel different. Everyone looks at me like, “Oh, you’re Black, so you must be here for some type of sport.” Like “You must be someone.” “Who are you”? Like, you just couldn’t stumble upon this school.

As a college athlete, I realized my training and dedication throughout high school was lacking. I realized my year-round team wasn’t really competitive; we practiced only two hours a day. My college teammates had been doing double days, and they had also done lifting too. We would just do the bare minimum, but now my ability is starting to shine thru.

I got a lot of media attention as a result of my athletic success. Once my training level changed, I started lifting. I was dedicated to just one sport, and I got super focused. I got the school record early, and a lot of attention from the media. They would always interview me and highlighted me in a feature. My other teammates weren’t getting that. I faced some bullying on the team as a result. I think it was definitely a jealousy issue. And for some time... it continued.

Everyone here is just super focused on themselves. It wasn’t really an uplifting environment for me. It felt like the girls were trying to take me down, partly because I was hanging out with an upperclassman who had taken me under her wing. She has the sweetest soul, but this girl was kind of mean. I didn’t feel that comfortable, and they targeted me.

My freshman year, I definitely felt isolated and secluded. I’m kind of shy. I didn’t really open up to a lot of the people around me, even though my dorm was mostly athletes. I went through some rough patches, feeling out of place. I knew that I needed a Black friend, someone I could talk to about everything. My teammates wouldn’t really understand. Now I’ve got those friends, familiar faces, just not on my team. But even that was kind of challenging.
When everybody’s already got their team,  
Everybody’s got their best friends.  
Their experiences are completely different because their sports are predominantly Black.  
As soon as they step on campus, they have automatic best friends.  
I had to open my horizons,  
**Realize I can choose to have friends on my team and grow with friends that are not.**

My coaches, too, they piss me off.  
I asked would they be a little bit more flexible with allowing me to join a Black sorority.  
To do a Black student conference?  
where I would be representing…  
He was like, “The only thing above athletics for me is academics, and this doesn’t constitute that.  
I don’t want you doing this,  
I need you to focus.  
I don’t think adding more to your plate is going to bring your happiness back.

Are you serious?  
This is bigger than you and me!  
That was frustrating.  
He thinks it’s about nothing more than partying.  
My coach didn’t understand that I needed to be in a club.  
I don’t want to leave college with only that in my portfolio.  
Oh, she was a pretty good athlete.  
You weren’t in any clubs? You didn’t give back to your community?  
I really need that; I need it for me!

After I experienced so much with my mental health,  
my performance went down so much  
Now that I’m only focused on sport, it’s kind of taking a toll on me. *It hurt.*  
*Even though everyone was cheering, I burned out, and I had lost my motivation.*  
I didn’t know if I wanted to do it anymore, I’ve been doing it for my *adolescent duration.*

Black women, do we have any Black women? No, Maybe, yeah, maybe?  
I know we have lots of Black men  
that have been  
in my corner,  
I’m trying to think of Black women….  
…  
I can’t think of one right now.  
Black professors…. Nope  
I don’t come in contact with Black women during the day.
Every week, I looked around, nobody looked like me
It was definitely,
Eye-opening!
We need people that look like me,
growing up I didn’t have anyone to look up to
I grew up watching the greats, but they didn’t resemble my truth.

After a little time off, I’m ready to go back; I’m excited.
Remembering the community behind me
You’re not just doing this for yourself anymore.
I’m creating that important representation
If I see a face that looks like mine,
I’m cheering for her every time.
I can do this! I have a purpose.

Siyasa

Among the many elements evident in Siyasa’s experience, her story describes
both the general and very specific influence of politics in becoming a YBW student-
athlete. Among them are the politics associated with the Black family’s various levels of
socioeconomic status and the direct relationship it has to community schools and
neighborhoods. Politics are also presented in sport governing bodies that may vary in
national team selection processes and criteria as well as the approach to the development
programs they rely on. Finally, Siyasa describes the effect of society’s political climate on
college campuses. The local communities’ political expectations have the ability to
inadvertently influence the choice and intensity of the political stance any athlete chooses
to take.

Siyasa

I. Before Recruiting
Pay to play systems create a burden
Not for me, I can laugh now; I was the token Black friend

They incentivized us,
you criticized us
when my school offered me extra resources
Being away from the building, I wasn’t fazed by the drama, I didn’t connect with the rest; I missed her trauma.

Too busy falling in love with the game
it gave me a platform, and it set the stage,
so, I performed, and I expressed,
and then confessed
These girls are too slow,
The boys help me grow.
Pushed me to hold my own,
And nationally ranked, my new comfort zone.

Obviously,
It has become a part of my identity
Since they raised me,
to be a “Black girl that could ball” as far as I could see.
Warning me
of an idle mind, and workshops for devils
No worries mom, I was accelerated; I was on another level.

II. During Recruiting
I spoke about why the U.S. should gain the right
In this room full of very influential figures,
they were all white.

Even though my allegiance was not forced to the school or anthem
I needed a place where I still felt welcome

III. After Recruiting
The constant need for attractive presentations
rather than just being you.
How can you fully enjoy your sport?
if other realms of your life are suffering as they sometimes do?

Still, greatness is manifested
Through different experiences, different times, and different strides
I want there to be more females involved in the sport, more people of color by my side.

We need to find and use every different kind of person to our advantage
show that we are the United States of America and it’s a place for everybody to manage,
right?

Immigration, voluntary or not, should equally distribute priority
embrace diversity,
offer opportunity,
and recognize the wins established on the backs of minorities.

While you decide whether to use your privilege to talk about black issues
I’ll effectively reach my followers, who you know don’t lose

Expectations of being dismissed, overlooked and attacked
Make me want to hold back
Sometimes I am hesitant to speak
How Black women can be celebrated athletes
This is what it means to be
recruited as a Black lady athlete like me.

**Connecting Textural and Structural Descriptions**

I used free-verse poetry to present the relevant, delimited horizons and themes, a method recommended by Moustakas (1994), to construct individual textural descriptions that specify “what” things happened for each participant. The poems offer the stories and experiences as they were told from the storyteller to give them a voice within this research study and for those who interact with them. The next section explains the themes in detail and also acts as the composite structural description to provide a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, specifically, the themes and qualities that account for “how” feelings and thoughts were connected. Connecting the textural and structural descriptions intuitively-reflectively integrates the composite textural and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1994).

**Structural Descriptions**

**System-Centered Macrolevel Gender Identity Themes**

At the macro-level, a system-centered research approach prioritized gender identity to focus on conceptualizing the dynamic complex social systems related to YBW
student-athletes recruited to compete at American colleges and universities. After considering initial gender-related themes and experiences before, during, and after the recruiting process, two themes emerged that centered on disadvantaged development remorse and hair expression joy.

**Disadvantaged developmental remorse.** Disadvantaged development remorse addresses the lost connection to a healthy community and the rejection that is felt as a result. Audre Lorde said, “without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (Lorde, 2012). All of the participants described the many ways that community affected their experience as YBW student-athletes transitioning towards Black collegiate women athletes. Most common among the participants’ experiences was a sense of abandonment, and the inability to develop in ways that being connected to a community can provide. The sense of abandonment comes from an event that is initiated by the loss of a valued individual and, the coping style for this experience is to seek an equal replacement (Plutchik, 2003). A standard definition of a community is a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings (MacQueen et al., 2001). The need and consideration of community for YBW student-athletes as they transitioned from high school throughout their collegiate experience is evident in their sadness from community abandonment, efforts to avoid solitude through sororities, and the ways they value Black maternal experiences in supporting Black athletes.
Sadness from community abandonment. Various participants describe the feeling and fear of an absent community during the complete recruiting process. To emphasize the consistent influence of the community in their lived experience, a chronological representation of the student-athlete and phases of the recruiting process is presented. First, Daib discusses how conflict manifested within her longtime high school community as a result of her athletic success in preparation for the recruiting process. She described the moment she reached a milestone in her maturing athletic career:

A lot of girls I would consider my best friends at the time, I saw their true colors. I was doing really well my senior year in high school…I was starting to get shown interests from a lot of colleges. They were coming to our practices to watch me, and the parents started to notice that…Instead of them saying congrats, they were basically like, “we think you are not passing … You’re just trying to get yours”. I knew this had nothing to do with me; ya’ll are mad because I did it before you.

Daib’s moment that should have strengthened her athletic identity resulted in a negative impact on her social identity as her recruiting status was raised. She intentionally mentioned the reaction of the parents, who were also a part of this community as authority figures of the adolescents. Daib’s experience offered a detailed description of the roles that parents play both intentionally and unintentionally in the preparation and execution of the recruiting experience. Adil also expressed her sadness about the loss of community in high school:

At the request of the (college) recruiting coach, I switched teams. She thought that by switching teams, I would be exposed to better competition, which wasn’t necessarily the case. So, not only did I leave my friends, but I left them to play with a team that was supposed to be better…it was a very emotional process because I had played with them so long. I had success with that team. I met some of my best friends with that team, and we did well together…The recruiting coach said go to this team, play with them, they play better. I was like, if this is what I have to do, then that’s what I have to do.
Like Daib, Adil prioritized her athletic identity during high school. This difference between them is the motivation behind the approach to do so. Where Daib appeared to be motivated by the potential to improve recognition from college coaches, Adil acted in response to a directive from the college coach of which she was most interested. Still, both examples resulted in the sacrificing of the community to pursue athletic goals prior to the acceptance of a college athletic scholarship offer.

Second, several participants mentioned the memories of first meeting their future teammates and experiencing the physical space of the new team prior to committing to attend and compete for the college or university. However, Gasira discussed her need to access and build community prior to physically being in the space because of the great distance she would be required to travel to be there. As Gasira explained,

I reached out to one of the girls on the team because she was Jamaican. I just wanted to talk to someone. I wasn’t getting a visit because I was all the way in Jamaica, I didn’t have a travel visa or anything. It was difficult to come for a visit at that point. For me to get the experience by not going, but understand what’s going on, I talked to a teammate…I reached out to her. I think they can’t really talk to you unless you reach out to them. So I reached out to her, and I was like I just want to know what it is like for you, how you transitioned, the things you have been through, is it a good place, will I be okay? She was able to answer everything and gave me a peace of mind. Okay, she survived, so I think I can do it too.

Gasira was limited from visiting the campus because of her international status but still expressed her desire to be connected. Her mention of the NCAA policies prohibiting contact from current team members to future prospects forced her to initiate and maintain a relationship in order to satisfy her discomfort of the unknown.

Finally, without safety and security in the community, sadness, and disgust affected participants. Verbal, physical, and emotional abuse was mentioned as an
experience within college athletics. Specifically related to gender, Aggression, Bullying, Competition (ABC), violence was mentioned in the most considerable detail in Nia’s experience. Nia described a scenario of ABC violence that led to her forcing her attention away from the sport and towards her mental health. After making mention that just recently, she began to feel comfortable expressing her feelings about this experience, she admitted the toll that it had taken on her for a significant part of that academic year. She explained the quick progression of ABC Violence once she was recognized publicly for her athletic success:

I know teammates were getting jealous, and I did face some bullying on the team because I think it was definitely a jealousy issue, but also because I was hanging out with one girl that this group of girls didn’t like. She was an upperclassman. She was kind of took me under her wing. So, I just hung out with her, and she has the sweetest soul, but this girl is kind of mean. So, they targeted me after hanging out with her because I don’t know, girl drama. I didn’t feel that comfortable on my team.

It is also essential to understand the extensiveness of concerns with mental health and community loss. Caplan (1990) explained that loss like this leads to a prolonged period of distress and disability. Among the associated feelings of being upset, there exists a deterioration in the clarity of the person's self-concept and capacity to assess their ability to persevere in the face of discomfort, which weakens their will to struggle (Caplan, 1990). At the time of the conversation with Nia, she was gearing up to make a new attempt at success in the sport while managing the effects of the violence she experienced while being isolated from a sense of community. Ryan, Gayles, and Bell (2018) explored the barriers and factors related to the underutilization of mental health resources on campus and attributes a student-athlete’s lack of time, fear of possible adverse reactions from coaches and administration, and a fear of experiencing personal discomfort. Nia and
others confirmed these barriers and the impact it has had on their ability to perform and progress.

**Avoiding solitude through sororities.** Avoiding solitude through sororities is a strategy that participants would like to use to create a community for themselves outside of the confines of athletics. The perception of solidarity through sororities was evident in relation to both gender and racial identity, but after considering the origin of sororities, a system-centered research approach was most appropriate. Iyora introduced how community is viewed in relation to student-athlete interests and desires to benefit from sorority membership. Participants mentioned the conflict college coaches found with their interest in pursuing membership in a sorority and the impact it could have on their athletic performance and were therefore non-supportive. Iyora’s account of wanting to pursue this long-held interest highlights the significance of the community and YBW Student-Athletes and brings the notion of community back full circle to time in adolescents for many of them. Iyora described it this way,

> When I was younger, middle school again, I was a part of a step team, kind of like this last-minute helping hand, but still participated for some time. But the lady that was running the step team, she was a Delta. Her step team was mostly Black girls, I think there were two Hispanic girls. She always tried to incorporate us in this outside group called Delta Gems. So that was my first interaction with a sorority. I didn’t understand sororities and how they actually worked or what it was at the time, but I knew it was an amazing group… I asked my coach what he thought about me being in a sorority and he was telling me if you’re really dedicated to track, you would just put all of your focus in track. I was like well, I heard that before. So, him telling me that was like well, this must be a real mentality because I’m in college now and they’re paying me to be here so I probably shouldn’t join a sorority. I really wanted to because that idea of sisterhood and family and going into an atmosphere you don’t really know anyone, and I didn’t really know the team because I didn’t do a visit.

The allure of sorority membership provides an opportunity to replace the community that was lost and provides a means of becoming reattached and connected. Sororities have
served in this capacity since the beginning. However, Iyora’s account of gaining permission to access as a young teenager was presumed to be encouraged and celebrated and later as a young adult was limited due to her athletic commitments.

*Valuing Black maternal experiences in supporting Black athletes.* The foundation of many of the participant's experience is rooted in the role their parents played in terms of their ability to successfully pursue sports. Today, both mothers and fathers of these YBW student-athletes are of the Title IX era and could have some experience in pursuing sport at various levels and require that acknowledgment while in the recruiting process. While the influence of men and fathers in sport has been explored, the full list of roles that Black women play outside of coaching and administration has not. Jilo’s story makes a case for the misunderstood need to create and empower Black women in organizations such as college athletics because of their ability to guide and support students in a way that is not only necessary and unique compared to White women and men of all races but is familiar. She described the way her mother’s experiences and instruction supported her in this way,

> My mom was working retail, and somebody came in and told her about how her daughter had a track meet. So, my mom took me to the track, and I had a great time. I ended up liking it. That was in fifth grade. So that summer, I started running track, and I’ve been running track ever since.”

> “I was always independent, and I honestly think that’s why I ended up having so much strife with my male coaches because I’m not used to a male authority figure…I actually had a woman coach once in my life, and she was absolutely amazing. I think women understand women better. I think they know how to talk to women better. I would honestly respect a woman better…just because I am a woman, especially a Black woman, I would absolutely respect them more.”

> “During the recruiting process…[the coach] talked a good game; he was really smooth; I guess like most men are. He was friendly. I am from the deep south; southern hospitality really is a thing, and that’s what we look for. For certain people, when we meet them, we want them to be friendly. You want to feel like
they care, and that’s what I felt. I felt like he cared about not only how I did in the
sport but how I was doing as a person.

Specifically, Jilo mentions how her sense of independence was cultivated by her mother
as a means of survival and self-dependency and her current interaction with men as
authority figures that have both been shaped by the absence of her father in her home.
Many of the participants said that they leaned on their mothers and grandmothers for
emotional support and perspective.

Several participants discussed an almost nonexistent presence of Black women in
their day-to-day lives: academically, athletically, and socially. Participants often paused
when asked to reflect on the Black women they interact with on a daily basis. Macaria
captured and elaborated on the other participants’ accounts of the roles that Black women
could play for students on college campuses:

I feel like they (Black women) would help me grow as a Black woman better.
Since we’re, I don’t know, I don’t really want to say, looked down upon, or
whatever, but I just feel like they would help me grow into who I am.

Black motherhood and related roles are unsung in the ways that it often sacrifices,
encourages, and nurtures Black athletes from grassroots to professional ranks. In the case
of the participants of this research, their mothers, more often than their fathers,
introduced them to and supported them towards the highest levels in sport. Black
motherhood and related roles help teach respect, authority, discipline, and commitment.
Yet, their absence on college campuses suggest a void in the continued development of
these and other essential principles for all students, and critically and specifically for
Black collegiate women.

Overall, the loss of community creates a sense of sadness for YBW student-
athletes. At the systemic level and when considering the gender identity for YBW
student-athletes, it was demonstrated that this potential loss or fear of losing community and connectedness happens in many instances throughout the recruiting process and is impacted by several members of a given community. As the YBW student-athlete transitions from high school to college-level play, she is simultaneously leaving one community to join another. Doing so forces the abandonment of the familiar and comfortable systems of the overall development.

**Hair expression joy.** The politics around Black women and their hair were evident throughout the conversations with the research participants. Most participants described the relationship with their hair as though it was a consistent reminder of what is important to them and how they show up in the world. Since joy is initiated by the gaining of a valued object (Plutchik, 2000), it appears as though the relationship between Black women and their hair in this research study exhibited the celebration of one thing that the individual has control over. Also, it consistently communicates what their words or platforms may be limited from saying. Nia explained how this comfort came to be:

> My relationship with my hair is a bit complicated, I guess. When I was younger, I hated it, despite how long and healthy and kinky it was because I was surrounded by people with straight, easy to manage hair. Growing up, I learned more about myself, and I learned to love it in all of its beauty.

Nia described some of the challenges in sport related to her hair and how it took time to become confident in using intentional styling methods and care routines when sport participation was said to have a negative impact on how she was able to present herself during and outside of competition due to the need to choose styles to keep her swim cap secure and the drying effect of chlorine. Hali also discussed her hair considerations related to individual and team image:
It definitely crosses my mind about what I’m going to do with my hair, especially when we have to compete, compared to when we have a photoshoot or poster pictures. Just especially because I feel like a lot of my teammates can just wash their hair and flatiron their hair and just be ready to go, where I feel like I have to think about it for a few weeks…I definitely do my own hair, but there are a couple other athletes that go to one of the track athletes that does hair, and she will normally do a lot of people’s hair.

Gasira mentioned the need to rely on others that understand her standards of beauty in the same ways that Nia mentions the reliance on track athletes to do so for the women she knows on her campus:

I don’t know but a thing about Caribbean kids or Jamaicans, when we go out and when we go on vacation, we believe that once my hair is looking good and my nails are looking good, then I can do good. So, it’s appearance; we want to look good no matter what…I was lucky to always have someone from either Jamaica or a Caribbean country that could take care of my hair for me. The good thing was, they wouldn’t charge you. You can get you hair done for free.

Gasira’s sentiments regarding image relating to her hair lined up very similarly to the other participants, drawing parallels within the topic across the African diaspora. The African American women, Jamaican woman, and Buli, an African woman, were coordinated on how expressing themselves through their hair makes them feel. Buli shared this concern, in relation to her hair, about being a minority woman on her college campus:

I don’t like people asking me about my hair…I mean, everybody should mind their own business. That is the only thing I don’t like being asked. That’s the only thing I don’t like about being a minority, being a Black person here, I don’t know. Back home, nobody cares, because they know it’s a braid, it’s extensions, but here they don’t understand it. They don’t understand the trouble of a Black woman’s hair.

Black women have a relationship with their hair that is unique and critical to how they feel they show up in the world. From childhood, hair characteristics like texture and style shaped their perception of beauty, creativity, and empowerment. Sports
participation influences this relationship further depending on the sport of choice, specifically in consideration of how and where you will be required to perform. Black collegiate women don’t want to answer questions about the look they have adopted for the occasion and would rather have a spectator enjoy the performance and respect their consideration of the details, including every hair on their head.

**Summary of System-Centered Macro Level Gender Identity Themes**

Overall, the community plays a leading role in the many ways that YBW student-athletes develop and grow towards becoming successful Black collegiate women. A loss of community created a sense of abandonment and impacted the ways that they managed and embraced their gender identity. When community felt non-existent, it was actively pursued by forcing connections across borders, dismissing signs of danger in order to be accepted in unfamiliar places, and through alternative group membership, specifically in Black Greek sororities. In addition, one connection that these Black women felt was their joy in embracing their individual and collective cultures through their hair and using it as a means of expression and demonstration of beauty standards.

**Process-Centered Meso Level Social Identity Themes**

Process-centered research uses a premise of relationality to better understand structural and organizing processes of inequality (Choo & Ferree, 2010). It examines how individuals are “recruited to” categories and yet have choices in the “subject positions” they adopt in the complex locations they are recruited to (Adams & Padamsee, 2001;). In this research study, process-centered themes were determined by YBW student-athlete's social identity or that of being a student-athlete. The process refers explicitly to a) the means of entering the pool of eligible athletes, b) satisfying the recruitment criteria
set by the NCAA, c) being contacted by an NCAA Division I coach representing a college or university, d) making the commitment to attend a specific institution of higher education, and finally, e) meeting the requirements to maintain eligibility and continue as a student-athlete. Optimistic preparation and disappointing experiences emerged as significant process-centered themes.

**Optimistic preparation.** Optimism, the combination of joy and anticipation, was the prevailing emotion associated with the majority of the recruiting process. In fact, it prevailed until students arrived on campus for the start of their college careers. Overall, most participants expressed a desire to enter the recruiting pool as soon as their specific sport allowed and negotiated their academic, athletic, and social identities to accommodate gaining access.

**Strategizing within education systems to gain access to sport participation.** The benefits of different entities were mentioned across the spectrum of American secondary and post-secondary options. For example, Daib illustrated the way her family strategized early in her K-12 academic experience to help support her athletic goals later:

I went to high school out of my school district... We could build a really good high school team if you leave your middle school and go to the middle school in this district for eighth grade. I could play varsity in ninth grade if I was in the district as an eighth-grader. So, I left the middle school that I was at. Going into my eighth-grade year. The reason I did that is because my ninth-grade year, I could play varsity if I went to a middle school in that district in eighth grade. So, we had two other girls do that with me that did the same thing. We all ended up going to the same middle school for eighth grade. So then ninth grade year, we ended up making varsity. The high school team had potential, but we knew we could make it better. And the team that I was going to, if I was going to go to that high school, it was really bad. I would have been like the best player. I wouldn't have really gone anywhere; I wouldn't have... So, we ended up doing that. My ninth-grade year, I ended up making varsity, and two of the other girls ended up making JV. So that's when the politics, the competition started early.
American participants in this research study attended high schools that scored at least a B- according to Niche. Factors included in this score are based on rigorous analysis of academic and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education, including test scores, and college data ratings. This is relevant considering the reasons participants gave for their choice to transfer within and outside of their designated school districts, which were athletically based and not academics. Still, it appears as though rules had been in place to combat these types of transferring for play strategies in the past. The desire to succeed athletically in anticipation of earning a college scholarship appears to entice community members to manipulate and challenge system policies in an effort to generate an opportunity that otherwise seems nonexistent. On the other hand, Macaria was not strategic in ways of choosing a specific high school and was less than satisfied with her high school academic experience. She also developed athletically during that time with a club coach located outside of her school district.

Honestly, I really don’t think I prepared (academically) because my high school was not very big on academics. That sounds kind of, I don’t know, every high school is big on academics, but it wasn’t as big, so I feel like there was no preparation, and they didn’t really do anything to help us prepare for college, so I don’t think I really had any preparation.

Although school districts try to limit transfer for play tactics, athletic goal-oriented student-athletes and their families find ways to manipulate the system when they can if the potential outcome leads to significant opportunities beyond the K-12 experience.

Buli took an alternative path towards gaining her college degree by way of utilizing the American Junior College system as a pathway towards the large research institution she currently attends. Her experience as an international student-athlete is unique in that she describes the ways she was directed towards junior college as a
strategy to the NCAA Division I level. She explained it like this: “He organized it for a junior college. I didn’t do good on my SAT’s so they decided I could maybe go to a junior college first so I could maybe transfer after two years”. This method of transferring is known as a 2-4 transfer (transferring from a junior college or community college to a four-year college or university) and applies explicitly to academic qualifiers (transferring after graduating with your associates or general education degree) and non-qualifiers (transferring before completing your general education or associates degree) (Infante, 2019).

Simply being conscious of the requirements for recruitment appears to be necessary during the early years of secondary education. Choosing schools based on reputation and resources creates a gateway for exploring issues related to equity, housing, and other measures of socioeconomic status. At the same time, a lack of understanding, familiarity, and academic preparation is not a deterrent for eventually continuing your studies at the country’s largest institutions of higher education, as long as the promise of your athletic ability remains.

**Sports specialization and recruiting.** Many of the participants described aspects of embracing and experiencing sport specialization as they prepared for the college recruiting process. Sport specialization is defined as intense, year-round training in a single sport with the exclusion of other sports (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Duga, Patrick & LaBella, 2013). It has been suggested that sport specialization takes place later in the high school years when athletes are physically, mentally, emotionally, and cognitively mature, and athleticism is developed, and related abilities are transferable (Balyi, Way, & Higgs,
Specialization at an earlier date can lead to burnout, or the state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

Many aspects of the student-athletes’ lives are affected when they embark on a path of sport specialization. Parents have a role in making necessary adjustments to support the endeavor of their students, as well. It is essential first to recognize Iyora’s experience of progressing from the suggested path of sport sampling, splitting her time between track and field and volleyball, towards becoming more specialized as a track and field athlete. However, choosing to give up the sport she preferred for the one her coach and mother recommended left an impression on her that would resurface during her college years when her dedication is yet again questioned. She explained:

It was super progressive. From not going to state at all my freshman year and then winning it all my senior year. It was really exciting and really crazy, and I almost was like this may not be for me because I didn’t even want to play sports in the beginning. And, I was like well this may not be for me. My mom was like, “No, it’s literally in your blood. This makes sense. This is what you do. This is good for you. She said, “Just because you’re not winning, don’t stop. Just keep doing it.”

Sport specialization requires a commitment of resources to include people, money, and time. Like Iyora, Adil mentioned the support she received from her parents when she became committed to the idea of concentrating on a single sport in pursuit of college sports participation “My mom and dad were athletes. So, growing up, I watched that and knew it was something I was interested in. Once I decided that I wanted to play in college, they were very supportive”. Both Iyora and Adil made a similar commitment to specialize in a single sport while in high school in pursuit of an opportunity to compete at the collegiate level. They benefited from the support of their parents and coach’s encouragement and relied on their personal experiences as a guide to move forward.
Specializing in sport also requires adjustments made to how a person understands their competing academic and athletic identities and how she experiences the typical school day. Gasira’s experience offers a glimpse into what it looks like to prioritize academic identity over athletic identity:

My cousin was always like; you should do a sport because you can go far in sport and school alone will not take you everywhere. So, I was like okay, I’m already doing good in my classes; I can do a sport for real, not just for fun or whatever.

While Hali’s and Siyas’s stories show the flexibility of a private school to help support their need to specialize in sport throughout her K-12 experience. Hali says:

Private school helped with my time management and making sure that I could get the work done before we hit the road for travel and competitions. It definitely helped to make sure that I had everything in order and didn’t feel so overwhelmed.

Siyasa’s desire to concentrate only on sport led to her accelerating her high school academic requirements to free up time to prepare for her first collegiate season. She explains:

I had to grow up a lot earlier, but I had control of my life because I wasn’t at home all that often…I actually graduated early because I just wanted time to just do soccer and just chill out before I went to college.

Nia describes the contrast of her athletic efforts in high school compared to her college teammates. At the same time, she noticed the benefits of patience in pursuing elite status in high school and the performance gains she enjoyed at the collegiate level:

We only practiced two hours a day. After school would end, it would be from like 5:30pm to 7:30pm. On Saturdays, it would range from either two or three hours, starting at like 8:00am. But I know a lot of my college teammates had been doing double days since they were in middle school or high school, and they have also done lifting too, and I had never lifted before in my life because we weren’t that competitive in high school. We would just do the bare minimum.
Collectively, they demonstrated the many paths towards pursuing sport on an elite level and the constant negotiation between academic and athletic priorities as a result.

At times, the athletic identity was more dominant and required a desire to measure your success against others and generate recognition for their physical ability. The need to create opportunities through successful competition performances is crucial for recruiting. What it takes to gain access to those events becomes an issue of financial concern and geographic location. The popularity of various sports may differ based on region or state and therefore allows for some performances to become overlooked and potential candidates to become lost in the local recruiting pipeline. Jilo’s need for opportunities to compete on a national level helps to put this in context:

It was easy to get recruited for academics…that is a big thing college coaches look for. Athletically, I would say there was not a lot of competition here. I wouldn’t get much exposure until I went to bigger meets like national meets

Creating opportunities for athletic performance exposure and visibility is impacted not only by the sport of choice or event within that sport as Jilo explained, but also begins to expose limitations related to geography, community sport preferences and the socioeconomic status that challenges rates of participation and opportunities to travel.

**Disappointing experiences.** Disappointment following the recruiting process was experienced by many of the participants in the research study when considering process-centered themes related to their social identity of student-athletes. Plutchik (2003) describes disappointment as sadness, (thoughts of abandonment), and surprise (an unexpected event that causes an individual to seek help in order to gain time to orient themselves to what is new). This compounded emotion touched various aspects for individuals and was most concentrated in the areas of misunderstanding everyday
mandates, coping without community, politics and athletic platforms, and money management.

**Day-to-day student-athlete considerations.** Beginning with new authority figures found in coaches and administration, there was a discussion of being surprised by the ways in which coaches communicated with student-athletes. First, some of the YBW student-athletes admitted that they had not had interactions with authority figures in settings similar to this or with the persons that shared the demographics (race, gender) of those they were being required to now interact with during and after the recruiting process. Although not all interactions created feelings of discomfort, participants used descriptions like tone-deaf, condescending, and rude to characterize coaches they interacted with during the recruiting process. Iyora presented her experience about communication as a recruit with one coach in particular during the recruiting process and how she felt disrespected:

I remember going to my mom and crying because I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t know what not to say. She was like you should have come downstairs and had the talk in front of me. I was like; I didn’t think he would hang up on me though. I thought they were trying to recruit you. If they are trying to recruit you, why would they treat you like that? That was the very first coach. I was just kind of in shock, I think. I was like well, I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t know if I can because I don’t know how to turn them down and say I’m not interested.

Following the conversation with both the coach and her mother, Iyora mentioned feelings of anxiety generated from the pressure to make the right decision without offending anyone. In other words, she was uncertain about how to be patient with her decision-making, direct with communicating her choices and nonconfrontational in doing so. In another instance, Nia faced a comparable situation when she was presented with a choice
to commit to a university. Deadlines forced her to quickly evaluate and prioritize her
relevant variables during her decision-making process:

They made me an offer right there. They told me I only had 10 days to decide if I
wanted it or not. I thought that window of 10 days wasn’t enough for me
personally. I’m super indecisive, and I was like, if this is really where I’m going
to be for four years, I want to make sure.

Communicating with the new coaches and administrators proved to be uncomfortable and
intimidating for Iyora and Nia, among others.

The second area of disappointment was the unaccounted sacrifices required once
the student-athlete has begun their collegiate experience. Jilo describes the more realistic
expectations of her time like this:

We get because they take…I have to give up all of my weekends. I have to give up
anything that a normal college student wouldn’t give up. I have to give up all
of my academic work that you do, that’s easier for you than it is for me because I
have to worry about all of these other things. I have to give up being able to figure
out what classes I want to take and when I want to take them…anyone who tries
to come in, and you’re an athlete, and you try to do engineering, every athletic
academic advisor advises you against it.

Daib’s sacrifice came by means of not feeling prepared for life after graduation. She had
desires to gain some professional experience and relevant workplace readiness skills
while performing as a student-athlete but felt let down that her commitment to be a
collegiate athlete negated her opportunity to prepare better for life after college. She
explains:

Coaches preach academics first, basketball second, but when it comes down to it
if you wanted to get an internship during the summer for something that I needed
experience or whatever, and it means me missing 6:00am workouts…But, if I’m
not going to go pro, I know I’m not going overseas or play in the WNBA, I just
feel like coaches should let players invest in their future at the same
time…You’ve got to give student-athletes a chance to earn experience. That’s
what most jobs are looking for.
Jilo’s resentment from time lost plays out over a relatively short period of time (days, weekends etc.) while Daib provides an awareness to the impact of the same time lost over a more extended term, and the implications on the speed in which she will presumably be able to move forward in her career as a result. Together their stories highlight the obstacles associated with student-athlete participation and time management.

Based on the experiences of the participants, it appears that the realities of student-athlete life did not always line up with the expectations either presented to them or those that they failed to inquire about. Making commitments obligates the student-athlete to satisfy the terms of that commitment with the expectation that they understand what is being asked and the terms associated with it.

**Dysfunctional athletic community.** Another factor contributing to disappointing experiences for YBW student-athletes at NCAA Division I colleges and universities was their experiences with dysfunctional communities. Typical dysfunctions of a community of practice are based on its three underlying factors, the domain (major purpose of community existence), friendly relationships (the community), and knowledge sharing (Mládková, 2015). Participants recalled factors that satisfied these criteria and created environments that were difficult to thrive in. To provide a standard for functional, Hali describes the benefits and characteristics of her healthy student-athlete community. Her experience was one that was not without challenges but became manageable when her sporting community was active:

We’re very family-oriented, so we do try to be very close to each other and open up, and be there whenever somebody’s struggling or needs help or anything of that nature. Our coaches are helpful with that too. They’re very open, and their doors are always open for any time you are struggling if you just need someone to talk to, to vent to.
Iyora didn’t share this experience. She described isolation on her college campus instead:

When I first got here, it was really hard to meet people because all I saw was my team every day. Every second of the day and I rarely saw them on campus, which is weird. I would see them all the time in practices and meetings that we had to go to, but on campus, it was so hard to interact with people.

Community was shown to be a significant influence on the experience of YBW student-athletes, as was demonstrated at the systemic level. In the process level, the concerns with community are centered around dysfunction and toxic climates, like the one described by Daib. Daib concentrated the retelling of a moment in her recruiting experience on the abuse within her collegiate athletic community:

When I committed, there was a scandal that had come out actually about the coach that recruited me. The players had come out and said that my former coach had been abusing them. She put her hands on them. So, when it came out, it was on the local news and stuff. She called me and basically told me that it was a lie; it’s not true. They’re just mad because they got cut off the team, blah, blah, blah. My gullibleness, I guess, at that age, I believed it.

Daib’s account of abuse between coaches and athletes is alarming and deserves considerable attention. She continues on, explaining how difficult her first year was with the aforementioned coach featured on the news along with other staff members were retained until the following academic year, leaving her and her teammates susceptible to her aggressive and physical behaviors that Daib said were rooted in pettiness.

When the disappointments become too great, the opportunity to leave or transfer colleges or universities is available. Today, transfer policies set forth by the NCAA are more lenient than they have been in the past, and student-athletes are taking advantage of the flexibility it offers. For example, Adil has considered transferring and imagined what life might be like at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU):
I think I would have had a different experience at an HBCU. Obviously, the level of competition would be different, but knowing where I am now and the things I’m involved in, I’ve realized that those opportunities exist elsewhere.

Exercising transfer options was mentioned by several participants both as considerations for their future and as possibilities of the past since they are now at a point where graduation has become the primary focus, or they have gained entrance into their chosen academic programs that distinct and recognized as elite, specialized or limited.

A third factor that created disappointing experiences for some student-athletes was the unstable platform that they are given on campus based on how well they perform athletically, which is shaken when they choose to promote and support causes they designate as favorable and relevant. There was a heightened awareness around political climate and potential social implications often tied to race. However, when focusing on her experience as an example of the process level themes and the social identity of student-athlete, Siyasa negotiated what it means for athletes to have and use their platforms on campus for protesting social injustices: “I want to find a place and a comfort level where I can speak out on issues that truly matter to me.” She explained further that using her elevated platform in this matter is different when compared to her academic counterparts in that the potential media coverage could lead directly and indirectly to her opportunities to grow as an athlete, retain her scholarship and impact her professional athletic offers in the future. This practice of silencing satisfies the notion that dysfunctional communities prohibit or limit knowledge sharing, in this case, the outward sharing of personal position and the quieted repercussions as a result of doing so.

Money and the collegiate experience. Finally, disappointing experiences were often related to matters of money. The allure of participating as a college athlete is
usually the scholarship associated with it. Macaria described how it felt when she understood the gift of scholarships and her need for the funds to grant her a better chance at degree attainment.

It was scary and cool at the same time. Like, oh wow, they’re going to offer me money, but I don’t know, it’s kind of scary to think about, wow, I’m going to go to college and be a collegiate athlete.

In another example, Buli’s experience with the desire, need, pursuit, and management of scholarships for degree attainment highlights the end of the spectrum when her international experience is considered:

After I graduated from high school, I decided that I would like to run to get a scholarship from the United States. I heard from a friend that there’s a lot of scholarships here in the United States, so I decided I’m going to start running. I’m going to start practicing because I didn’t get an experience of running in high school.

As her textural description illustrates, she was able to navigate the process of eventually becoming an NCAA Division I athlete; she added this for consideration when it comes to matters of money:

I’m an international student-athlete, and I only depend on my stipend, I don’t work, I can’t get a job off-campus, and getting a job on campus is hard. I don’t have enough money to pay for everything. I wish they would give us access to jobs on campus. That is the only problem international student-athletes go through. We feel that our parents are going to send us money. I can’t expect my parents back home to send me money. They should provide maybe jobs to international students to help them financially. That would be great.

Buli’s experience with money is compelling in that it forces the reconsideration of how benefits for student-athletes are scrutinized and distributed. Buli participates in a sport that is connected to athletes from the African continent. Her textural-structural description describes the conditions and resources available to her there and how she was selected to compete for her university. Since she is not able to gain additional resources
to return home, one could argue that there is an unintentional act of entrapment developing for those athletes and at the very least, a sense of isolation that is unmatched to their counterparts.

**Summary of Process-Centered Meso-Level Social Identity Themes**

Process-level themes focused on the social identity of being a YBW student-athletes at NCAA Division I colleges and universities. Both optimistic preparation and disappointing experiences emerged as opportunities and problems to evaluate in an attempt to emphasize and redefine aspects of the process. YBW student-athletes described their strategies within various educations systems to gain access to sport participation, a concentrated effort between school administration and parents. The same coordination could be found in the choice to specialize in a sport at different ages, heavily dependent on the chosen sport. After completing the recruiting process, these same collegiate women were met with disappointing experiences once they began life on campus ranging from everyday considerations of sacrifice, dysfunctional community, and matters related to money.

**Group-Centered Micro Level Racial Identity Themes**

Group-centered research brings in the experiences of marginalized groups by giving them a voice that highlights their unique realities and standpoints to understand inequality better. This research study used Black racial identity as the shared experience of the YBW student-athlete participants. During data analysis, five group-centered themes emerged related to their racial identity. Experiences connecting race to the campus community, class, methods of communication, parental figures, and culture were described by participants throughout the NCAA collegiate recruiting process.
Submitting to issues of class. Measures of social class were evident in the lives of the participants throughout the recruiting process and attributed to the ways that they experienced and participated in the sport. Social class is defined as a division of a society based on social and economic status (Law, 2019). From the participant's earliest days, their family's social class affected the ways they interacted with the communities they had access to. Jilo and Buli described an experience of submission, a combination of fear and acceptance when it comes to their experience with class and their homelife prior to their college experiences. Jilo alludes to access to healthcare as an indicator when she mentioned that she was intentionally born across the state line because of the improved quality of the hospital. While Buli provides an international comparative description of how she experienced class in ways that she recognized consistent in the United States:

I didn’t come from a rich family…I’ve been on full scholarships, I don’t have that much money, so I’ve been through a lot…Some parts of Kenya are really, really good…Some parts are ghettos, too. It is the same as here, there are some great places, and there are some poor places, so yeah, it depends on where you are coming from.

As Buli describes it, the social class provides you a spectrum of limitations and opportunities regardless of where a person calls home. Other participants describe some of these spectrum points related to sports access and participation throughout their recruiting experiences.

Before recruiting, Siyasa, and Macaria address the issues of race, class, and sport participation directly. On the one hand, Siyasa introduced Black adolescent attitudes towards the traditionally White-dominated sport she participates in:

So essentially, in high school, my group wasn’t very diverse, it could have been, but I felt like in high school, the other Black girls didn’t really understand what I was doing and why I was doing it.
Siyasa’s sport of choice and willingness to commit a significant amount of time to develop as an athlete often kept her in the company of groups where she was the racial minority, and of the social class of the majority. Her comment that a lack of understanding existed among other Black girls in her school creates a distinction between traditionally White sports and the more familiar sports for Black women like basketball and track and field. Macaria, a track and field athlete expand on the financial access required for sport to strengthen this point:

My high school coach was helping me find a club coach, and he said he feels a lot that there are coaches that don’t know that much, and they just charge a lot of people to be a part of their program, and we just never found anything that was good enough, and then, we found a new coach, and he was like oh, this guy seems really good, you don’t have to pay anything.

Siyasa and Macaria both shared details regarding the socioeconomic status of their families and what is provided in terms of the ways in which they participate and with whom they were able to be in company with and the likelihood of intermingling among these groups within or outside of sports.

During the recruiting experience, Adil and Macaria were forced to reconcile the assumption of their social class in conversations about managing the affordability of their college expenses from Head coaches. Macaria mentioned the cost of higher education in relation to socio-economic status and race:

I don’t know if the recruiting process was different because I was Black…it’s just really stressful and figuring out how much money they’ll give you if you’re going to need to pay anything.

Adil extended the concerns of Macaria when she mentioned the experience of social class assumption in conversation during her recruiting visit with the Head Coach:
When I was being recruited, we were in the coaches' office talking about money and scholarships, and she was like I know this isn’t a full ride, but maybe you guys can hit the number and pay for the rest of school. I’m like, why would you say that? If I was White, you would not say that. Let’s be honest. Maybe she was joking, and maybe she would say that to a White athlete too. It just comes off tone-deaf and insensitive.

Unfortunately, while Adil was thinking about what might come to be of her scholarship during her recruiting visit, Macaria was listening to her coach speak about her strategy to maximize the team’s allocated scholarships unintentionally placing Macaria on defense.

Social class is a fair topic when it comes to college athletics considering the role financial scholarships play in building successful teams and gaining and retaining the commitment of team members.

The concept of social class is not one that is new, and neither is its relationship to sports access. When seeking to understand the experiences of the student-athletes in the recruiting process, participants provided a gateway into the ways that power could be used in relation to class and the enticement of upward class mobility as an incentive for commitment.

**Surprised by campus climate.** Gasira’s international experience had not prepared her completely for what others called racism on her campus.

Racism was not something I really know. I didn’t even know what it means. I mean, I know what it means, but as a personal experience, I did not know what it is. Coming here from Jamaica, from here, you have your education and your money; you are okay. Status in Jamaica is based on money in a sense. Your money gets you a ride. It doesn’t matter what color you are; it doesn’t matter how well you speak; it doesn’t matter anything like that. From your connections and you have your money, you are good.

Gasira highlights the distinction between racial and ethnic identities in the ways that this research study aimed to clarify. Her need to ethnically identify in her international hometown did not prepare her for the considerations made around racial
identity in the United States. Further, Gasira’s description of misunderstanding the power
dynamics related to race creates the needed contrast required for the argument made early
in this research study that the diversity among the African diaspora is recognized,
acknowledged, and responded to. At the same time, Daib developed through the racial
diversity of her American hometown and brought with her a level of tolerance for others
to her university.

I grew up in a very big place…all races, and I’m thankful for that because some
people grew up around one race and really don’t know how to be in a place where
there’s more than race. So, I know how to be around all races of people, but I
would still like to see people of my color.

Still, transitioning from the comforts of high school to the unfamiliarity of campus life
proved to be more difficult than anticipated. YBW student-athletes navigated the effects
of their campus’ climate in many facets. Campus climate refers to the experience of
individuals and groups on campus and the quality and extent of the interaction between
those various groups and individuals (Hurtado, 2008). From the online presence of
athletic teams to the face-to-face interactions, while visiting the campus, matters of
campus climate and race were prevalent.

Despite Buli’s confidence in the Black Student athlete population’s impact on
campus diversity statistics and overall healthy student-athlete experience, many of her
counterparts described experiences that demonstrate their experience as less than perfect.
She explained:

We don’t have a lot of Black students. I think we are the minority here. I haven’t
got any trouble. I think we’re being treated good, and I don’t know…I think most
of the Black people here are student-athletes. I think everybody is being treated
the same here in school.
Yet, beginning with an online review, Nia and Jilo were disappointed by the realization they faced when noticing the possible trends in diversity recruiting in athletics for athletes, coaches, and administrators based on the online media presence of the universities.

Well, I did look at a lot of schools’ demographics. That was one of the first things I looked at. Just to see if I would be super out of place or not. I looked at other teams that the college is popular for to see if there were any faces similar to mine, just so I wouldn’t be super out of place or feeling that way at least.

Jilo, Iyora, and Buli add a unique perspective of the reasons for placement and interactions with specific coaches and individual athletes in athletic spaces and the difficulty it poses for the student-athlete in terms of communication and interaction.

All of my teammates in high school were Black, and all of the coaches that recruited me were Black. I feel like White coaches; they’re kind of more for formalities. It wouldn’t have been as easy to communicate with them for myself really; it’s just kind of different.

Iyora continues the conversation by alluding to the hierarchy and structure within college athletics:

I felt like I had an upper hand I guess you could say compared to a White person that would be recruited for track and field. But the coaches that I actually interacted with were Black, and their head coaches were White. The head coach is the one that decides how much money you get.

Buli’s experience is different in that Jilo and Iyora describe the interactions where they were in a position of selecting; Buli illustrates the means of being selected. She frames the conversation about being selected and directed by someone with the power to navigate the systems connected to her opportunity on behalf of the University.

One day when I was doing workouts, one of the coaches saw me, and he said that he thought I was going to be a good runner. He helped me with the process of coming into the United States, and he organized it for a junior college.
However, there are instances when the perceived power imbalances are level, and the benefits are mutual. Gasaria describes the honor she feels to have such a relationship with her coach.

So, my coach is White. He came to my high school twice, I think, or three times. The first time I was in a ceremony. He came back another time, and we had practice, but it was raining in Jamaica; our field is a grass field. We couldn’t practice on the field, so we are at tennis court we were practicing on. He came, and he watched, and he helped which is really nice... As the recruiters coming in, we have coaches all over the world coming in to look at current athletes and trying to get them a scholarship. That was really good!

My coach as a person, he’s a father figure. Yeah, he is amazing; to me, sometimes honestly, when I look at my coach, I don’t see a White man. I see my coach. I don’t see a White man trying to coach me. I see my coach, and I see him as a father. Sometimes I even say you know what, you are Black. As a joke with him. He will laugh because he understands I’m not saying he is Black; I’m just saying you know how to relate to me, not because of a different background or a different color. You and I relate as if we are equals in a sense, there’s nothing dividing us, there is no color, there is nothing different.

The participants communicated their understanding of the power dynamics in college athletics, their role in it, and the role of their assistant or event coach within the system as well. In most instances, those positions of power and authority are made clear, and there are other instances when a bridge has been levied on the part of the coach to invite the athlete to be willing to be involved and a part of their process for progression.

Hali and Daib desired diversity, including that beyond race, and found herself having to consider the boundaries of her personal comfort zones during the recruiting process in order to do that, specifically on their recruiting visits. A comfort zone is a psychological state in which things feel familiar to a person, and they are at ease and in control of their environment, experiencing low levels of stress and anxiety (White, 2009) Hali talks about this and her recruiting visits:
One of the schools that I visited was definitely eye-opening for me, just because the culture was definitely something I’ve never experienced growing up. So it was just more of a getting to know my comfort zone and understanding that if I go there, on top of already being a minority, I might be a little more of a minority, just because there’s also different culture changes that I would have to adjust myself to.

Daib describes a similar sentiment:

I think one thing that did cross my mind being a Black student-athlete is when I did go on visits, I think…I know this sounds bad, but I really looked at the team, and I looked for Black teammates. I feel like as a Black woman; you want to have somebody relatable to you. I couldn’t see myself on an all-White team. Not saying there is anything wrong with that, it’s just as a Black woman, I would like to have Black teammates, somebody I can relate to in many aspects.

Both Hali and Daib needed to expand their comfort zones in order to progress comfortably in the recruiting process in ways that made them consider their racial minority status.

Even after the recruiting process, participants were confronted with issues of race as the newness of the collegiate experience waned. Nia is repeatedly surprised by her arrivals to the college town many times a year:

As soon as I get off the plane, I feel different. Everyone looks at me differently, like it’s a different feeling when I fly into home. People are looking at me like, “Oh, you’re Black. So, you must be here for some type of sport. Like you couldn’t just stumble upon this school and just voluntarily go here unless you are doing a sport.”

Outside of the places of travel, a personal, racial confrontation was made in the presumably safe athletic spaces where teams celebrate and bond around common goals. Instead, Adil experienced racial bullying in the very early days inside the team locker room:

One teammate said she had to go and do research on monkeys. The other said, why do that when you can just stay here and look at her. I don’t think she knew, or at least she didn’t know how that could be perceived. It was shocking because I had no idea that was possible for someone who was from here.
As the semesters continued on, Macaria mentioned the sadness she feels when she is without the Black community:

I wouldn’t say it’s a huge deal, but I wish I did have more contact with Black women on a regular basis. That’s why honestly, I thought about transferring and going to an HBCU, just for that reason. Just being around more people of my culture…There’s not that many Black people here too. It is a predominantly White School.

Participants shared consistently negative experiences related to their race and lack of representation in athletic spaces. These experiences compelled them to expand the tolerance of their comfort zone in order to persevere on a daily basis, an additional barrier that delivers a need for reorientation to their new environments.

One of the tools thought to be required to navigate the varying campus climate successfully was that of the Black Student Union or similar organization. The Black Student Union (BSU) is a student-based organization focused on the cultural, social, and academic needs of Black students attending the college or university. It seeks to build cultural and community bridges in the general context of the academic environment. Nia described the feelings of acceptance and joy when she had a mutually supportive relationship with her Black Student Union in high school:

Me and all my Black Student Union friends, we still keep in touch. At my high school, it wasn’t I wanted to join the Black Student Union because I needed it. It was like, “All my friends are doing it. So, I’m going to do it. My high school was really diverse.”

Siyasa and Hali add that BSU as a collegiate organization offers not only the traditions of Black cultural and community exchange but also the depth and breadth of Black identity. The availability of this organization offered what they were hoping for when choosing
her University. Hali described the events that united the Black students to be welcome back and milestone events like final exams where pretty much, most of the Black students definitely meet there, and they provide food and everything. You just get to know everybody that you’ve met before or haven’t met yet, and we all just get to know each other and eat food and play music.

Siyasa explains how she experiences and uses her BSU:

I want to be known as being a Black girl everybody knows. I don’t want to be the same as everybody else because everybody is looking for what makes you unique… I went to the Black student union, and that was cool because I got a collection of people that I could hang out with outside of my team or outside of people from other racial backgrounds.

Historically, the BSU has played the role of bringing Black students and faculty together to celebrate and combat college campuses when the climate there calls for it. Clearly, the relevance of the organization remains based on the benefits that Nia, Siyasa, and Hali shared.

**Acceptance through communication.** In keeping with the role of the Black Student Organization at her school, Jilo advances the conversation about their role towards the ways that communication works within them. After becoming available to be more involved in the BSU, Jilo found acceptance and connection:

There’s the Black Student Organization. We always talk about how we can make the campus more diverse because we definitely feel like the ratio of minorities to the majority is not good…there is literally a group chat for all the Black people here.

At the surface, social media and continually advancing technology and applications creates a safe space for communicating, planning, and achieving some level of validation. Daib described the effectiveness of social media communication among marginalized populations, including YBW student-athletes:
We formed our own group. We have a big group chat, basically every Black person on campus that wants to join. We just basically have our own thing, which I really like that. So, if we have an event going on, we will put it in the group chat. It was just a big meeting place for all the Black people. Just like a support group and stuff like that.

At a deeper level, Iyora recognized the greater significance of this type of safety in communication as it relates to the methods of silencing marginalized groups like hers.

When describing hate-related actions on her campus, she had this to say:

We have to watch what we say in most cases because the school doesn’t want to feel disrespected by us, the sport. While the people at the school are disrespecting us as well. That influenced how I participate in the sport because knowing that I’m performing to make the school money. There are a bunch of Black football players that are playing to make the school money. Basketball girls and boys, they’re playing for the school, but are Black. It just felt like we had no representation because we have all these people her disrespecting us, but we still have to do what we have to do.

Using social media to remain in communication with a shared community appears to be vital during times of despair to confidently express concern without judgment.

Textural-Structural Description

The final step of the phenomenological process requires integrations of the textural and structural descriptions to provide a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This section will provide the essence of YBW recruited to participate in college athletics. Since phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2018), the essence will be offered in the same manner for four reasons. First, each sentence is an uncomplicated form of phenomenological description, articulated in everyday conversation. The subject term “I” indicates the first-person structure of the experience since the intentionality proceeds from the subject, and the verb indicates the type of intentional activity described (Smith, 2018). Second, narration allows participants
to express powerful and suppressed emotions and unburden themselves of these feelings and thereby liberate energy for problem-solving (Washington & Moxley, 2008). Third, the story often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience (Bochner, 2012). Finally, Accurate portrayals of the lived experience, which incorporate both plight and efficacy, can illuminate ways of understanding that other forms of inquiry cannot (Washington & Moxley, 2008).

The Essence of Young Black Women Athletes Recruited to College Athletics

The experience of being recruited to college athletics as a YBW was the act of enlisting my womanhood, blackness, and athleticism. It requires me to trust new people who typically were White men. I hoped he would point me towards greatness. My expectations to be dismissed, overlooked, and attacked collided, and still do, in a manner that created avenues for me to hold back. This collision allows me to justify my hesitation so that I can maintain my silence. Critical is the only way to be since it is a system that regularly and consistently expresses or analyzes my merits and faults. The recruiting process taught me that little progress is surprisingly sufficient. I also learned that my expectations for greatness were ambitious, and they would be satisfied with slight improvement instead. No key, recipe, or formula exists for trying to plan my future, only guidelines if I knew where to find them. I always knew I was expected to leave memorable impressions through unforgettable performances. I understood it would not be the same for institutions or systems I visited. I keep my eyes open and travel in only a forward direction.

Before Recruiting. I submitted to my known issues of social class and have had experiences that have introduced me precisely to what that means, although my
understanding of it may be absent at times. Communities of at least some racial diversity supported me since shades of Black and Browns always feel comfortable when they are around, and I love being there. I maneuver easily between the affluent places and the poor places and the ghettos too, all of these places have been roots for me. I learned early on about the detriment of an idle mind and stayed sharp in my academics also, by gaining access to the best schools. We chose those we could afford, flexible, and willing to help. This strategy inevitably allows me to build friendships and rivalries with my peers in and out of school.

   My mother serves as the bridge connecting my present and my destiny. She is motivating, encouraging, independent, and has always accelerated me to higher levels. At least one of my parents has experienced the benefits, disappointments, and ability to leverage sports, and it influences how I participate. People make a mistake in believing that excelling in a competition is a natural derivative of my parent's genetics. I have made sacrifices and forfeited an abundant social life. I chose my sport and the demands that come with it. While I was learning how to read, I was learning how to run, doing sports for fun while my parents paid for me to play. It is a competitive environment, and competition is a part of my identity. Regardless of the makeup of my team, I have excelled and accepted the label of exceptional, above all others. In time, perhaps around middle school, parental pressure and organization politics begin to replace fun with funds, and the framework of a business mindset was paramount. Commitment teeters between a sincere pursuit of sports excellence and an urgent need to capture society's meaning of success. Still, I embraced the role of a specialist in my sport. I worked on an annual calendar. I prepared early in the morning, late into the evening, and utilized
weekend hours. I expectantly prepared for college recruiting with a steady faith that I would earn an athletic scholarship.

**During Recruiting.** During recruiting, marketing my abilities with a social media post, an improvement on a ranking list, or entry confirmation in a significant competition solicits college coaches and signals my place in their recruiting pipeline. Any coach-initiated correspondence in response to my efforts creates an immediate willingness to improve, sense of validation, interest, and demonstration of their favor upon me. It is impressive and beautiful to feel care. I wanted to celebrate because, finally, someone would notice me.

Coaches came to visit my school and my home and played games of "show and tell." In other words, they showed me my future draped in school colors and logos, and images of newly renovated athletic facilities. Conversations with them about money were generally favorable and were followed up with talk about how they were different from the last call I received and the next caller to get through. I despised the responsibility to refuse an offer; it created anxiety and discomfort, and I hesitated to both answer and hang-up when the phone calls continued. Some coaches seem bogus, and others I hoped would remain ingenuous. I connected with several of them, and these relationships gave me good feelings. It is one of the times in life where I had power, yet I did not recognize it this way since it offered me emotions of surprise and anticipation.

Being a woman of color minimizes my options when I am unconsciously asked to explain my place in the different spaces that I do exist. When researching and evaluating colleges and universities, religion, sexuality, nationality, culture, and standards of beauty become variables weighted against one another for optimal outcomes, it is nerve-
wracking. It feels like no one resembles how I see myself, not a coach, not an administrator, and barely the team. I accept that I need to get out of the comfort zone I constructed, built by easily recognizable minority limitations. There are not a lot of Black faces here, mostly the student-athletes, but sometimes Black faces show up in the unlikeliest of scenes. Every time I arrive here, I have feelings of difference and isolation, but I am not alone. I felt I needed to ask questions and talk to those with more experience than myself. I permitted myself to learn about the traps and gutters and how to determine if this is still the right place for me. Her authentic reflection of the difficulties created methods for my ability to cope and overcome. She extends me peace of mind since she survived, and it made me glad I put my nerves aside.

The expiration date of recruiting visits turned days into hours when he expected my commitment, and the potential to do so confidently is limited. The recruiting process is extremely stressful, with the pressure to sign somewhere, anywhere, is incredibly immense. Signing day is the day they say you sign your life away. They meant I would give up control, but they did not understand that I gained the opportunity I needed. I made a commitment with my words and my signature on a proverbial dotted line to step into the next chapter of my life. It is cool and scary at the same time. I think to myself, "Wow, they are going to offer me money. I'm going to college. I'm going to be a collegiate athlete. Recruiting is nerve-wracking. I had expectations to regain the control I felt was lost, and my nerves reminded me constantly that I didn't know what was coming next. Would it be love or hate? Still, I felt accomplished. It was terrific; another journey was ahead.
After Recruiting. After recruiting, I was in my little bubble left to celebrate successes and manage struggles. Coming into college, I was young and oblivious. I went through some rough patches feeling out of place, and upon arrival, they told me about gender, equality, and LGBT groups that were mostly white. There are not a lot of people like me here, and the other Black students are almost impossible to find. By the end of the first term, I realized I need at least one Black friend, someone to talk to about everything when my teammates don't understand.

My perception of people quickly changed when they treated me differently. It was shocking when I found out that someone can treat me this way coming from where we are. I go out and smile anyway for the people who have accepted my sadness. They fuel it with disrespect, shunned by the average students, and I continue to feel conflicted about watching what I say. It influences how I participate in the game today. I have no representation or see anyone to aspire to replace daily. Still, we do what we have to do. I feel excluded, isolated, and unwelcome. It is a weird feeling; I never get used to it. I slowly recognized that doors open to include my participation and then keep me excluded from safe spaces. The disrespect and hate from my classmates force me to create counter spaces with my peers. Through it all, putting on my school gear remains impressive, I feel pride and accomplishment, and it keeps me from regretting my choice to come here.

I learned that coaches change too from the time you first meet, and I wonder why it seems as though they say less than complete truths. Contemplating if they even care most of the time, and whether catering to our emotions is a big deal. They can be intimidating and sometimes rude. I did not expect that my first coach would be gone already. I can aspire again to relate to their replacement as if we are equals in a sense,
nothing dividing us, no color, no nothing different. I would like to have them accept me like a daughter and give me consent to respect them as a father.

I break school records, continue to get better, but it has been a hard transition, keeping up with practice and school. Traveling from Wednesday to Sunday isn't easy. My friends and professors don't see me meaning I am likely to struggle more with academics than with sports. I have had to bounce back at least once, probably twice, and needed to refocus and remember my reasons for signing up. I don't have time or encouragement to join a sorority or student organization. My coaches convinced me that the only relevant concern above athletics is academics. I wondered about the requirements to be an involved high school student concerned with the community. I asked why it loses priority after gaining admission into college. Instead, they asked me to focus more and not believe that my happiness tied to any of it.

I am more likely than others to experience changes with my mental health. Sometimes I have doubts about whether I am good enough if I am an imposter. It affects the way I perform. Even though everyone is cheering, I experience some degree of burn out, try to regain motivation that often threatens to fade. I get a lot of things easily handed to me. I know I have to work a little harder to get what I want. Before it is all over, I find comfort in continuing to believe in myself, putting in work, and knowing that I am capable of finishing. After some time away from school, I cleared my mind. I am ready to begin again. I remember that I am not just doing this for myself anymore. I know I can do this, and I have a purpose.

Today, my standard is nothing less than exceptional. In response to the girls who have dreams of getting where I have made it to, I believe and tell them a few things.
Mental health is essential, feeling included is important, giving back is necessary, and you are worth it. Everything you believe in; work hard for it. You are going to achieve it. You have power, and you have a voice, and grace to understand. You know there is always a way to make a difference demonstrated in your actions when you improve on the trivial things. Despite the compartments with which I manage my identity, I learn that the people and places attempt to make me aware of whom they want me to be. Until you know who I am and whose I want to be.

**Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the lived experiences of ten Black collegiate women athletes attending NCAA Division I-FBS colleges and universities. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews and written narratives that captured their emotions before, during and after the recruiting process as it relates to their gender, social and racial identities and suggests that this subset of the student population is subject to both the battles of their marginalized identities but also the ways that they manifest on various levels. Specifically, at the macro-level systemic issues related to their gender identity are greatest regarding the ways in which development is lost when a community is absent and slightly regained through the joy found in navigating hair politics and statement-making. The meso level revealed social identity issues related to the process and recognized the juxtaposition of optimistic preparation and disappointing experiences had by the Black collegiate women athletes. Finally, at the micro-level, racial identity was examined for the group, and these student-athletes were reminded of their previous submissions to social class, surprised by the campus climate, and found acceptance through the methods of communication utilized by their Black peers.
Black collegiate women athletes experience a range of emotions, both positive and negative, related to their multiple identities. These real emotions help to identify areas of concern and opportunity for administration and coaches and, more importantly, give Black collegiate athletes permission to investigate and understand for themselves the origins and meanings and outcomes of the emotions. The women who participated in this study recognize that they continuously negotiate or manage their multiple and marginalized personal identities in their pursuit of sport and education.

Chapter five provides a discussion of these findings and considers the role of intersectionality and organizational theory with them. Also, it demonstrates how useful the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities is in providing the framework for probing, sensing, and responding to these significant issues and themes as a way to advance directly related programming and policies. This discussion assists in understanding the real essence of YBW student-athletes looking to transition into Black collegiate women athletes and the decision-making process, impacted by their gender, social and racial identities that are considered in order to do so. Finally, the chapter upholds the critical nature of this study by considering the relationship of the findings to that of the social and historical literature discussed in this study and lists implications for policy and practice as well as recommendations for future research and a method for implementing them. It concludes by listing the limitations associated with this research study.
Chapter V.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In order to successfully develop, YBW student-athletes make complex decisions in preparing for and embarking on the NCAA recruiting process as a means of gaining access to higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making processes and experiences of ten YBW student-athletes recruited to compete in intercollegiate athletics at NCAA Division I-FBS colleges and universities. When considering the historical and social barriers specifically related to their social constructs of race and gender, and social identity of student-athlete, it is necessary to better understand how the recruiting process is experienced, account for the systems and organizations in which it occurs, and contemplate the impact of historical and societal ideals, norms and expectations on them. As a result, a qualitative phenomenological method of inquiry was utilized to critically examine and update the lived experiences of YBW student-athletes transitioning into BC women athletes in a changing society as a group. Second, this study describes the challenges experienced in the recruitment process and retention of “othered” women in organizations. Finally, this study provides a tool to examine and understand systemic diversity and inclusion efforts for all people in a way that meaningfully considers their combination of multiple marginalized identities.

In this chapter, I first integrate the discussion of prior literature and the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities (CDMII). I include conclusions that address the research questions and relates the research findings to that of the larger body of literature discussed in chapter two by providing confirming and contradicting data related to the findings. This allows for the understanding of the essence of YBW
student-athletes and BC women athletes. Second, implications for practice, policy, and theory are presented for business leaders, coaches, communities, educators, governing bodies, professional organizations, and researchers, based on the research findings. Third, recommendations for further research are offered to multi-disciplinary scholars and policymakers grounded in the study’s central problem, collected data, and specific findings. This is followed by my acknowledgment of the limitations associated with this study. Finally, I conclude this study by addressing its relationship to the basic ideas of leadership in athletics, specifically the derivatives of power and its use, control and disposing of multiple resources, initiatives in social interpretation, sense-making and shaping of meaning and the place of BC women in the context of social control options like higher education and sport.

**Relationship of the Findings to Literature and the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities**

Connecting the findings of this research to the societal and historically related literature and circumstances impacting it is best done through the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities (CDMII). The CDMII is this research’s conceptual framework that considers society’s and history’s concurrent influence on the integration of the multiple identities of individuals who face complex problems. I used a PROBE-SENSE-RESPOND approach to develop resolutions that mobilize their complex problems to a lesser intensity that is more complicated in nature and solvable with time, expertise, and attention (Snowden, 1999). To help determine the gap in the literature that this research study fills, I selected a combination of 40 scholarly articles and books published in the last 20 years used throughout the literature review in chapter two. These sources present research from a diverse group of academic disciplines that are related to
the themes that emerged in chapter four, and directly or indirectly center on Black girls and women. Since this research uses a multi-level research approach, this section will present the relationship between the findings and previous literature in descending level order.

**Macro-Level Themes Within the CDMII and Literature Connections**

**Macro-level themes within the CDMII.** At the macro-level, two main themes emerged: disadvantaged development remorse and joy in hair expression. When preparing to use the CDMII (Figure 5.1) to understand these themes better, it is necessary to determine organizational, societal, and historical factors related to higher education responsible for creating the complex issues at their intersection. At this level, the complexities of the community are at the center of understanding positive and holistic development, happiness within self and the organization, and the basic human need for connectedness and membership. Using the PROBE-SENSE-RESPOND method requires consideration of the impacts on the community; therefore, the PROBE step will be continued by finding the connections between the findings of this research and the current literature.
Disadvantaged development remorse. Disadvantaged development remorse focuses on the benefits of community in the overall development of individuals, reinforced by the subthemes: sadness from community abandonment and avoiding solitude through sororities. The findings associated with the theme are consistent with the literature associated with development. For example, Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman (2016) found that a sense of community in the broader academic setting was integral to the success of Black collegiate women at PWI’s. More recently, Porter (2017) advanced a model of development for Black undergraduate women by prioritizing and centering their holistic identity development. This research study recognized this need and focused on social, academic, and athletic identity development. Chapter two presents evidence to support the conflicts associated with managing them simultaneously. Within sport and academic settings before and during college, Black girls and women face disadvantages when it comes to their opportunities to develop more so than their ability to develop. Remorse is the combination of disgust and sadness according to Plutchik (2003) and the literature used to support this research describes how this disdain occurs.
through isolation, power struggles with perceived authority, and a constant need to
combat stereotypes and their impact on her ability to articulate racial identity through
self-awareness, and usage of self-identifying terminology and affirming personal
definitions (Horton & Mack, 2000; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Browne-Huntt,
2010; Porter & Dean, 2015).

Sadness from community abandonment. The sadness from the community
abandonment theme describes the feeling and fear of an absent community during the
complete recruiting process. Leaving the places where these students prepared for college
meant leaving some comfortable levels of various forms of diversity. Embarking on the
PWI campus proved to be difficult for a majority of the student-athletes. The qualitative
data from this research study complements the work of DeCuir-Gunby (2009), and
Lewis, Cogburn, and Williams (2015), who investigated the use of comprehensive
assessments to measure experiences of discrimination related to racial identity. DeCuir-
Gunby (2009) detailed the categorized survey instruments used to each measure
respective operationalizations of the construct of Black Racial Identity (BRI).
Developmental measures view BRI as a developmental process that begins early in
adolescence and continues throughout the lifetime. The nationalistic/worldview category
attempts to measure how African Americans view themselves, their interactions with
others, and their acceptance of various cultural values. Reactions to racism measures take
an external focus to learn how individuals are perceived and treated by others. Finally,
the multidimensional measures address the impact of socialization in a European
influenced society has on the beliefs, practices, and actions of African Americans.
DeCuir-Gunby (2009) found that these various measures of racial identity are relevant in

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a school context specifically related to White educator influences, peer relationships, and academic success. The findings from this research study provide the qualitative description of these experiences in the collegiate setting. Participants expressed their desires for the Black community in general and the company of Black women specifically as a means of developing holistically. Although DeCuir-Gunby’s (2009) work focused on adolescents, their findings related to White educator influences potentially influence the uncomfortable interactions with college recruiting coaches, administrators, and faculty members on campus.

Similarly, Lewis, Cogburn, and Williams (2015) described the importance of assessing psycho-social stressors related to social disadvantage. They explained that research should seek to understand, measure, and analyze both discriminatory stressors comprehensively and other psycho-social stressors related to social disadvantage in the context of broader societal forces. They recognized the Chicago Community Adult Health Study as a means of doing so because it demonstrated how to observe a graded association between the number of stressors and poor self-reported health outcomes related to stress in domains that reflect vital areas in which people operate (e.g., home, job, neighborhood) and major roles/statuses they assume, including acute life events, work stressors, financial stress, life discrimination, work discrimination, relationship stress, childhood adversity, and neighborhood stress (Sternthal et al., 2011). Participants in this research study were able to articulate their emotions associated with this level of disadvantaged development. The perception is that greater levels of social advantage exist based on their social identity as student-athletes. Their narratives describe an
alternate reality and tend to confirm Lewis, Cogburn, and Williams's (2015) concerns of the effects of diverse origins and forms of stressors.

More recently, Williams (2018) investigated the ways that these studies and others confirmed that discrimination resulting from gendered racism results in measures of adverse changes to overall mental health. These measures are positively associated with depression and anxiety symptoms and psychological distress. Chapter two detailed the prevalence of mental health concerns related to BC women as a result of these types of microaggression encounters and the outcomes of depression associated with it. Participants described the texture of these experiences and their time trying to understand and recover from the effects. Williams (2018) emphasized that these outcomes are evident in international contexts as well and fitting for the findings related to the international student-like those who contributed — understanding these findings that illuminate experiences of exclusion that trigger feelings of being scrutinized, overlooked, misunderstood and disrespected. Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn (2012) described the impact of advancing the student-athlete services providings on college campuses. Intentionality related to services provided and service providers is essential to working to combat the elevating concerns of all student-athletes and primarily related to this research, BC women athletes.

Avoiding solitude through sorority membership. Avoiding solitude through sororities was the third theme at the macro level. Many of the participants described their initial interest in joining one of the Black sororities organized on their campus as a means of avoiding the solitude they felt as a result of their athletic commitment. Bartman (2015) explored issues impacting college graduation rates of African American women and
suggested sororities as one means of interrupting this issue. Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) add that these student-led organizations provide some level of social capital for its members.

While the participants in this research study were not members of Greek organizations, their experiences allude to the early process of finding Black others, which Borr (2018) calls Black homophily. Borr (2018) explained that students “exert significant effort when negotiating place and time to find Black relationships and often sacrifice cross-race relationships in the process” (p. 324). In regards to the place, finding Black peers requires physical relocation. Borr (2018) mentioned choosing residence halls occupied by at least 50% of Black students and minority cultural centers as examples of managing a place for students. However, the challenge for managing place remains for student-athletes in ways similar to Nia’s experience when she recognized that she was in need of a Black friend. She described her dorm being mostly athletes and still feeling isolated. Joining clubs and organizations or participating in activities like the collegiate athletic teams on campus requires time. Time is limited for student-athletes when they have eight hours of allowable team-related activities per week, out of season, and up to 20 hours of team-related activities during the competitive seasons.

Further, for the participants in this study, the allure of membership was said to be desired, not for social capital, as Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) suggest, but for a more primal reason of connectedness when they felt lost. Collectively, the literature and research findings provide a point of which consideration is given to how a student-athlete chooses how to become connected and develop their identity on campus. The process towards connections that an individual select manifests in their social status achieved
from having obtained and maintained the requirements for membership, expected external demonstration of commitment and belonging, and the internal value members assigned to the presence of their group on campus.

*Valuing Black maternal experiences in supporting Black athletes.* Lastly, the sub-theme of Black Maternal Experiences in Supporting Black Athletes emerged under the disadvantaged development remorse theme. As it is understood for the findings of this research, these maternal experiences include some shared lived experiences concerning the diversity within the group membership, similar to what Jones and Day (2017) describe. A part of these shared experiences are the methods of coping these women choose to recover from the effects of discrimination they also face. Murray et al. (2001) found that parental exposure to discrimination can adversely affect their children, and mothers’ reports of racial discrimination were associated with reduced maternal mental health, which adversely affected the children’s behavior and parenting satisfaction. In this study, participants often mentioned the roles their mothers or grandmothers played by providing an empathetic response to the pressure of performing, and their capacity to uplift, care for, and support the people who made up their families, teams, and communities. This label of strength reaffirms the work of Donovan (2011) about stereotypes, specifically those associated with the matriarch/Sapphire image. Still, their intentional inclusion in these spaces means providing familiar representation in athletic spaces for Black and women students and Black women students specifically.

*Hair expression joy.* The second central theme at the Macro-Level was that of Joy in Hair Expression. Joy in Hair Expression speaks to the politics surrounding the particular and central standard of beauty and the intentional imagery that the student-
athlete participants considered concerning their competition and performance and the
media that results from it all. Muhammad and McArthur (2015) examined the
interpretations of media representations such as these and found that among other things,
Black girlhood is perceived as being judged by their hair. This judgment continues
throughout the adolescent years as Seaton and Tyson (2018) point out in their mixed-
methods study. When it comes to hair, they revealed social disadvantages for YBW (aged
11-19) based on their reporting of inappropriate comments and unwelcome hair touching.
The findings from this research continue the conversation in the direction that works to
understand the relationship between Black women athletes and hair expression since
women athletes in general far too often are measured against society's beauty ideals.

Understanding the standards of beauty for Black women means understanding
their courage to face the world and the scrutiny that comes along with it. Athletes tend to
have elevated and sometimes global platforms compared to others in society. Showing up
on those platforms requires athletic preparation and courage, among other things. The use
of social media platforms by young Black adults was described in chapter two. Either of
the available platforms can be a place of safety that also doubles as a space for
cyberbullying and abuse for things disliked and misunderstood. Supporting hair
expression and recognizing an internal standard of beauty helps to alleviate the backlash
that results from disappointment from viewers. At the same time, as I am preparing this
draft of the research study, a Push for Player Pay law is gaining national attention since
the state of California enacted the law to allow college athletes to sign endorsement deals,
and profit from their status and likeness beginning in 2023 (Anderson, 2019). Although
this matter has not been settled with the NCAA, it does magnify the role of social media
and marketing and the ability to generate income based on an individual’s presence and
“followers” on those platforms. The Push for Player Pay is likely to have origins for the
male-dominated sports of football and basketball but has implications for women athletes
and the brands that they support. The social image has already shaped the way we
choose content, but expanding on Jilo’s point of her understanding that college sports are
simply a business, creates room for this theme to grow leverage in the ways in which
Black women athletes participate.

At the macro-level, the CDMII reflects the weight of history and pressure of
society on community within higher education athletic organizations and the
communities that house them. Based on the research findings and their place among the
scholarship on the topic, capturing the sense of the community as it relates to Black
collegiate women athletes is artificial and temporary. The essential elements of
community are locality (occupying a territorial area), sentiments (social coherence which
people inculcate within themselves), wider ends (sharing of their interests), group of
people (the totality of individuals with similar life conditions), common life (no
inequality in community), particular name (a means of being defined), and permanence
(individual permanence within the community) (Farooq, 2011). Black collegiate women
athletes in this study reported that they are without the real sense of community despite
their contracted affiliation to the organization and team. Besides locality and being
among a group, these women feel that their need for connection has been overlooked and
minimized despite their ability to remain resilient in the pursuit of higher education.
Responding to these concerns is beyond the scope of this research but are recommended
as areas to be considered for future research later in this chapter.
Meso-Level Themes Within the CDMII and Literature Connections

**Meso-Level Themes within the CDMII.** At the meso-level, two primary themes emerged related to the process centered research approach and social identities of the participants. Early in the recruiting process, optimistic preparation was reinforced by the subthemes of strategies within education systems to gain access to sport participation and the expectations of sport specialization and the recruiting process. Meanwhile, disappointing experiences were apparent after beginning the collegiate athletic process in the areas of day-to-day athlete considerations, dysfunctional athletic departments and money, and the collegiate athletic experience. The CDMII featuring these horizons is found in Figure 5.2. To better understand these horizons, organizational, societal, and historical factors related to college athletics responsible for creating the complex issues at their intersection are presented.

![Figure 5.2: Meso-Level Themes within CDMII](image)

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Optimistic preparation. Optimistic preparation is made up of the joy and anticipation associated with approaching the recruiting process and then embarking on a collegiate experience for YBW student-athletes. This level of enthusiasm around personal expectations to attend college presumably began as early as middle school and ordered the steps and strategies used to accomplish this goal for participants in this research. Ricks (2014) addressed the neglect that national education policies like Race to the Top, My Brother’s Keeper, and Every Student Succeeds Act focuses on race and gender, but ignores the unique positioning in which Black girls live and learn. Participants in this research and their families found a way to overcome the effects of these policies by embracing the factors identified by Ford (2013), which focused on high achieving students and the pursuits of high academic achievement of culturally diverse students. The factors deemed relevant to their success and which readied them for these opportunities similar to those presented to the participants in this research were a) communication, b) cultural awareness, c) motivation, and d) teaching and learning supports, all of which were identified in some way by the participants in their experiences. For example, Iyora described how her lack of readiness to communicate created discomfort in rejecting offers from recruiting coaches. She admitted that she had not been prepared to communicate with authoritative figures in this manner. Hali reflected on how her cultural awareness was heightened as she engaged with those different than what she was most familiar with. All of the participants were motivated by both athletic and academic pursuits as a means to accomplishing their personal goals. Lastly, several examples emerged in the research findings that described the benefits of supportive teaching and learning environments and the pitfalls that occur when they do...
not exist. These supportive networks were primarily found in the education systems prior to college. Many of the participants described how the flexibility and their school's willingness to help them pursue both academics and athletics was crucial to their success. Macaria had a different experience and felt academically underprepared ahead of college and has faced some difficult times adjusting since arriving on campus. Ford’s (2013) model speaks directly to the experiences of those preparing for the recruiting process.

Strategizing within education systems to gain access to sport participation.

Strategizing within education systems to gain access to sport participation is the first subtheme found in this research study. The literature review used to support this research study did not focus on strategies used within K-12 education systems to gain access to sport participation, only the conditions, and circumstances surrounding sport participation at designated schools within specific communities. Glennie and Stearns (2012) used the structural resources of racial competition theories to examine the interactions among race, gender, and school environment to determine whether individual and school-level factors account for gender-specific racial gaps in sport participation. Since this issue surfaced in the findings of this research when Daib discussed how her private club teammates and family agreed to transfer to an out of district middle school in expectation of “building a really good high school team,” it is essential to position them among the current research available.

The concept of transferring between institutions in a college setting is mentioned within this research and the policies set forth by the NCAA committee that recently loosened the restrictions minimizing student’s ability to easily move between teams and institutions for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, there has been limited scholarly
research done on the topic. However, in the contemporary news setting, articles are often printed in support of the district and state-level athletic programs that detail legislation updating the local athletic transfer policy rules. One recent example can be found in the newly passed transfer rule approved by the Colorado High School Athletic Association (CHSAA) legislative council in 2018. The updated rule supports educationally based athletics and activities for student participants who are encouraged to take advantage of schools of choice and opportunities to transfer based on bona fide family move and hardships (Mohrmann, 2018).

Strategizing within education systems for access to sport participation is important, although not required, for YBW student-athletes who have desires to continue their participation at the collegiate level. At the meso-level, it is a matter of student-athlete identity and finding support and resources to help develop that role. However, there are also suggestions of school district disparities in terms of human and financial resources that make the elevating levels of play and exposure for opportunities at recruiting easier. Further, there are relationships that exist between colleges and high schools and the coaches that occupy these leadership roles that make them desirable for a person who has goals of earning a scholarship and being recruited for college athletics.

Sports specialization and recruiting. The relationship between sport specialization and recruiting is the second subtheme related to optimistic preparation. Sport specialization is intense, year-round training in a single sport with the exclusion of other sports (Jayanthi et al., 2013). The debate on when to specialize in sport is reflective of the sport of choice, the NCAA recruiting calendar associated with it, and the individual desires of becoming a collegiate student-athlete. Understanding how to elevate an
athlete’s level of play to attract college scholarship offers while mentally and physically preparing them for continued performance gains at the collegiate level is not a skill easily mastered at the grassroots and high school community levels. The participants in this research study illustrated the commitment required to choose a specialization in a sport when it comes to creating opportunities to gain access to higher education institutions. Navigating the public and private education systems appears to be a secondary consideration when exploring the methods of sport specialization.

The participants in this research study described a need and desire to focus entirely on their sport of choice at differing times and referenced the specific sports using their age and ability as indicators of when to do so. For example, Hali mentioned beginning gymnastics at the age of three, which is in line with USA Gymnastics recommendation of beginning the sport, and Iyora chose track and field over splitting her training time with volleyball upon entering her junior year in high school (McCarthy, 2003). Balyi, Way, and Higgs (2018) describe an athlete-centered stage-to-stage approach that gives athletes of all ages the greatest opportunity to reach their highest sports performance potential. This philosophy is used to scale the pace of athletic identity in this research study and proved to be consistent with the recommendations and findings presented by the authors.

A significant amount of research surrounding college recruiting is related to the overall admissions process for the greater student body. This research extends these efforts by confirming Sellingo’s (2018) claims about generation Z. Sellingo found that the current generation of students consider factors differently than their predecessors in the ways that they signal their interest to recruiters, consider the academic reputation,
value social and extra-curricular activities, and involve their parents. Challenges recruiting Black women are evident in many industries and for a variety of purposes. Yancey, Ortega, and Kumanyika (2006) agree that the identification of targeted participants, community involvement, nature, the timing of contact with the prospect, incentives, logistical issues, and cultural adaptations successfully improve recruiting barriers. When these factors are adhered to or overlooked, emotions surface for the recruits, as was indicated in the findings. For example, Gasaria described her coach as “down to earth” and valued his willingness to assist with an athletics practice, giving her feelings of acceptance. In another instance, Iyora was disgusted when she was faced with the responsibility of rejecting the incentives offered by one state university. Finally, when thinking about athletic recruiting, the focus tends to be on male, revenue-generating sports like football and basketball. For example, Harris (2018) presents the use of a two-sided matching model for recruiters to use in selecting the perfect candidates by focusing on football as the subject sport. The tool is valuable and could be adapted for different sports and athlete populations.

**Disappointing experiences.** Compared to other themes in this research’s findings, scholarship produced on the disappointing experiences of Black women and college campuses is visited frequently. The broad topic remains relevant despite the numerous research efforts made to detail the implications of these continued experiences. Methods of calls to action generated from both quantitative and qualitative studies have been devised to alleviate the impact that these climates have on Black women. For instance, Lewis and Neville (2015) developed the gendered racial microaggressions scale (GRMS) to measure these experiences. Twenty years ago, Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000)
examined distinct types of racial microaggressions present in higher education academic and social spaces. Harper and Hurtado (2007) synthesized fifteen years of published research on campus racial climate and identified several racial and discriminatory natured themes prevalent on PWI colleges and universities.

Athletic spaces are no different when it comes to microaggressions, as was detailed in the participant's textural descriptions. For instance, Gasira talked about the rate at which she speaks, coupled with her accent that kept her from speaking unnecessarily on campus because of the confusion it caused the listener. Adil reflected on the overt racism she noticed in the locker room with her teammates and the blatant racial comments aimed at her. Finally, several of the participants alluded to the marginalization of Black women in their respective athletic departments when discussing their lack of ability to develop with the help of Black women due to their absence in those spaces. Jordan (2010) explored these microaggressions and found eight related themes that included ascription of intelligence/status, and assumed universality. Assumed universality is the assumption that that people racially categorized as Black share no differences among them. Yet, there were socioeconomic and ethnic differences among the Black women participants in this study. Assumed universality was most prevalent in the findings related to the experiences of the international student-athletes. Although they did share some similarities throughout the recruiting process, Siyasa’s understanding of racism in America was not well recognized, and unfamiliar based on her experiences at home, and Buli’s overall means of recruiting were quite different when it comes to selection and exposure.
Day-to-day considerations. Day-to-day considerations are the first sub-theme used to describe the disappointing experiences had by BC women on college campuses. Commodore et al. (2018) thoroughly delineate the critical issues associated with the collegiate experience for Black women students. Their work covers the time before, during, and after the collegiate experience and the critical issues related to them during those time include a) socially constructed homogeneity, b) isolation on the college campus, c) lack of quality mentoring, d) psychological stressors, e) forgotten institutions, and f) financing higher education all of which they emphasize could be transformed into opportunities. The findings in chapter four confirm these issues and extend the conversation to include athletes specifically, and their strategies to combat them. For example, Iyora searched for LGBTQ and gender equity groups on campus but was discouraged because of the lack of diversity in them while Jilo mentioned her worry about renewing her scholarship every year to finance her education through her scholarship despite her discomfort with her event coach. Foster (2003) researched the time commitment and loss of flexibility of BC women athletes’ participation in an elite collegiate athletic program similar to this study. The author showed how programs maximize their athletic and academic potential through surveillance, control, and discipline. Specifically, collegiate athletic programs exercise the surveillance of a population through security and scanning of identification for entry and exit of athletic designated buildings to account for observation and accountability. In that study, some participants expressed a belief of value in that level of structure and credited it in some ways for the progress they had made. The concept of the structure was not explicitly mentioned by the participants in this research study in relation to making progress.
towards their degree, only the time, measured by hours in the day, weekends out of the year, and shortened vacations. There are higher levels of oversight and structure for student-athletes compared to their campus peers. The day-to-day considerations they evaluate externally also reflects how they feel internally when they are experiencing the moment and planning for the future.

*Dysfunctional athletic communities.* Dysfunctional athletic communities is the second sub-theme used to describe disappointing experiences. Dysfunctional communities lack domain, friendly relationships, and knowledge sharing (Mládková, 2015). The dysfunction that some participants confronted was with building relationships and their White teammates. They described those interactions as bringing about sadness and surprise. For instance, Macaria wondered how truthful coaches were to other recruited athletes when she described the process as glamorized. Nia’s textural description details her experience with this type of dysfunction that resulted in episodes of bullying and depression. Fordham (2016) draws on narrative findings to explicitly describe the widespread and disguised violence between girls of different races in schools prior to beginning on college campuses. This violence characterized by aggression, bullying, and competition is present at both secondary and post-secondary levels for student-athletes according to Mishna, Kerr, McInroy, and McPherson (2019) and confirms and extends the conversation on how the impact of bullying, experiences with verbal, social, and physical victimization affected participants across gender and sports. Findings in this study describe the emotions assigned by participants to these types of experiences and the ways that they changed their attitude towards people and their ways of participating. Iyora’s confession to participating differently in her sport is a specific
example of this. She discussed having to reconcile her feelings, like other Black student-athletes on campus, of being expected to smile and show up for events and “do what she had to do” even after dealing with fueling racial tensions on campus during one competition season.

Ryan, Gayles, and Bell (2018) discuss the prevalence of mental health problems on college campuses, as well as some of the most common concerns for student-athletes and barriers associated with underutilization of mental health resources. Student-athletes battle mental health effects related to their role as student-athlete, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse (Ryan, Gayles & Bell, 2018). The textural descriptions in this work illustrate how that happens and what is experienced for the individuals involved. Nia expressed how the bullying she experienced and the burnout she felt while competing created mental health challenges for her. To prepare for her upcoming season, she credited time away to “clear her mind” as necessary to accomplish the goals she had set for herself. Smith-Evans, George, Graves, Kaufman, and Frohlich (2014) call for institutions to have the right opportunities, trauma-informed services, support, and encouragement to succeed and affirm that Black collegiate women will do so.

Money and the collegiate athletic experience. Money and the collegiate athletic experience as it is related to this research broadly means conversation around scholarships and the emotions tied to the benefits associated with it. This theme was the most surprising finding for this research study since the actual scholarship parameters were absent in the literature review. The expectation of a full scholarship is that all school-related expenses are accounted for and covered by the institution. However, based
on Buli and Gasira’s description of travel and additional financial support as needed, and currency exchange rates, it begs the question of relationships between country representation per sport and particular university access as a result.

The NCAA Divisions I and II provide more than $2.9 billion in athletics scholarships annually to more than 150,000 student-athletes, meaning only 2% of high school athletes are awarded athletic scholarships to compete at the collegiate level (NCAA.org). Full scholarships cover tuition and fees, room, board, and course-related books. Head coaches decide who receives a scholarship, the scholarship amount, and whether it will be renewed. Reductions and renewals to this aid must be communicated to the student-athlete in writing by July 1, annually. According to the NCAA, there are over 20,000 international student-athletes enrolled and competing at NCAA schools representing 162 countries. Some of the countries with the greatest representation include Canada (2,951), Germany (678), Australia (672), and Spain (550). Participants in this study represented one of the 206 Jamaicans and one of the 166 Kenyans competing in college athletics at the Division I level today.

When considering the experiences of student-athletes and the actual value of scholarships awarded, especially for international athletes, the notion of exceptionalism is paramount. The textural descriptions developed through this research study describe processes of systematic recruiting processes, established and recognizable higher education pipelines, and internationally mobile ambassadors for athletic departments and their teams. Further, between optimistic preparation for, and disappointing experiences in the recruiting process, findings from this research study provide opportunities to use the CDMII to PROBE-SENSE-RESPOND to the disconnection between the two, while
considering the historical trends of recruiting and the societal pressures of athletic performance. Probing for methods of preparation for this, and similar subgroups of incoming college students could help develop varied, intentional, and private student-athlete services, advancing the experiences of student-athletes in high school in preparation for collegiate settings.

**Micro-Level Themes Within the CDMII and Literature Connections**

**Micro-level themes within the CDMII.** At the micro-level, three themes were recognized related to the group centered research approach and the Black racial identity of the participants. The themes and horizons for the CDMII are submission to issues of class, surprise by campus climate, and acceptance through communication. The CDMII featuring these horizons is found in Figure 5.3. A final attempt at the probing process will be used to establish a clearer understanding of how these horizons relate to the organizational, societal, and historical scholarly research related to Black collegiate women as a group.

![Figure 5.3: Micro-Level Themes within the CDMII](image-url)
Submission to issues of class. Submitting to issues of class means recognizing the fear and acceptance of social class-related issues when accessing societies’ institutions. This research study used higher education and specifically sports participation as a means of doing so. The National Partnership for Women and Families (2018) explained that Black women look towards higher education to minimize the effects of some of the most common barriers to social, community, and professional advancement. This advancement has the potential to change the socio-economic class status of an individual and transfers their ability to access goods and services to those available to another class of people. Oakley (2000) examined explanations for why women have not ascended to the top of many organizations, including differences between female leadership styles and the type of leadership style expected at the top of various organization types, feminist explanations for the underrepresentation of women in top management positions, and the possibility that the most talented women in business and leadership often avoid corporate life in favor of entrepreneurial careers. All of these are transferable reasons for the disparities creating the lack of representation in athletic departments.

Staurowsky et al. (2015) highlighted that even though youth sports are racially diverse, girls of color are significantly less likely than boys of color to participate in sports. This was supported by some of the participants in this research study, who were often singled out as representative of a wide variety of sports typically dominated by White participants. Chapter two describes these limitations in relation to specific schools and their surrounding communities. Opportunities to play sports, which provide valuable benefits, are diminished for all students at these schools but are particularly limited for girls (Graves et al., 2015). Many of the participants in this research were able to attend
private schools or schools and school districts that had demonstrated willingness and resources to accommodate the pursuit of high-level club participation with competitive scholastic programming. Recognizing the impact of social class on college athletic recruiting is crucial because it helps identify disparities in exposure, current trends in youth sports, and a starting point for identifying methods of support from athletic departments and governing organizations that support them.

**Surprised by campus climate.** The difference between being surprised by campus climate and the disappointing experiences previously discussed at the Meso Level is the identity associated with them, although both are rooted in oppressive social, academic, and athletic experience. Being surprised calls for re-orientation to an environment, while disappointment is a factor of something of value lost. I attribute this loss to the promises an individual grows to expect or was extended during the recruiting process. Causey (2019) suggests that racial socialization is an important process in the development of resilience in Black collegiate women attending a PWI and that the availability of on-campus support for Black female college students is of great importance when considering the different ways race-based coping, resilience and support seeking behaviors are demonstrated. PWI's like those used in this research study maintain oppressive hierarchical structures that situate Black women in lower social positions based on both their race and gender, making their academic success and overall well-being susceptible to the discrimination they face (Causey, 2019).

Based on this information, BC women athletes are at a disadvantage when it comes to their pursuit of athletic success since both their academic achievement and well-being are in jeopardy within these circumstances. Nia’s burnout, Adil’s well-being, and
Macaria’s question of being in the right place created questions about transferring to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) to find more supportive and encouraging peers and mentors. At the time of this research, no participants had indicated their intentions to go through with the transferring process, only that they had planned to stick it out another year.

Up until now, the role of organizational culture theory has not been discussed in a way that connects the research findings and the current literature. Hurtado and Guillermo-Wann (2012) explored how various aspects of the institution play essential roles in achieving student outcomes that also enhance social transformation for a just society. The authors present the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments that furthers the understanding of how students perceive the multidimensional nature of the campus climate for the diversity of race, gender, and institutional types. The model focuses on the interrelationships between the campus climate for diversity, educational practices, and a set of three educational outcomes needed to advance a more equitable society.

In relation to this research study, the first educational outcome, equity in student achievement and retention, addresses how students of color, low-income students and less academically prepared students are overrepresented amongst mobility patterns that are detrimental to degree programs compared to white students, higher-income students, and students with higher academic measures (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2012). Some participants could contribute to this mobility if they decide that transferring institutions is the best way forward. Namely, Macaria’s description of feeling as though her high school did not care about academics and failed to prepare her academically for the collegiate
academic requirements. The next educational outcome increases the habits of mind for lifelong learning centers on student interactions across difference by way of campus facilitated practices that help cultivate interpersonal and academic validation, social identity awareness, a host of civic outcomes, multicultural competencies, and habits of mind for lifelong learning. Educational practices include more courses as part of a curriculum of inclusion, ethnic studies courses, women’s studies, study abroad, and participation in co-curricular diversity activities and inclusive or racial/ethnic organizations. Student-athlete participants mentioned how their time is extremely limited and prevents their participation in some of these types of educational practices and initiatives outside of the curriculum enhancements. The final educational outcome determined by Hurtado and Guillermo-Wann (2012) involves the development of multicultural and civic competencies. The textural descriptions in this study confirm the rationale provided for this point of emphasis, which is that African American students experience hostile climates, racial stereotypes, and stereotype threats that function as barriers to academic success.

Singer and Cunningham (2012) conducted an intrinsic case study of an American university athletic department in efforts to highlight its unique diversity culture (i.e., how it creates and sustains a culture of diversity and inclusion) and the potential impact this culture could have on its various educational stakeholders, and how they interact in this organizational or workplace setting. Findings uncovered two major interrelated themes. First, this institution of higher education has a history and culture of valuing diversity, and this, in turn, has positively impacted the athletic department's commitment to diversity. Second, the integration of the athletic department into the broader university
culture, particularly because of its organizational structure, has enabled this department to embrace diversity better and avoid some of the educational challenges many of its peer’s face. This model provides a way forward for other institutions of higher education and the athletic departments they house to improve their recruiting attempts possibly. Successful recruiting improves the performance of the particular team and reflects positively on the organization as a whole. As YBW student-athletes become more aware of how diversity measures affect their experience, they could use them to help make decisions in their recruiting process.

**Acceptance through communication.** Acceptance through communication describes the way Black women connect with each other to get help with their experience of multiple forms of oppression. Such oppression is perpetuated by the online environment in which they prefer to discuss these topics (Litchfield, Kavanaugh, Osborne & Jones, 2018). Kelly (2018) recently examined the ways in which Black female students develop critical resistance strategies, working individually and collectively within existing structures to fight for their humanity and liberation. Marginalized students resist oppression using the tools available to them, like their social or digital media accounts, to combat overlapping threats to their identity. Jilo, Diab, and Siyasa mentioned how social media networks are utilized on their respective campuses in an attempt to “connect all of the Black people” for a space to discuss current campus events and controversies and gain virtual support and encouragements. Siyasa, an advocate for equity through sport governance, truly captured the role and need for acceptance through communication by stressing the compromise that high profile athletes make when remaining silent about sensitive issues that they would like to become invested in for fear of backlash, missed
professional athletic opportunities and future endorsement opportunities. Seeking acceptance through communication, in this circumstance, is presumably the only way to express what is being felt and believe that as a human being, you are being heard.

Summary

Using the CDMII to connect these micro-level themes creates opportunities to understand how the culture of an organization cultivates and hinders the development of the individuals there. It also identifies how history has cultivated the culture and society reinforces it. When looking for understanding amongst the intersections of submitting to the issues of class, surprise by campus climate, and finding acceptance through communication, the probing efforts within the CDMII should offer a sense of complexities related to self-love; how it is acquired, retained and expressed by individuals with multiple marginalizing identities.

Theoretical Implications

This critical phenomenological research study situated the intersecting identities of YBW student-athletes and distinguished them based on the present intersecting emotions. Doing so initiated an exploration of the complex dynamics of an outward experience of external marginalization and a simultaneous inward sense of emotional minimization. The research findings of this study and their webbed connections to the varied academic disciplines have important theoretical implications. Like Carrim and Nkomo (2016), who wedded intersectionality and identity work in organizations, I conclude that a student-athletes identity is not formed solely by personal and social identities in the athletic spaces, but socio-historical, political and cultural contexts within which individuals and groups are embedded as the CDMII illustrates. These contexts
shape not only the racial and gender identities of individuals but also the process of racialization, gendering, and adapting to their cultural environment and acquiring the values and behaviors associated with it. Together, it creates and reinforces particular social locations in society, academic, and athletic spaces.

This study used two different theoretical frameworks: Intersectionality (Intersections of multiple identities and prioritizing one over the other) and Organizational Culture Theory (Comprises attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and values considered valid in an organization) to develop the CDMII as a conceptual framework for this work. First, Intersectionality is an intentional viewpoint regarding problem-solving and gaining an understanding of a particular bind. In general, it is the only opportunity to consider the challenges faced by the group and is used to combat the opposition’s view of problem-solving (Ange-More Hancock, 2013). Second, Schein’s (2004) Three-Tiered Integrative Model of Organizational Culture (artifacts, norms, and organizational values), discussed in chapter two, consider the espoused values, and underlying assumptions to understand the culture of any given organization better. The study suggests that the two theories taken together can be used as a support for research involving marginalized populations in athletic spaces. The combined theoretical framing helped to execute the multi-level approach used in this research study. Since this study explored the interaction of YBW student-athletes and the recruiting coaches that connect them to higher education institutions, both Organizational Theory and Intersectionality Theory were beneficial in understanding how the person perceives and interacts with the place and the ways society and history impact both. Ultimately, this combined framework revealed the changes that
individuals must consistently undergo while the institution remains unchanged when it comes to values, artifacts, and norms.

Coupling these theories with Plutchik’s (2003) work on emotions was intentional to advance the understanding of intersectionality from the studies affected by biological difference to the studies of universal psychological difference. Characteristics of emotions help a person cope with a complex changing organizational environment and is a catalyst for functions of emotional behavior and expressions (Plutchik, 2003). Rolls (1990) explained that emotions a) elicit autonomic responses as preparations for crises, b) adapt reactions to specific local conditions, c) motivate actions designed to accomplish goals, d) communicate an intention to others, e) increase social bonding, f) influence memory and the evaluation of events, and g) increase the storage of certain memories. The benefits of the spectrum of emotions and the CDMII is that it consequently connects the effects of multiple marginalized identities to the feelings that overwhelm a person as a result of the societal and historical influences on the complex problem being explored. As a result, the theoretical implications of this research study consider the multi-level approach to settle on three areas of organizational culture and the multiple identities that support the progression of Black women athletes (Table 13) and are considered for policy and practical implications in the following sections.
Table 13: Organizational culture area supporting the progression of Black women athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Influence</th>
<th>Society Determining Relationship</th>
<th>Organizational Culture Emphasis</th>
<th>Schein’s (2004) Three-Tiered Integrative Model of Organizational Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Development through community</td>
<td>Artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Student-Athlete</td>
<td>Varied, Intentional, Privatized (VIP) support services</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Acquiring, retaining, and expressing self-love</td>
<td>Assumptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Policy Implications**

Implications for policy are most often Macro-and Meso-level considerations and can have programmatic, community-oriented, state-level, or federal level reflections (Cooley, 2016). Policy implications for university athletic administration and student-athlete services/student affairs emerged from this study. Based on the findings of this research, the systemic policy level implications prioritize and address issues of gender. At this systemic or macro-level, the most significant concern was missed developmental opportunities when a community is lost. At the same time, the process or Meso-level implications prioritize issues related to the social identity of being a student-athlete. Therefore, I propose a single connection for policy at the systemic or macro level and the process or Meso-level.
Macro-Level Policy Implications

Black collegiate women athletes experience a lost sense of security on predominantly White colleges and university campuses. This loss of security diminishes their ability to sustain basic relational needs of having, receiving, giving, and helping through the community (Stone, 2002). Solidarity is unity (as a group or class) that produces or is based on a community of interests, objectives, and standards (Merriam-Webster, 2019). This research found that across the country, BC women negotiate sadness from community abandonment, desire to seek solitude in Black sororities and student-led organizations and, value Black maternal experiences in the supporting of Black athletes in these spaces. Examples of this are in the participants’ consistent messaging of feeling isolated and without friends. Many of these women mentioned their interest in learning more about participating in sororities but detailed how it was not encouraged or supported by their athletic coaches. Iyora described her surprise when a graduating teammate revealed that she secretly pledged to one of the sororities on campus, and the moment she realized that she had a false belief that there was no option to pursue this. Finally, all of the participants recognized the nearly non-existent interaction with Black women regularly while competing in college athletics. All students deserve an opportunity to develop in the multiple ways that college experiences are designed to enhance, including student-athletes who are limited on time and as a result, access to these opportunities and spaces.

Based on the findings of this research study, I present a policy implication for conference level commissioners to intentionally create positions and embrace Black women within campus athletic departments in a variety of capacities, specifically in
administrative roles to establish a culture of safety, support, and significance. Stone (2002) says that “representation is the process by which interests are defined and activated in politics” and has a dual quality; representatives give expression to an investment by portraying an issue, showing how it affects people and persuading them that the portraits are accurate, and representatives speak for people in the sense of standing for them and articulating their wishes in policy debates (p. 215). The BC woman athlete’s multiple identities make her interests in any particular issue contradictory within continually changing scenarios. Currently, Black women athletic administrators do have some presence in Division I FBS athletics. While there is only one Black woman to hold the role of athletic director of a Division I-FBS football school in the country, there are 71 (3.4%) Associate and Assistant Athletic Director’s, 45 (14%) senior women administrators, and 3 (2.7%) faculty athlete representatives (Lapchick, 2018). Also, Black women hold 39.5% of the remaining professional administration positions within Division I college athletics to include places in the area of promotions and marketing, academic advising, and compliance, among others. Still, these are relatively low numbers, and BC women need to see themselves represented in these leadership roles because it provides some hope that they are being seen, and someone else may understand some of their challenges. Also, it gives a sense of safety that a person with some authority can advocate on their behalf.

In order to strengthen the impact of Black women’s representation in these spaces, athletic conference commissioners should consider establishing professional administrative positions at the conference level and a supporting professional within each institution to be held by individuals who identify as being in the “margins,” a reference
by bell hooks (1984) to describe Black women as existing on the margins and their lives hidden from mainstream. This regional/conference service position advances support and makes mandatory the newly developed role of Athletic Director of Diversity and Inclusion beginning to appear within some individual athletic departments. This conference level position would be expected to operate similarly to various industry standards where they are responsible for managing departments or areas of specialized services for the organizations and their human resources. Also, these professionals would work to address the significant issues of the small population of marginalized student-athletes based on their identities, including those of BC women athletes throughout the conference. The participants in this research study detailed the level of isolation on teams, campuses, and conferences for some, based partially on numbers, and therefore provides the rationale for this position of authority and influence at this level.

Efforts by the teams of conference and campus administrators would have many objectives. These objectives include an assurance of integration of student-athletes with the student body, assessment of the current athletic conference environments, and evaluation of athletic directors’ diversity and inclusion action plans. More direct interactions include the creation of forums for uncomfortable and challenging dialogue, granting of permission to be vulnerable about the experiences of the students and staff, and concentrated efforts on the diversification of candidate pools for hiring staff. Collectively these goals can improve descriptive representation (representatives who share important demographic characteristics with their constituents that can best represent their interests) (Stone, 2002). These objectives are commonly listed on the profiles of the new Diversity and Inclusion athletic director at the campus level position.
Further, the benefits of this position structure are that it provides accountability and oversight, dual-direction peer support for administrators, community groups among administration and student-athletes, and a strong start to a network with which to move forward. Simply they provide oversight of programming, development issues, and the generation of specific opportunities for their population of students. One such program and extension to this policy implication is that of relationship management for college athletics as it relates to student-athletes and their experience with marginalized identities.

Deliberate relationship management and collaboration with the National Pan-Hellenic Council (a collaborative organization of nine historically African American international Greek lettered fraternities and sororities (Brown & Parks, 2005)), Black Student Union Associations, and collegiate athletics creates new political alliances among the people who perceive themselves to be harmed by the problems associated with marginalization in college athletic departments. Relationship management bridges gaps in the community, and coincidently, the recognized missed opportunities to develop in ways that these affiliations can provide. Collaborations like this can be used effectively to resolve conflict or advance shared visions, where stakeholders recognize the potential advantages of working together (Gray, 1989). More broadly the benefits of collaboration between organizations such as these create; 1) synergy (sum of the whole is bigger than the sum of each part); 2) a sharing of resources; 3) overcoming of obstacles; 4) increased community awareness; 5) access to constituents and funding; 6) innovation; and 7) stability and information sharing (Nutcache, 2019). Changing the membership of the decision-making body has the potential to mobilize constituents, participate in innovative
reform, recruit Black membership in various capacities, and provide experience in and forced political participation to deal with them.

**Meso-Level Policy Implications**

At the process-level or macro-level, implications for policy are related to the Black collegiate women athletes’ assessment of their disappointing experiences that followed their optimistic years of preparation. During that time, this research found that these students were at times extremely overwhelmed daily with demands on their time and location, the dysfunctional athletic communities in which they operated, and the impact of a lack of money and opportunity to earn during their collegiate experience. As a result, I suggest the consideration of an automatically available “Non-Play Acclimation Year” (NPAY) for student-athletes. The NPAY addresses a matter of equity in developmental outcomes for college students. Mirci, Loomis, and Hensley (2011) explained that equitable educational outcomes imply that learners may successfully progress and reach the completion of education for ensuring social mobility, earning money, and improving the quality of their lives. They define the scope of equity in educational practices to include classroom instructional practices, educational resources, interactions, attitudes, language, institutional cultures, and the ensuring of students’ required skills for fuller educational participation. There is not an extensive amount of research on equity and educational outcomes for student-athletes. However, Cooper (2016) used Black male student-athletes to make a point that this type of acclimation year is useful at the beginning of the collegiate experience. The author argued that doing so allows student-athletes one year to acclimate to the new campus climate (social integration) and academic environment (academic integration). Cooper (2016) proposed
that this approach lessens the intense pressures of managing full-time athletic responsibilities at the start of the collegiate career.

The facts remain that student-athletes unintentionally forfeit significant opportunities for development beginning during the transition between high school and college with a missed exploration of a gap year experience. A gap year is a period, typically an academic year, taken by a student as a break between secondary school and higher education to intentionally expand their comfort zone, have cross-cultural experiences, and reflect on their own critical experiences (King, 2011). As the findings of this study confirm, student-athletes are routinely recruited as early as middle school, and sometimes committing early in their high school experiences.

To be acclimated means to become accustomed to a new climate, environment, or situation (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Overlooking this process perpetuates the forgone benefits for the development of some student-athletes. Some psychosocial theories understand the development of a student examines the content of development, the critical issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives (Chickering, 1993). The NPAY offers this theory to manifest more entirely for student-athletes. Tyrance, Harris, and Post (2013) found that Division I student-athletes with higher athletic identities had lower levels of career optimism unless they had a higher expectation of playing professional sports, which is not as likely for women as it is for men. Gender was the only variable compared to race or sport played to contribute significantly to the prediction of career knowledge (understanding of job market and highering trends). The authors continued to explain that if student-athletes had not considered or prepared for careers other than
professional sports, their ability to adapt to the changing world of work could be more challenging.

Participants in this research study detailed concerns related to a lack of professional experience that would directly help to secure professional career positions after graduation. The NPAY would help Black women college athletes by allowing them to take advantage of internship opportunities as an example. Internship participation varies significantly by race, institution, enrollment status, and academic program. Students who did not receive an internship tend to desire to do so but could not due to scheduling conflicts, insufficient pay, and lack of placements in their disciplines (Hora, Chen, Parrott, Her, 2019). Ensuring equitable access to internships for all students, screening of employer hosts for mentoring quality and capacity, and recognizing internships to be simultaneously a positive transformative experience for students and a vehicle for reproducing inequality is available with NPAY.

In another example, BC women athletes can benefit from an opportunity to study abroad to gain employable skills and experience, interest in international careers, improvement of their employment prospects as students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds (Pietro, 2019). Study abroad opportunities are typically negated, and so these athletes may miss out on the benefits of personal growth, intercultural development, academic commitment, and advanced education and career attainment that comes with study abroad (Dwyer & Peters, n.d.). Semesters away from campus to engage in these programs interrupt off-season training, in-season competition, and daily routines implemented for oversight, accountability, and progress and qualify the NPAY for more sincere consideration.
To strengthen my argument for the NPAY, I will rely on the policy provision of inducements. The theory of inducements says we can alter people’s self-propelled progress towards their goals by changing the obstacles and opportunities they face (Stone, 2002). In other words, inducements work by encouraging student-athletes to change their mind about how they choose to progress, and evaluate the process, since they have goals inside and outside of athletics and each decision to act is predicated on conscious goal-seeking. Inducements are a system with three parts: the inducement giver (NCAA Athletic conference), the inducement receiver or target (student-athlete), and the inducement itself (NPAY). Inducements assumes that givers and receivers are unitary actors where a giver must be able to implement a consistent policy of rewarding or penalizing behavior, and a target must be capable of making a unified calculus and taking a single course of action keeping in mind that membership in an organization or community alters the ways individuals apply and respond to them. A third assumption of the theory of inducements is that the receiver has some orientation toward the future. The membership of being a student-athlete on course for graduation qualifies their opportunity for the NPAY, while their competitive invitation to participate in such developmental programs, experiences, and/or training throughout their athletic conference affords the financial support of the college or university for that time. The NPAY has the potential to allow time for acclimation and adjustments to a life different than that of a college athlete, and also affords study-abroad learning experiences, professional internship training, and the pursuit of significant and mutually beneficial faculty mentorship relationships, an attempt at bringing together individual motives in line with this communities’s goals (Stone, 2002).
Implications for Practice

Five specific suggestions for improving the exceptional recruiting experiences of once YBW student-athletes and now BC women athletes are outlined as a result of the findings and discussion of this study. The gender or macro-level suggestion for administrators is to initiate corporate sponsorships between the athletic departments and Black-owned and operated hair, beauty, and body brands. At the process or meso-level, it is suggested that coaches and support service administrators provide adequate options for mandatory customizable and individualized recruiting visit experiences. Finally, at the group or micro-level, BC women athletes should first acknowledge their thoughts and apprehensions about firsthand experiences related to issues of class. Second, they can construct informative networks and third, embrace platforms to communicate and find acceptance. The recommendations for practice are presented based on the associated identity and research level of which it is aligned. The intention of these implications is to provide a broad overview of multiple methods of implementation feasible at most colleges and universities in the United States.

Macro-Level Implications for Practice

This research study uses gender to identify macro-level findings. Macro-level implications for practice are meant to address university-level athletic administrators. Implications for practice address the single issue of Black standards of beauty and self-care.

Establish a Black beauty brand corporate partnership. Sponsorship spending on college athletic departments, conferences, bowl games, and related properties was expected to exceed $1 billion dollars in 2018, according to the IEG Sponsorship report
(2018). It listed the most active sponsors of the “Power 5” conferences, previously discussed in this research, to be State Farm, Nissan, Nike, Coca-Cola, AT&T, Google, and Indeed.com. Meanwhile, marketing to millennial women of color is expected to steer Black spending power to $1.5 trillion by 2021 in all industries, including the Black hair care industry, which was valued at more than $2.5 billion in 2018 (Tilton, 2018). Benefits to these types of agreements are four-fold and mutually look to; a) promote a positive brand, b) increase brand awareness, c) reach a broader demographic, d) enhance customer experience (Manns, 2017). In addition, it recognizes the diverse needs of many students and potentially makes accessing these products easier when local college communities do not provide them.

A part of the implementation should involve the building of a multi-ethnic athletic department salon, spa, and wellness center that makes obtaining and using these products easier and helps to facilitate multiple methods of appropriate self-care. This addition levels out the accommodations made for revenue-generating sports in a matter that tends to favor men’s sports. 24/7 Sports made the claim that in regards to football facilities on NCAA Division I-FBS college and universities, an athletic department is “falling behind if you don’t have LED sets inside bathrooms and a barbershop within walking distance of the locker room, complete with uniform cleansing lockers and futuristic upgrades” (Crawford, 2019). Currently, the tab of $1.2 billion is associated with new construction or renovation of football-only facilities on these campuses. Evaluating these amenities could be a positive approach to embracing the relationship of and value in self-care, mental health, and overall performance.
Meso-Level Implications for Practice

The findings from this research study resulted in a single implication for practice at the meso-level. When considering the social identity of student-athlete, I offer an intentional opportunity to eliminate the gap between optimistic preparation and disappointing experiences of the collegiate athletic experience for athletic coaches and student-athletes.

Mandate customized recruiting visit itineraries. The higher education campus visit is the single most influential source of information for students in college choice (Helsel, 2004). Visiting colleges is an ideal way to get familiar with what college is like. Most colleges visits and tours for students and student-athletes alike include options like an information session usually with admissions and financial aid personnel, a walking tour of the campus, an opportunity to attend a class and meet a professor, attend a club meeting or practice, eat in the dining hall and a night spent in the dorm. Helsel (2004) explains that the most significant positive factors for college choice related to college selection include the appearance of the campus, size of the school, and the atmosphere of school and facilities. The negative variables include a school size that is too large or too small, campus appearance, outdated dorms, cleanliness, and unfriendly students.

Recruiting visits in athletics offered or approved by head coaches and are limited to 48 hours on campus. It should be mentioned that visiting weekends are used to host multiple student-athletes at a time. Still, I propose an option for customizing the itinerary to create a connection for students with the services, people, and resources available to them and crucial to their success. It would make student-athletes better informed when making this complex decision. Expanding the current format to include a mandatory visit
with someone or to some on-campus place of the student-athletes choice, outside of athletics and based on their own research and submission, creates an opportunity for an initial connection outside of the athletic department where most of the time is said to be spent based on the responses of participants in this study. Also, offering real-time virtual tours for international students or those that are not extended an official visit due to their inability to travel as a result of Visa student travel regulations should be mandatory. Customizing recruiting visits with the input of those visiting deepens the connection of the student-athlete to space, and further solidifies their commitment to their choice through inevitable adversity.

Micro-Level Implications for Practice

This research study uses race to identify the group and categorize the micro-level findings. Micro-level implications for practice are meant to address the needs of YBW student-athletes and BC women directly. Implications for practice address issues of class, networks, and platforms for communication.

**Acknowledge firsthand experiences related to social class.** A person’s social class has far-reaching consequences in the United States (Boundless Sociology, n.d). Social class refers to the grouping of individuals in a stratified hierarchy based on wealth, income, education, occupation, and social network (Keltner, 2011). Barratt (2015) describes it as a collection of subcultures arranged in a hierarchy of prestige. Some characteristics of social class are expressed by the clothes you wear, the music you like, the school you attend and influences how you interact with others similar to the ways culture was previously described as deriving its power from the values and ideas of
YBW’s experiences and their methods of expression in chapter two (Duke, 2000; Keltner, 2011).

Consequences of the social class hierarchy manifest in many areas of one’s life experiences (Boundless Sociology, n.d.). For instance, physical health is impacted by environmental hazards, health inequality, and lower levels of health insurance. Mental health can change due to various levels of access to treatment and an individual’s encounter with different mental health stressors. An example of economic stressors extends from financial stress as a result of low income to stress incurred from intense social pressures associated with elite circles. Family life is challenged in the realms of marriage, childbearing, and household composition. Social class in education shows up in the means that people seek to acquire higher education degrees from more prestigious schools and the educational inequality that perpetuates generational class divides. Lastly, a person’s political presence, level of political participation, and political influence are magnified the higher their social class.

Holmes (1999) wrote that the influence of social class, regardless of the level, in the lives of African American women was present and contributed to how their academic experiences were shaped evident in the perceptions held by their White colleagues or people they interacted with in performing their academic roles. People who come from a lower-class background have to depend more on other people and are usually better at reading other people’s emotions and are more likely to act altruistically, have greater empathy, and possess a finer attunement to other people. Upper-class people have the freedom to focus on self, tend to hoard resources, and are sometimes less generous than they could be (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Peterson, 2010).
Holmes (1999) mentioned the struggle had by African American women being members among the middle and upper class and having left their respective Black communities once entering higher education. This change dealt with women's psychological issues while they remained at PWI's while at the risk of high mental stress. For those Black collegiate women who would like to change their social class, it should be understood that it requires changing both what they think of themselves and what others think of them. It also takes thinking about cultural capital (knowledge and skills of the prestige class) and social capital (the personal network of individuals who can be recruited by an individual for action), two controllable characteristics that are discussed further in the next section regarding networks (Barratt, 2015).

**Construct intentional networks.** Black collegiate women athletes need to construct intentional networks to ensure their success during and beyond their time in higher education. Distinguishing between social networks and networking for the purpose of developing and supporting career aspirations are both critical but serve different purposes in the intentional construction I propose. A social network is a network of individuals (such as friends, acquaintances, and coworkers) connected by interpersonal relationships (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2019), while networking is defined as the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2019). Collectively these intentional networks establish three unique advantages: privileged information, access to diverse skill sets, and power (Uzzi & Dunlap, 2005).

Grier-Reed (2013) describes the effectiveness of the African American Student Network, a culturally sensitive and therapeutic intervention co-founded by Black faculty
and co-facilitated by Black psychologists to attend to the socio-emotional needs of Black
Students at PWI’s. Hour-long interactions helped students find safety, empowerment,
validation, connection, intellectual stimulation, resilience, and a physical home base. This
effort demonstrated a statistically higher rate of retention for student participants (Grier-
Reed, Arcinue, & Inman, 2016). This model of intentional social networking and counter
spacing could be duplicated among BC women athletes in the same fashion, with the
expectation of harnessing the active ingredient of providing a safe space for themselves
as a model for coping with racial microaggressions and challenges within their college
environments.

While establishing and maintaining an intentional social network, BC women
athletes should develop a willingness and comfort with networking to significantly
impact their abilities to establish contacts, get interviews for employment, and identify
and cultivate mentorship relationships (Janasz & Forret, 2008). Networking improves
social capital by influencing 1) the size of the social network (number of members); 2)
the strength of their relationships in the social network (degree of closeness that
characterizes a relationship); 3) their pattern of relationship in their social network
(whether members of an individual’s social network are connected to one another); and
4) the resources of their social network (benefits that may be derived). Janasz & Forret
(2008) compared networking skills to athletic ability in that some individuals have more
“natural talent” than others, but these skills and abilities can be developed through
education, practice, and feedback. They recommend three exercises that college students
can use to train their networking skills further: the handshake (an integral part of face-to-
face networking in many cultures); the career fair/“30 second commercial” (the ability to
clearly and succinctly articulate who you are, what you offer, and what you want); and Networking simulation (utilizing networking skills to make new connections). Those who do not learn how to network risk being limited to connection, creation, and collaboration opportunities. Finally, to relate the importance of networking to the previous practical implications of recognizing class, it should be understood that networking is a critical human capital skill that is unique in its ability to increase an individual’s social capital and represents proactive attempts to develop and maintain personal and professional relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit in work or career (Forret & Dougherty, 2001)

**Embrace platforms to communicate and find acceptance.** In order to provide an agenda for embracing platforms for acceptance through communication, I will provide a brief description of The Strong Black Woman Collective Theory (SBWC) (Davis, 2015) to suggest why and how these platforms work. The SBWC says that Black women appropriate the image and regulate strength to each other to promote solidarity within the group and confront external hostilities collectively. Davis (2015) explains that Black women enact communication behaviors that affirm strength in each other, representing a safe space that dually promotes solidarity within the collective and confronts oppressive forces. It advances the concept that Black women’s verbal and nonverbal communication is a critical site for strength to bind and that this strength regulation simultaneously activates processes that confront hostile outsiders and establishes a safe house from hostilities (Davis & Afifi, 2019).

The instant and readily accessible information, as well as the formation of virtual communities, make social media a vehicle for change and supportive space for BC
women athletes who seek support (Ellington, 2014). Chapter three discussed the social media platforms of Instagram and Twitter as a means of communication for young adults. Meanwhile, YouTube performs as an online-community-building space that promotes active participation and gives those without traditional platforms of power to become content creators. It has played a vital role in the dissemination of information in a range of topics from dialogue about natural hair, helping to shape the discourse currently surrounding the topic, to creating an anonymous space for minority student-athletes to express grievances and protest natured commentary (Jackson, 2017; Sanderson, Frederick, & Stocz, 2016) This form of protest holds implications for minority athletes activism efforts and sport organizations administrations.

Cunningham and Regan (2012) explain that for contemporary minority athletes speaking out or up about social and political issues creates conflict with their discernment of issue prevalence compared to times of the past or experiences at differing locations, focus on athletic achievements, and the fear of financial consequences caused by their contribution to controversial topics. Even when these conflicts are considered, social media offers individuals the ability to disseminate political views, introduces divergent perspectives about news stories and social issues, enables community around issues of interest, and allows people to converse, contest, and debate these topics to a point where critical mass can be reached (Cunningham & Regan, 2012).

It should also be stated as a caution, that through both exchanges with out-group members and in-group events, group members may encounter identity threats that jeopardize their perceived social standing and can make the members feel vulnerable. Social Identity Threats shows up in the forms of renouncing fandom, punishment
commentary, racial commentary, general criticism, attacking other group members, and presenting the facts of the case (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears & Doosie, 1999; Cunningham & Regan, 2012). The argument is that sporting events are inappropriate venues for activism, and social media platforms provide space where group members can contest, reinforce, and challenge group norms and values similar to the experiences within the Strong Black Woman Collective.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this critical phenomenological study was to examine and update understanding of the lived experiences of YBW student-athletes as a group, and to describe the challenges experienced in a recruitment process and retention of “othered” women in organizations. Also, it provides a tool to examine and progress systemic diversity and inclusion efforts for all people that meaningfully consider their combination of multiple marginalized identities. The CDMII conceptual framework should be used to understand better the complex problems affecting any group of individuals with marginalizing identities and complex problems. A completed CDMII framework that considers the historical and societal influence and is contextualized to the environment and operations of a community, team, or organization provides a new and mutual language with which decision-makers can discuss situations, perspectives, and actions. Also, it can be used to make meaning of current conditions based on gathered data, to evaluate strategic interventions, and to constructively manage conflict and bring about consensus without removing disputes (Snowden, 2005).

Based on the findings of this study, opportunities exist to conduct qualitative and mixed-method system-centered, process-centered, or group-centered research. Future
research is needed to examine the depth of the student-athlete challenges at NCAA participating colleges and universities and the ways in which their experiences can be enhanced. Three possible directions to consider based on the foundation provided from the research findings are: 1) the experiences of Black women support staff on college campuses, a recommended macro-level approach; 2) the stratification and diversity among international student-athletes and their unique experiences, a recommended meso-level approach; and 3) outcomes of Black athletes within Black Greek organizations after college graduation, a recommended micro-level approach.

Snowden (2005) suggests and details a Safe-Fail probing tactic as a means of utilizing this system of analysis since the complex system has no repeating relationships between cause and effect, is highly sensitive to small interventions, and cannot be determined by outcome-based targets. As a result, a need for experimentation is prioritized. Safe-Fail Probes are small-scale experiments that approach issues from different angles, in small and safe-to-fail ways, the intent of which is to approach issues in small, contained ways to allow emergent possibilities to become more visible. The emphasis is not on ensuring success or avoiding failure, but in allowing ideas that are not useful to fail in small, contained, and tolerable ways (Snowden, 2005). The ideas that do produce obvious benefits can then be adopted and amplified when the complex system has shown the appropriate response to its stimulus. The outputs from Safe-Fail Probes can form the basis for proposals for new initiatives, and the relationship engagement among stakeholders forms a basis for assembling project teams for these experiments. Moving forward, these viable and well fleshed-out proposals can then be picked up for experimentation within the system, process, or group (Snowden, 2005).
Limitations

Though critical phenomenological qualitative studies provide rich and compelling research data, there are limitations to this research study design. First, the participants were interviewed during their summer breaks. Although this does provide the opportunity for them to reflect on their previous academic year, this also may not give them enough time to fully reflect and make meaning of their experiences during that time.

Second, interviewing is not a perfect method. An enormous amount of data was collected that required analysis; this is time-consuming and labor-intensive (Miles et al., 2014). For this research study, all interviews were conducted in English over the phone and through video conferencing, which is not the primary language for all of the participants. Thus, some word choices may not indeed indicate the exact meaning of their experiences. However, ample time was given to participants to respond to questions, and questions were often repeated and rephrased in order to assist in their understanding. Also, participants were given an opportunity to review and edit their transcripts prior to any data analysis.

Third, there are limitations linked to credibility and reliability. As Rudestam and Newton (2015) advised, it is the researcher’s responsibility to convincing oneself and one’s audience that the findings are based on a critical investigation. Therefore, the researcher must do their best in the interview phase to present the data and communicate what the data reveal, given the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 433). Credibility and dependability were accounted for through member checking. For this research, participants may not have been willing to voluntarily share details of personal information for fear that someone might identify them through their stories or accolades,
and they would face the consequences as a result. Since it is likely that some participant anecdotes could be recognized by other student-athletes, pseudonyms were used throughout this research in an attempt to protect the anonymity of participants and their colleges and athletic conferences.

Finally, my personal experience as a YBW student-athlete, BC woman athlete, and NCAA Division I coach did not create a bias or limitation on my analysis of this research. Instead, it proved to be an asset in the data collection process. Also, I did everything I could to be aware of my biases and set them aside. The researcher’s role must include the integration of biases, beliefs, and values up-front in the study (Janesick, 2011), which I provided in chapter three. In the next section, I provide my reflection to communicate my experience of the critical phenomenology research design, my improved awareness of the phenomenon of “Exceptional Recruiting,” and how these research experiences have prepared my curiosity and intellectual journey forward.

**Conclusion**

This critical phenomenological research study examined the phenomenon of ten Black collegiate women recruited as high school students to compete in NCAA Division I college athletics at American colleges and universities. In chapter one, I detailed how I became interested in gaining a better understanding of YBW student-athletes and the ways in which they approached decision-making and experienced the NCAA recruiting process. I focused on the concept of exceptionalism to frame their counter-narratives of being viewed as beneath the majority when it came to race and gender and upheld when it comes to their student-athlete status on college campuses. I focused on those young women student-athletes who identified as Black intentionally, to provide some contrast
and similarities of experiences of members within the African Diaspora. Doing so created a foundation for discussing the ways in which Intersectionality functions to allow structures to make certain identities the consequences of and vehicle for vulnerability, as Crenshaw (2015) explained. I found that exploring this topic provides awareness of the specific needs and intentional methods of student-athlete development by placing related societal and historical effects on their creation. Collectively, these variables worked together in the development of the primary dissertation research question: “What is the experience of young Black women student-athletes recruited to predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)?

Chapter two presented a review of the literature related directly to the three phases of the collegiate athletic recruiting process. I utilized sources related to education, policy, sport sociology, and some sport business management. It begins with a description of the exceptional circumstances of YBW student-athletes that primarily focuses on microaggressions as psychological stressors and their sources in educational settings and the ways in which they develop socially, academically, and athletically in conjunction. Next, I provided an overview of higher education recruiting, including an overview of the policies and procedures related to college athletics recruiting. I then illustrated the exceptional experiences for Black collegiate women before focusing on the experiences of their athletic peers by tracing the history of access into higher education and federal policies related to the access of women in these spaces. Finally, I introduced the two theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Organizational Culture Theory guiding this research and the Conceptual framework I created to induce action based on
the research findings called named the Complex Decision-Making Framework for Intersecting Identities.

Chapter three details the qualitative and critical phenomenological research design and methodological approach utilized in this research study. After providing the history and rationale for this qualitative approach, with a great focus on the foundations of Heidegger’s (1962) work, I detailed the means of applying Intersectionality directly to this research design. I elected to use a multi-level (system, process, and group) approach to understand how power affects decision-making on marginalized women and follow with a description of the intricacies of the phenomenological design process. One of those details includes my position as the sole researcher and my attempt to bracket my experience and biases within this study. This chapter concludes with specific descriptions of my research participants and the associated settings.

Findings from this research study are found in chapter four and show that these students face several unique and emotion-laden circumstances related to their overall development on their respective campuses. At the macro-level, a system-centered research approach revealed sadness from community loss and joy found in self-expression using their hair as a device for communicating. At the Meso-level, a process-centered approach focused on the student-athlete social identity where optimistic preparation was countered with disappointing experiences. Finally, the micro-level utilized a group-centered research approach that prioritized race and found there to be submission to issues of class, surprise by campus climate, and acceptance through communication. These themes were in line with the historical and social trends presented
in the literature review and introduce some counter-narratives to the expectations presented by the NCAA regarding commitment to well-being.

Finally, based on the foundation and findings of this research study, theoretical, policy, and implications for practice are provided to move this research forward and provide a means igniting change as critical research aims to do. After completing this research, I am reminded of my firsthand experiences as it related to this work and found an overall comfort that the beliefs I held were not isolated, exaggerated, or insignificant. I was also made aware of the depth of uniform and straightforward policy, but the canvas available for opportunities to create change within or without the systems, processes, or groups most connected to the experiences of those that are left to perform in the margins.
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Appendix A: Social Media Recruitment Flyers

SEEKING THE HELP OF BLACK WOMEN STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM NCAA DIVISION I-FBS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

HEY FRIEND! I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VOICE IN MY RESEARCH STUDY.

TO GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY PLEASE VISIT: HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y2DZVH67
TO SCHEDULE TIME TO COMPLETE AN INTERVIEW OVER SKYPE AND SUBMIT A NARRATIVE ABOUT YOUR RECRUITING EXPERIENCE.

THIS WILL TAKE YOU LESS THAN 90 MINUTES!
TO THANK YOU, I WILL SEND YOU A $20 AMAZON GIFT CARD!

SEND ME YOUR QUESTIONS:
BLACKWOMAN.STUDENTATHLETE@GMAIL.COM

Are you a Black woman student-athlete attending an NCAA Division I-FBS college or university?

If so, I’d love to interview you and read about your NCAA recruiting experience.

Your participation will not require more than 90 minutes of your time.
You will receive a $20 Amazon gift card

Please use this link to get started: https://tinyurl.com/y2dzh675

For more information please contact: Sean Houston Blackwoman.studentathlete@gmail.com

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity will be maintained. This is a doctoral student designed study and is not endorsed by organizations. The data collected in this study may be included in subsequent research, to include my PhD dissertation efforts.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1) Tell me how you came to be a young Black woman student-athlete at your college or university (Narrative);
   a. Describe how you prepared academically and athletically as a high school student.
   b. What did it feel like to prepare in these ways?
   c. What was most important to you as you changed from a high school student-athlete to a college student-athlete?
   d. What is one of your most memorable experiences as a young Black woman student-athlete? How did that make you feel?
   e. If a friend were looking to join your current team, what would you tell them about the school, coaches, and team?

Now I’d like to learn more about your real experience both as a Black student-athlete and as a woman student-athlete. Is this ok?

2) Tell me how you prepared for the recruiting process as a young Black woman (modes of appearing)
   a. How did you view the recruiting process differently (if you did) because you are Black?
   b. How did you view the recruiting differently (if you did) because you are a woman?
   c. Do you think your non-Black peers had a different experience?
   d. What situations have typically influenced your experiences as a young Black woman student-athlete in high school and in college?
   e. What did you feel during the experience?
   f. What thoughts stood out for you?
   g. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

3) Describe how the recruiting experience would change if you did not identify as a young Black woman (imaginative variation).
   a. What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
   b. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
   c. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?

4) How has your college experience matched or not matched your recruiting experience?
   a. What would you list as the top 3-5 reasons for choosing your college or university?
   b. Now that you have experienced the recruiting process, what do you believe was missing when making this decision?
   c. How did you feel after the recruiting process concluded?
   d. How do you feel today about your collegiate athletic recruiting experience?
   e. Have you shared all that is significant concerning the experience of being a Black woman athlete in college?
Appendix C: IRB Approval

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 19-192
Protocol Title: Exceptional Recruiting: Identity Intersections Impact on Decision Making for Young Black Women Athletes During the NCAA Recruiting Process
Principal Investigator: Beau Manierre Houston
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Dr. Andrea Bingham
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (if changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: N/A
*Note, if no expiration date is indicated: Changes in the research need to be approved before implementation, and you need to report any adverse events. Requests for status updates may be sent by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.
Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:
- The PI must submit all protocol, recruitment, advertising, and consent form amendments/revisions to the IRB for approval.
- If you are a student, please note that it is required to include the IRB approval letter to the library when you submit the dissertation/thesis.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse events (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45CFR46.108(c)(4)(i)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- If required, renew the study with the IRB at least 10 business days prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Program Director in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Lori Bryan

Lori Bryan, PhD
IRB Committee Member
www.uccs.edu/irb
Version 1.19.2018