Ain't I A Woman? African American Women's Identity as Student Athletes at Predominately White Institutions

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Introduction

"Ain't I a woman" is the title of popular speech given by the historical figure, Sojourner Truth. This speech was delivered at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio and criticized many of the antifeminist arguments that occurred during slavery ("Sojourner Truth," n.d.). Although this speech was delivered in 1851, it continues to serve as a symbol of women's rights and embodies the definition of strong women. Thus, this paper incorporates this title in order to discuss the interesting identities that African American women encounter within the sport environment. Athletics have become one of America's favorite pastimes. From professional sports to T-ball, athletics has captured the hearts of Americans of all ages. Many children grow up having sport icons as their role models as they strive to emulate the success of their favorite sport player. However, when looking at the media today, there are some common trends within sports. For example, sports like the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA), which are sports occupied by men, dominate the American culture. Even at the collegiate level, men's sports are presented as the main attraction. The government became aware of the imbalance in gender-related activities and ultimately created Title IX a law passed in 1972 requiring gender equity for boys and girls in every educational program that receives federal funding (National Women's Law Center, 2012). Athletics are not specifically mentioned in the law, but are considered an educational program and therefore covered by the law (National Women's Law Center, 2012).

Since Title IX legislation has come into effect, there has been an increase in the number of female participants in sport. However, there still appears to be a discrepancy between certain races and their levels of sport involvement. In 2012, the National Women's Law Center indicated that Girls of Color play sports at a far lower rate than White girls. For example, from 2010-2011 the number of females playing sports was 3.2 million and of this population 64% were African American and Latino/a and 76% were White (National Women's Law Center, 2012).

Additionally, Sellers, Chavous and Brown (2002) reported that many African American children might assume that sports are considered one of the few avenues of upward mobility for African Americans in American society because sports give African American students an opportunity to be judged on their ability instead of their skin color. Although African American girls and women are underrepresented in just about every traditional venue for upward socioeconomic mobility in our society (e.g. education), they are significantly overrepresented in particular collegiate sports such as basketball and track (Sellers et al., 2002). The 2013-2014 NCAA Student Athlete Ethnicity Report stated that 32.6% of women participating in basketball at the Division I level were African American and 20.1% of women track athletes were African American (NCAA, 2014).

According to Rhoden (2012), White women play sports at a higher rate due to the fact that their presence in sports occurs across more sports rather than just basketball and track. African American women are all but missing in lacrosse (2.2%), swimming (2.0%), soccer (5.3%) and softball (8.2%). African American women also have an underrepresented rising presence in volleyball (11.6%). In the most recent 2013-2014 figures, White women student athletes comprised 65.7%, 70.2%, and 81% of all women athletes in Divisions I, II, and III respectively (Lapchick, 2015). In contrast, Lapchick reported that African American's comprised 15%, 12.8%, and 5.5% of all women athletes in Divisions I, II, and III respectively.

While all athletes have to balance multiple responsibilities (i.e. being a student and an athlete) it seems that when these identities intersect with race it can cause additional stress for minority athletes. Sellers, Kuperminc, and Damas (1998) studied the overall experiences of African American collegiate athletes and determined that the time demands associated with intercollegiate athletics made it difficult for athletes to become involved in student activities outside of athletics, which has been associated with positive student development. Sellers et al. surveyed 154 African American women athletes and reported that integration within the university community is positively associated with better academic performance for minority college students. In their study Sellers at al. explained that for both African American women and men, the racial climate of the college environment might also affect their feelings of integration and subsequent behavior and academic achievement. They discovered that even accounting for background differences (i.e. SES, high school GPA, SAT score), African American women student athletes' college life experiences differed in meaningful ways from both White women student athletes and African American men student athletes. For example, Sellers et al. (1998), reported that African American women athletes were similar to African American men athletes in terms of their social background and SAT scores, but differed in their high school and college GPA's. This finding indicated that African American women student athlete's satisfaction with their academic performance might be linked to relatively high expectations to succeed within the classroom. Results also demonstrated that African American student athletes were more satisfied with life in general than African American nonathletes (Sellers et al., 1998). This finding might be a result of African American women athletes believing that their athletic status provides them with a greater opportunity to learn social skills, gain opportunities, and be more assertive. Additionally, unlike nonathletes, collegiate athletes enter college with an automatic support system (i.e. their sport team) and successful integration and acceptance on a team may increase overall life satisfaction particularly for minority students.

Purpose. This literature review will explore the experiences of African American women student athletes to understand their unique experiences and how to better meet the needs of this student population using Gloria and Rodriquez's (2000) psychosociocultural (PSC) framework. This literature review organizes key factors related to the experiences of African American women athletes within this framework by exploring three aspects of an individual's identity: psychological (e.g. self-beliefs, attitudes, perceptions), social (e.g., networks, connections, role models, mentors), and cultural (e.g., values validation, meaningfulness; Gloria & Rodriquez, 2000). This literature review will explore how these intersecting identities might influence the sport experience for African American women collegiate athletes. It will also provide suggestions for the application of PSC framework for helping professionals as well as athletic departments to provide services for minority athletes and increase success rates.

**Understanding the Experiences of African American Women
Collegiate Athletes within the PSC Framework**

The PSC framework was originally created to investigate cultural phenomena that may contribute to persistence behaviors and psychological functioning, particularly for Latino/a undergraduate students (Gloria & Rodriquez, 2000). The PSC framework (see Figure 1) takes into account contextual and social factors that influence perseverance of students of color within the college setting. The PSC framework can also provide a framework for designing recommendations for administrative personnel and counseling center staff who work with students of color as a means to promote greater persistence and enhanced psychological functioning (Gloria & Rodriquez, 2000).

This framework has been extended beyond the experiences of Latino/a undergraduate students to explore the experiences of all students of color within a university setting. For example, Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) tested the PSC framework by examining the self-beliefs (psychological), social support (sociological), and comfort with the institution (cultural) of 98 African American undergraduates. Results from hierarchical regression analyses provided evidence that the psychological, social, and cultural variables predicted persistence decisions in African American undergraduates. Ultimately, African American students who made fewer nonpersistent decisions experienced greater cultural fit with the academic institution, reported greater social support from family and friends, and had higher levels of self-esteem (Gloria et al., 1999). Given this framework had already been used to explore the experiences of African American students, this framework could also be applied to the experiences of African American women athletes to provide a comprehensive lens from which to study their psychological well-being at a predominately White institution.

**Figure 1:
Psychosocialcultural (PSC) Framework**
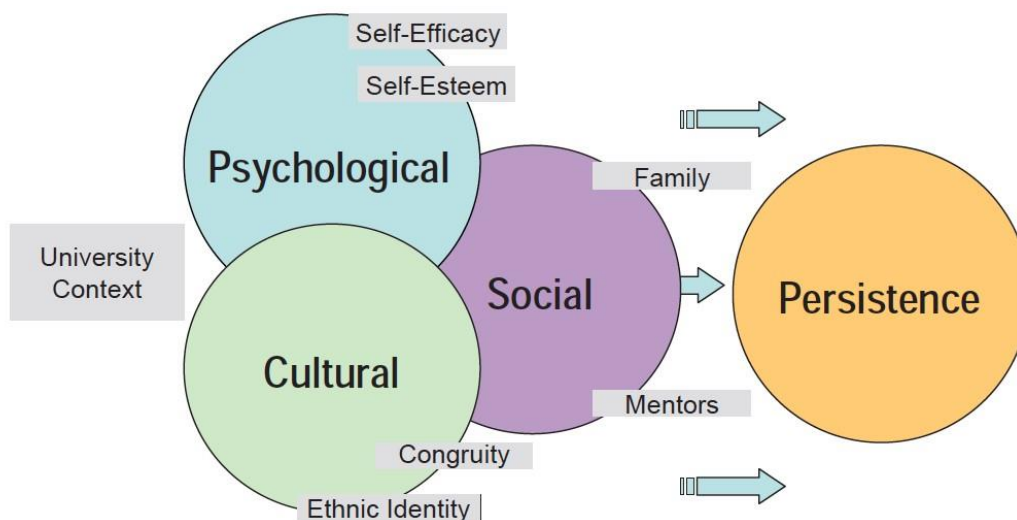
(Castellanos & Gloria, 2007)

Social

This section will explore social factors that impact the experiences of African American women athletes at predominately White institutions. In particular, this section focuses on constructs such as perceived isolation on campus, and social supports for athletes (their team, their families, and their religion).

Isolation. Previous literature has revealed that collegiate athletes may experience periods of isolation within their college environment as they attempt to balance their roles of being a student and an athlete (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005). Carodine, Almond and Gratto (2001) stated "the disconnection to campus that this [the level of commitment] creates can result in a negative experience for the student" (p. 20). Carodine et al. suggested that institutions should create supportive environments for student athletes to reduce feelings of isolation on campus. As racial minorities at a predominately White institution, African American women might encounter additional episodes of isolation. For example, Harmon (2009) indicated that periods of isolation might be intensified when African American women athletes feel as though they cannot fully express parts of their racial identity or do not feel like they are receiving adequate social support.

Thomas, Love, Roan-Belle, Brown, and Garriott (2009) stated that acknowledging barriers that may exist for African American women within higher education settings, such as at predominately White institutions, and ensuring culturally relevant institutional supports are in place have been proven to provide empowering and validating experiences for African American women. When supportive climate factors are present, it allows students to focus more on their studies and their athletic endeavors rather than issues such as discrimination, racism, and sexism, which if left unnoticed may have decreased their motivation to perform well in school (Thomas et al., 2009).

Team Support. Due to the rigorous demands and commitment of a collegiate sport, most athletes' social support networks consist primarily of people associated with their particular sport. Although, African American women athletes might receive social support by their teammates, the lack of diversity on the coaching staff might impact their athletic experience. Even after the passage of Title IX, it appears women coaching women's teams still do not represent the majority of coaches in the women's sports. During the 2013-2014 season, women only held 38.2% of the head coaching jobs for women's sports in Division I, which was a 0.5% decrease from the 2012-2013 season (Lapchick, 2015). In Division I women's basketball, African-American women head coaches held 10.6% of the positions in 2013-14 and African- American men held 3.7% of the positions in 2013-14 for a combined percentage of 14.3% African American coaches, which is a significant decrease from the 20.6% that was reported in 2012-13. Nonetheless, the 10.6% of African American women coaches does not compare to the 51.1% of the African-American women student-athletes who played basketball (Lapchick, 2015).

For some African-American women athletes, being highly visible and not having a role model can also add stress and anxiety to their lives (Cokley & Helm, 2007). Therefore, having same-sex role coaches could be beneficial for women athletes. For example, Officer and Rosenfeld (1985) examined the effects of sport team membership and coaches' gender on the self-disclosing behavior of high school female athletes. They found that although the athletes disclosed the same amount of information to their respective men and women coaches, women athletes perceived their male coach primarily as an authority figure whereas more intimate conversations were shared with female

coaches. Officer and Rosenfeld also reviewed several studies indicating that female athletes are more likely than their male counterparts to disclose personal feelings to coaches whom they perceive as nonthreatening. It is likely that female athletes may be more dependent than male athletes on positive communication with their coaches (Officer & Rosenfeld, 1985).

Another study sought to determine if there were racial differences in the amount of support that students receive while playing a sport, specifically basketball (Harris, 1994). Using a sample from two male high school basketball leagues, 116 African Americans, 59 Whites, and 12 "others" were selected to complete questionnaires that assessed their sport involvement, social support, and sport aspirations. Unlike previous studies that indicated familial support was a major influence for African Americans, results indicated that African Americans were more often encouraged to participate in sports by nonparent significant others (teachers, coaches, friends) than Whites (25% compared to 5% respectively). It was also found that the type of school (private versus public) influenced social support such that African American males in private schools were more supported by their mothers and teachers than White males. Lastly, results indicated that African Americans who attended private schools were more likely to receive support for sport careers than White athletes particularly from parents, coaches, and friends (Harris, 1994). Since this study was conducted using a sample of African American males, future research should be done to analyze if this information holds true for African American females.

Familial Support. Previous studies have also supported the view that parents play a role in the transmission of stereotypes and gender roles to their children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Fredricks and Eccles used the Eccles expectancy-value model to assess whether parent socialization impacts their child's perceived competence, value, and participation in a sport. They also sought to determine if a child's gender was related to three aspects of parent socialization (i.e. role modeling, sharing beliefs, providing emotional support). For their sample, Fredricks and Eccles used a group of primarily Caucasian mothers and fathers and their 2nd, 3rd, and 5th graders from a larger study to complete questionnaires across a year. Results indicated that compared to parents of girls, parents of boys hold higher perceptions of their child's sport competence and consider sport as more important, even after controlling for children's' actual physical ability. Moreover, parents seem to provide fewer encouragements and sport opportunities to girls than boys (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Further studies should be conducted to assess whether these findings could be applied to African American youth.

Melendez and Melendez (2010) surveyed 27 African American female college students to assess how parental attachment affected college adjustment. The results indicated the affective quality of African American students' relationships with their parents had a meaningful impact on the students' success in coping with the educational demands of college (e.g. keeping up with academic work). They also discovered that a relationship with their parents improved their physical and psychological states as well as the degree to which they experienced general psychological distress and/or somatic problems in college (Melendez & Melendez, 2010).

Researchers have also discovered that household configuration and socioeconomic status might impact an African American athletes academic success in college (Sellers, 1992). For example, a survey was distributed to 409 male basketball players and 917 football players across 42 Division I institutions to investigate if racial differences contribute to the academic success of student athletes. Results indicated that a mother's income seemed to influence the academic performance of African

American athletes more than a father's income. This finding might be possible due to the significant number of African American children who are raised in a single- mother home. According to Sellers, a mother's income can impact the educational opportunities afforded to African American children since an income can affect the quality of schools a student attends.

Additionally, another study also investigated the perceptions of social support minority student athletes receive at a predominately White institution (Thompson, 2010). For this study, eleven minority student athletes (five male and six female) were recruited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. Using qualitative measures allowed the researcher to gather information pertaining to the types of social support that this population receives. Results suggested emotional support, informational support, tangible assistance, task appreciation support, and esteem support from family members were critical for minority student athletes. Emotional support from family members was beneficial during challenging experiences (e.g. adjusting to college) and informational support encouraged students during times of uncertainty. It also seemed important for the families of minority athletes to attend games as a means of showing their support. The sample also indicated that receiving esteem support from their families was important because it gave the athletes hope and perseverance. Lastly, in addition to the scholarships many student athletes receive in college, it was found that receiving additional tangible (i.e. monetary) support from family members, especially during difficult times, could be beneficial (Thompson, 2010). Overall, these means of support for minority athletes tend to make them feel better about themselves and their athletic performance.

Religious Support. Previous research has shown that another important means for support for African American women is religion. Religious activity and religious organizations often represent ways in which people find social support and a feeling of belonging. Although social support has been found to make a profound impact on health, the uniqueness of African American religious experiences could have special benefits to health (Ferraro & Koch, 1994). Ferraro and Koch reported that religion serves as a social support for African Americans and the link between religion and health is stronger for African Americans than Whites. Additionally, data indicated that nearly eight-in-ten African-Americans (79%) say religion is very important in their lives. Results also indicated that most African American women (84%) say religion is very important to them, and 59% say they attend religious services at least once a week. No group of men or women from any other racial or ethnic background exhibited comparably high levels of religious observance (Ferraro & Koch, 1994).

Conclusions. It is evident that three main social variables may contribute to an African American woman's athletic experience: collegiate environment, support systems, and representations in society can impact their experience as a student-athlete. For example, if an athletic environment is not supportive, particularly for African American athletes, than the athlete may feel isolated on campus and have to discover additional methods of support. To navigate the experience of being an African American women athlete, it seems that this population seeks support from athletic teams, families, and religious affiliations. These social factors may be impacted by the unique intersection of race and gender for African American female athletes.

Cultural

African American women athletes may be exposed to several cultural variables that could impact their experience at a predominately White institution. The intersection of race, gender, and occupation (i.e., being a student athlete) can create unique experiences for this population. Therefore,

this section explores the intersectionality of identities for African American women athletes such as their racial identity, gender identify and their athletic identity. This section also seeks to provide a review of literature about the influence of the media, the idea of hyper- masculinity as well as the objectification of African American women.

Racial Identity. African American women have to contend with historically rooted stereotypes of African American women athletes as masculine and sexually promiscuous (Liberti, 1999). They have wrestled with the challenge of "double jeopardy" or "double consciousness" since slavery due to the reality that African American women have encountered multiple oppressions through race and gender (Collins, 1998). Double consciousness was a termed coined by W.E.B Du Bois referring to the "internal conflict in the African American individual between what was 'African' and what was 'American'" (Bruce 1992, p. 301). Since this time, African American women have had to overcome sexist and racist images of African American women such as the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker,
2013). The Mammy is portrayed as an obese and dark-skinned woman, who is also nurturing, selfless, and a good problem solver. The Sapphire is seen as nagging, controlling of men, loud, and argumentative while the Jezebel is perceived as seductive, sexy, and always wanting sex.

In a social environment where a particular racial group membership is emphasized, such as at a predominately White institution, the development of a racial identity will occur in some form in every student of color. Given that African American women athletes undertake a range of experiences and strategies to lessen their marginalization, it is important to understand how African American women athletes navigate their racial identity development. According to Cross's 1971 model of African American racial identity development, there are five stages in the process, identified as Preencounter (characterized by conscious or unconscious devaluing of African Americanness while concurrently valuing White values and ways), Encounter (characterized by two events a) the individual encounters a profound crisis or event that challenges his or her previous mode of thinking and behaving b) the individual begins to reinterpret the world), Immersion/Emersion (characterized by an intense involvement of African American culture), Internalization (characterized by the acceptance of one's African Americanness), and Internalization/Commitment (characterized by the individuals commitment toward social change, social justice, and civil rights; Sue & Sue 2013). Cross's Racial Identity Model has influenced other scholars in higher education to explore identity for its students. For example, Banks (1976) created a five-stage model for African American identity similar to Cross's which is composed of 1) ethnic psychological captivity, 2) ethnic encapsulation stage, 3) ethnic identity clarification, 4) bi-ethnicity, and 5) multi-ethnicity. Stage four and five, like that of focus on the African American students' ability to function within the dominant cultures society, numerous cultures, and their own cultural environment. Therefore, PWIs, counselors, administrators, and coaches must be able to understand the importance of race identification by enabling African American athletes' the opportunity to adjust as a subculture within the university populace.

Using the stages of Cross's Racial Identity Scale, Elion, Slaney, Wang, and French (2012) examined the constructs of perfectionism, academic achievement, self-esteem, and racial identity among 219 African American college students. By using the Almost Perfect Scale – Revised (APS-R) three clusters were created that represented adaptive perfectionists (i.e. individuals who are striving toward perfection), maladaptive perfectionists (i.e. individuals who self-criticize over perceived imperfection), and nonperfectionists. These three groups were compared on their scores on the

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D), the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), and Grade Point Average (GPA). On the racial identity scales, maladaptive perfectionists had high scores on Pre-Encounter Self Hatred and Immersion-Emersion Anti-White subscales than adaptive perfectionists. Additionally, high Standards (i.e. high standards and expectations one has for her or his performance) scores were positively associated with being multiculturally inclusive (i.e. open to other cultures while holding an acceptance of being African American as a foundation). Additionally, high Discrepancy (i.e. the degree to which one perceives oneself as failing to meet her or his standards) scores were associated with stages where race is more salient, such as Preencounter Self-Hatred, Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, and Afrocentric. Results also indicated that adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists did not have significantly different GPA's; however, they did discover that GPA was positively associated with Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive and negatively correlated with Pre-Encounter Miseducation (i.e. stereotypical views about other Blacks; Elion et al., 2012).

In addition, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001) surveyed 562 African American youth and discovered that Black students with more Eurocentric and Immersion racial identities showed lower academic performance, whereas high academic achievement was associated with high Afrocentric and low Eurocentric identities. Therefore, results from these studies, illustrated that African Americans who positively identified with their racial group have high scores on measures of academic achievement (Spencer et al., 2000; Elion et al., 2012).

As previously mentioned, there have been other scales developed that investigate racial identity. For example, Chavous, Smalls, Rivas-Drake, Griffin, and Cogburn (2008) conducted a quantitative study with 410 African American adolescents to identify relationships among racial identity, school-based racial discrimination experiences, and academic engagement outcomes. Their study intended to analyze if racial identity could be used as a protective factor against episodes of perceived racial discrimination. Results indicated that adolescent girls with high racial centrality were protected against the negative impact of peer discrimination on school importance and academic self-concept. In this article, racial centrality is defined as "the extent to which youths view their racial group as a defining part of their self-concepts" (Chavous et al., 2008, p. 639). This term originated as a subscale of the Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI) which was created to explore how an individual's racial identity might academic success by analyzing three scales (centrality, regard, and ideology; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). On the MMBI, centrality is defined as "the extent to which a person normatively defines her or himself with regard to race," ideology is considered an "individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with regard to the way she or he feels that members of the race should act" and regard is "a person's affective and evaluative judgment of her or his race" (Sellers et al., 1997, p. 806). Therefore, African American girls may show resilience in racially hostile schooling environments due to cultural socialization from families and communities emphasizing higher educational expectations. On the other hand, for adolescent girls who presented low levels of racial centrality, peer discrimination related positively to academic self-concept (Chavous et al., 2008). They also suggested that girls with low racial centrality are not likely to view race as a self-defining factor and viewed the discrimination as directed towards the entire racial group, rather than the individual.

Additionally, Lawrence (2005) conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences of eight African American athletes. Interviews were used to gather a deeper understanding of race and race discrimination and how it influenced the careers of African American athletes. From the interviews,

five major themes emerged that reflected African American athletes' experiences of race in sport such as being hurt, outrage and shock, team togetherness, being empowered, and differences. Results indicated that African American athletes, regardless of gender, are constantly aware of their visible differences and were hurt, shocked and outraged by the racial incidents they experience on campus. Results also indicated that athletes are aware of the contradictions/expectations that are present among certain people (e.g. coaches, fans, teammates, and administrators) and certain places (e.g. classrooms, in the athletic arena, restaurants). This demonstrated how the perceptions of a student athlete might change from the classroom to the athletic arena (Lawrence, 2005).

Another study also assessed racial identity by using quantitative measures to explore the relationships among Africentric cultural values, self-esteem, perceived social support satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Constantine, Alleyene, Wallace, & Franklin-Jackson, 2006). Researchers surveyed 147 African American girls and found that individuals who endorsed more Africentric values and viewed their racial identity positively had higher self-esteem. This finding suggested that African American girls who adopt more Eurocentric values might have lower self- esteem. Additionally, African American girls with high levels of Africentric values were related to higher levels of social support satisfaction. This might be possible given that "communalism" is an important aspect of Africentric values since many African Americans feel a sense of responsibility for one another and the community (p. 150). Lastly, African American women with high Africentric values also had higher life satisfaction. Researchers stated, "that the more African American girls possess a value system that positively reflects their cultural group orientation, the more likely they are to feel satisfied with their lives" (Constantine et al., 2006, p.150).

Based on the previous studies, it appears that African American women athletes who have a better understanding of their racial identity might be able to handle the challenges of being a minority student at a predominately White institution better than athletes who are still learning and exploring their racial identity. Those minority athletes who view race as a critical component of their identity are likely to have resources to overcome episodes of racial discrimination and use their identity as a tool to be successful in both their sport and in the classroom.

Gender Identity. Cokley and Moore (2007) surveyed 274 African American college students to examine the degree to which gender moderates the relationship between ethnic identity and academic achievement as well as examine whether psychological disengagement (i.e. devaluing academic success) mediates gender differences in the academic achievement. Psychological disengagement is defined as the detachment of self-esteem from outcomes in a particular area (as cited in Cokley & Moore, 2007). For this study, psychological disengagement can decrease academic achievement when a student's self-esteem becomes disconnected from their grades. Results indicated that African American women high in ethnic identity experienced an increase in GPA. Results also showed that African American women do not devalue academic success more than African American men. Cokley and Moore suggested this finding might be accurate as African American women may be exposed to more African American women role models in the classroom than their male counterparts. High racial identity may also be related to high academic achievement for women because African American women do not experience the cool-pose culture that is experienced by African American men. The cool-pose culture indicates that many male Black youth derive respect, self-esteem, and a sense of identity from non- academically oriented activities related to pop culture and athletics, whereas this is not the same for African American women (Cokley & Moore, 2007).

Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) also analyzed the racial identity of African American women by researching dyadic focus groups of 17 African American women between the ages of 15-21 to assess their meaning and salience of gendered racial identity. Results revealed that African American women reflected a greater degree of saliency for issues of gendered race more often than experiences of race and gender as single constructs, suggesting high levels of salience to the intersection of race and gender in their identity. Participants also discussed the influence of negative images and stereotypes of Black women and their need to overcome them and engage in the process of self-determination (Thomas et al., 2011).

Researchers have also explored the ways gender roles, racial identity, and self-esteem impact African American adolescents (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Their study consisted of 200 African American high school adolescents who completed questionnaires that assessed factors that might influence positive self-esteem. Results indicated gender role orientation impacted self- esteem such that African American girls who presented more masculine or androgynous (i.e. "both masculine and feminine characteristics") gender roles reported higher self-esteems (p. 656). Additionally, they discovered that girls with high racial identity scores (i.e. identified as pro-Black or pro all racial groups) had more self-esteem. This finding suggests that African American girls who are proud of their race tend to have higher self-esteem. Lastly, gender orientation and racial identity were related due to African American girls who scored higher on the racial identity scale also presented a more androgynous gender role (Buckley & Carter, 2005).

Athletic Identity. The psychological well-being of African American women athletes can be influenced by the challenges of not only grappling with the development of their cultural and racial identity, but also their athletic identity. However, the development of an athletic identity can be problematic for some African Americans in an athletic context where African American women athletes have to cope with the prejudices and discrimination that can be associated with being a women and being African American. Therefore, African American women athletes are not only aware of the historical gendered stereotypes of African American women, but also of the stereotypes of being an African American athlete.

Stereotype threat occurs in a situation where there is an expectation that one may be judged on the basis of social group membership and there is a negative stereotype about one's social identity group (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Hively and El-Alayli (2012) conducted a study with female and male tennis and basketball college athletes to determine the effect of stereotype threat on women's athletic performance. The participants were randomly placed into either the threat or no-threat condition and were asked to perform either a basketball or tennis task. The researchers were able to manipulate threat by informing the threat group that their task was an assessment of their natural ability while the no-threat group were told that men and women perform equally (Hively & El-Alayli, 2012). After the sport task, participants were asked to complete a survey assessing gender differences on the various tasks that were performed during the study. Results indicated that women often underperformed at an athletic task when told that it was measuring their natural ability. Therefore, it appears that when women are faced with stereotype threat it negatively impacts their athletic performance. (Hively & El-Alayli, 2014).

Hyper-masculinity in African American Women. As previously mentioned, African American women athletes are typically seen in sports such as basketball and track. These sports typically

require a certain body type, which has been defined as non-lean. The term non-lean implies that an athlete is stockier and possesses more muscle mass (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003). The attraction to non-lean sports for African American women also could present another barrier for African American women athletes known as hyper-masculinity. Hyper-masculinity is a social phenomenon that makes African American women athletes objects of ridicule, weakness, inferiority, decoration, and erotically desirable, yet transgressive (McKay & Johnson, 2008). Hyper-masculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of male behavior (Hyper- masculinity, 2013). There are many stereotypes and assumptions that are made about African American women athletes. For example, there is the assumption that if you are good at a particular sport then you are a lesbian. There is a common assumption that the more masculine a woman athlete is, the better they will perform (Liberti, 1999). In a 2014 online article by Paul Thomson, he reported that the president of the Russian Tennis Federation, Shamil Tarpischev, made racist comments about women's tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams, which caused him to be removed from his position for one year by the Women's Tennis Association and fined $25,000. Thomson reported that Tarpischev referred to the women as "the Williams brothers," saying it's "frightening when you look at them" during a talk show interview. It appeared that the root of Tarpischev's comments builds off of a history of oppression for African American women as they have been historically desexualized to the point of masculinization or hypersexualized and deemed "exotic" or "other worldly." Therefore, it seems that Tarpischev's comments were not simply about the Williams sisters' size or body types but, rather, directly linked to their race (Thomson, 2014).

Prior to the aforementioned situation, Serena Williams had encountered another situation in which an individual critiqued her physique. In a 2012 online article by Lucette Jefferson, she reported about when Caroline Wozniacki, a Danish professional tennis player, stuffed her chest and shorts with padding to imitate Serena. Jefferson indicated that Wozniacki was received by laughter as she walked on the court with larger breasts and bottom. Although Serena Williams is the top ranked women's tennis player in the world, her importance was reduced to her body shape simply because her physique did not match the majority of her fellow women tennis players. This recent sport event parallels the lived reality of Sara Baartman, a South African woman who lived during the 1800's. In her article, Tillet (2009) retells Baartman's story by describing how Baartman's "Hottentot" body was displayed around Europe. Tillet explains how a British surgeon found Baartman after becoming fascinated with her large buttocks and elongated labia, and she ultimately became a spectacle for people around England.

Media Influence. This idea of being highly visible can be a result of the consistent attention that athletes receive from the media. Ruggiero and Lattin (2008) indicated that despite the number of African American women in collegiate sports, the combination of predominately White media and White coaching staff essentially creates an environment of racialized and gendered representations. For example, Bruening et al. (2005) conducted focus groups with 12 African American female athletes to examine their sport participant patterns. Results of their qualitative study suggested that African-American women athletes' voices were silenced in sport by the media. Bruening et al., referred to the "silencing" that African-American women experience in sport as a lack of voice and also as underrepresentation. Although African American women and men are over-represented as sports figures, Bruening et al. suggested that the portrayal of this image with the exclusion of other positive images could lead to the stereotyping of African American individuals. Through focus groups, participants of this study indicated that the media tends to mainly show African-American women athletes playing basketball or track, and they are seldom shown on television playing other

sports. Results indicated that a lack of exposure and opportunities afforded to African-American women in sport (specifically in non-revenue producing sports) aid in silencing African-American women (Bruening et al., 2005). Ultimately, the media seems critical in the lives of young children because if young African-American women do not see very many African American women playing certain sports, they are not likely to participate in that sport.

Additionally, Ward (2004) surveyed 156 African American high school students (70% female) to analyze the ways media exposure might impact the self-esteem and racial self-esteem of African American youth. Results indicated that exposure to sports programming and music videos predicted lower self-esteem for African American youth. Ward elaborated on this finding by suggesting that sports figures and music artists are typically admired individuals for African American youth. Therefore, it is possible that the sexual desirability, wealth, and lifestyles of these figures may encourage upward social comparisons, making Black youth feel inadequate by comparison (Ward, 2004).

In their study to analyze whether racial and gender stereotyping exist in college basketball announcing, Eastman and Billings (2005) conducted an analysis of 1156 descriptors in sportscaster commentary during 66 televised men's and women's college basketball games. Results of their study indicated that traditional prejudices about African American athletes (e.g. being naturally athletic or lacking leadership abilities) persist in sports announcing despite changing times and the increased number of minority and women announcers in college basketball. Results also indicated that announcers favored White women over African American women in regard to athletic consonance (i.e. the notion that everything comes together at a moment that impacts the athletic experience; Eastman & Billings, 2005).

Poran (2006) addressed the ways the media misrepresents young African American women through focus groups with 15 African American college students. Her study examined these misrepresentations in relation to sexism, racism, and colorism. Results indicated that African American women were highly critical of present imagery of African American women and engaged in analyses of the images of Africa American women and the ways these images influenced African American women's sense of self (Poran, 2006).

The media also tends to portray the bodies of African American women athletes in a negative manner. In their article, Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) provide an overview of sexual objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and then expand on this theory to explain various ways sexual objectification can impact women. In athletics, there are many cases of athletes being driven to use illegal substances. Although in sports we typically assume substances are used as a means to enhance performance, Szymanski et al. suggested that sexual objectification may also be a reason that women use/abuse substances due to sexually objectifying media images. Their article reported that women might develop substance abuse problems as well as mental health problems as a result of societal pressures to be thin or if they continuously encounter sexist situations. Szymanski et al. stated that women are more likely to encounter sexist situations in "sexually objectifying environments" (p.20). They defined sexually objectifying environments as places that consist of traditional male gender roles, frequent male contact, gendered power differences, attention to female bodies, and the need of male gaze. Given these criteria, it appears that sports could be considered a type of sexually objectifying environment, specifically when acknowledging that many

women's sports such as ballet, dancing, cheerleading, and track have tighter and shorter uniforms which tend to accentuate the female body.

Objectification of African American Women. This idea of objectification is a concept that many African American women athletes tend to encounter. Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a framework for understanding the experience of being female in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body. For example, Harrison and Fredrickson (2003) surveyed 426 adolescent females to assess the impact of sports media exposure on adolescents' body perceptions. Results indicated that objectification theory might also be used to predict how media messages teach individuals to adopt a specific view of themselves. In their study, Harrison and Fredrickson discovered that reading sports magazines was linked to decreased body shame and disordered eating among participants regardless of body mass or race. A second component of their study allowed participants to watch videos depicting men's sports, women's lean sports, or women's non-lean sports. Their study revealed that participants of color seemed to disregard the skinny look of the lean athletes as personally irrelevant, but linked the larger, fuller bodies of the non-lean athletes to thoughts of their own body shape and size, resulting in increased self-objectification (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003).

Additionally, Moradi and Huang's (2008) literature review about self-objectification revealed that self-objectification results in low internal bodily awareness, disconnection from bodily functions, decreased flow states, difficulties in task performance, increased body shame, high appearance anxiety, and eating disorders. For example, Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar and Yoder (2008) explored 117 African American college women's skin tone dissatisfaction and body shame (as cited in Moradi & Huang, 2008). Results found that when a person consistently and negatively analyzes their skin tone, it can lead to skin-tone dissatisfaction as well as general shame regarding body shape and size. In addition to skin tone, Falconer and Neville (2000) analyzed body image and skin tone satisfaction among 124 African American women and reported that African American women who were less satisfied with their skin color were also less satisfied with their overall appearance. Skin color satisfaction was also significantly related to an internalized acceptance of societal beliefs of beauty and satisfaction with specific body areas (e.g., hair, hips, and thighs). Unlike previous studies Falconer and Neville found that African American women with higher body mass indices were likely to report satisfaction with specific aspects of their bodies. This may indicate that the African American culture is more accepting of larger women rather than society's thin ideal. Additionally, high levels of Black self-consciousness were related to more body area satisfaction. This finding supports previous empirical research stating that racial identity can influence an African American women's self- perception (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, and Nazari (2012) also conducted a grounded theory analysis to further understand African American women's experiences with sexual objectification within intersecting systems of oppression. Using semi-structured interviews they assessed the experiences of 20 participants. Results created a theory that combined elements of Black Feminist Theory and Objectification Theory. Participants in their study noted experiencing several different forms of sexual objectification including body evaluation, sexualized imagery of African American women, and unwanted sexual advances and/or experiences. These experiences seemed to contribute to many harmful effects among African American women, such as self-objectification, disordered eating behaviors, physical safety, and psychological consequences (Watson et al., 2012). Despite these harmful effects, their theory illustrated that many African American women developed coping skills

and resiliency against these negative consequences. Participants frequently relied upon social support, spiritual and/or religious affiliations, emotion-focused and cognitive coping, and personal responses to objectifies as well as sought avenues for growth within these experiences (Watson et al., 2012).

Previous research has also found that external and internalized sexual objectification is likely to be influenced by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In their review of literature surrounding objectification, Fredrickson and Roberts discussed how women of color might experience objectification differently due to a history of oppression. They referenced how the beauty of women seems to be continuously compared to White women and that women of color have had to create "protective factors" to cope with the objectification they undergo (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 197). Therefore, it seems that minority women's experiences of sexual objectification occur within interlocking forms of oppression, which may impact both their risk and response to sexual objectification as well as negatively affect their mental health (Szymanski, Mofitt, & Carr, 2011).

Conclusions. It is evident that many historical references and stereotypes of not only African American people, but of also African American women continue to shape how society may view African American women athletes. Throughout this section there were also several references to the ways culture can also impact the psychological well-being of African American women athletes. For example, it appears that factors such as stereotype threat and sexual objectification can impeded an athlete's performance academically and athletically. Ultimately, it will be beneficial for helping professionals as well as individuals who have direct contact with the student-athlete to create an environment in which all aspects of the athlete's identity are being supported.

Psychological

This section seeks to explore the psychological factors associated with being an African American women athlete a predominately White Institution. The factors reviewed in this section include coping strategies and motivation.

Coping Strategies. There has been previous research that describes how African American women tend to cope with stress. For example, Matthews and Hughes (2001) indicated that African Americans tend to cope with mental health problems by using informal resources such as church, family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Studies have also found that African American athletes are more prone to utilizing avoidance coping strategies as a means to cope with stress (Anshel, Sutarso, & Jubenville, 2009). Anshel et al. surveyed 332 student athletes (59 African American, 232 Caucasian, and 41 Hispanic) and discovered that African American athletes distance themselves mentally from unpleasant encounters by using one or more of the following avoidance coping strategies: a) discounting, in which the athlete perceives the unpleasant message as unimportant, b) psychological distancing, in which the athlete considers the communicator of the message (i.e. the coach) lacking credibility, or c) spiritual reframing, in which the athlete uses their spirituality as a coping mechanism.

Shorter-Gooden (2004) conducted a qualitative study of 196 African American women to identify coping strategies African American women use to manage the stress of racism and sexism. Findings revealed three immediate coping strategies, three internal coping resources, and one external coping

resource that provide African American women ways to respond to discrimination. The three specific coping strategies that were used to resist the impact of racism and sexism included a) role flexing, b) avoiding, and c) standing up and fighting back (Shorter- Gooden, 2004). These three coping strategies could be transferable for African American women athletes as they try to disprove stereotypes about being an African American woman athlete (i.e. by using role flexing) as well as avoid situations, people, or topics that might illicit biases and prejudices. African American women may also use coping strategies to actively challenge sources of biases and prejudices. The three internal resources included a) relying on faith, b) standing on shoulders (i.e. strength from one's heritage), and c) valuing oneself. Leaning on shoulders (i.e. utilizing social supports) was the one external resource that was used by the participants, which could relate to the ways African American women rely on resources outside of themselves to cope with racism and sexism (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Hunt (2012) also analyzed the strategies that African American women use to cope with gendered racial microaggressions. Gendered racial microaggressions refers to negative experiences that attack one's race and gender. This term originated to illustrate the "complexity of oppression experiences by Black women based on racist perceptions of gender roles" (as cited in Lewis et al., 2012, p. 53). Their study involved 17 African American college students, who participated in a focus group. Results from a dimensional analysis indicated the following coping strategies: two resistance coping strategies (i.e., Using One's Voice as Power and Resisting Eurocentric Standards), one collective coping strategy (i.e., Leaning on One's Support Network), and two self-protective coping strategies (i.e., Becoming a Black Superwoman and Becoming Desensitized and Escaping). In regard to being a student athlete at a predominately White institution, it seems that "Using One's Voice as Power," "Leaning on One's Support Network," and "Becoming Desensitized and Escaping" would be beneficial for African American women athletes. For example, when "Using One's Voice as Power" an African American woman athlete could speak up and address microaggressions they might encounter. By "Leaning on One's Support Network" an African American woman athlete could utilize social networks to cope with microaggressions as well as have their experience normalized when they encounter other African American women. Lastly, as previously mentioned there are several barriers and periods of perceived discrimination that African American women might encounter so by "Becoming Desensitized and Escaping" it can make challenging situations more tolerable.

Motivation. Amorose and Horn (2000) conducted a study to examine the relationships among athletes' intrinsic motivation, gender, scholarship status, perceptions of the number of their teammates receiving scholarships, and perceptions of their coaches' behaviors. After surveying 386 male and female student athletes from a Division I institution, they discovered that student athletes, regardless of gender, who are on full athletic scholarships have higher levels of intrinsic motivation than nonscholarship athletes. Therefore, receiving a scholarship may make athletes feel more inclined to perform well academically and athletically so that they can remain on a path towards success (Amorose & Horn, 2000). This finding may also hold true for African American women athletes given that athletics is seen as a route to upward mobility within the African American community.

African American women athletes may perform better in the classroom due to factors that might impact their motivation. For example, current scholars are suggesting that seeking paths of higher education should become a priority within the African American community (Lomotey, 1997). For some African American students, attainment of a college degree may be facilitated through an athletic scholarship. In 2013, the NCAA revealed that 3.7% of African American high school seniors

girls will go on to play women's basketball at a NCAA member institution. However, the percentage of African American women who pursue a career in a professional sport upon graduation decreases significantly from the percentages that played sports in college. For example, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) will only draft 0.9% of NCAA women basketball players by the after their senior year (NCAA, 2013). Knowing that the probability of continuing to a professional sport is very unlikely for most collegiate women, athletics may cause women to be more invested in academics and more aware of their intersecting identities.

Additionally, Gaston-Gayles (2004) surveyed 211 college athletes at a Division 1 institution to examine the ways academic and athletic motivation might predict academic performance. She developed a scale entitled the Student Athlete's Motivation Toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ) that assessed academic and athletic motivation. Results of her study indicated that ACT score, ethnicity, and academic motivation impacted athletic performance. A higher ACT score coupled by increased academic motivation seem to lead to a higher GPA. It was also found that African Americans tend to score lower on their ACT, which ultimately lead to lower academic motivation once they entered college (Gatson-Gayles, 2004).

Lastly, Ting (2009) surveyed 109 student athletes to assess if standardized test scores and noncognitive variables (e.g. acquired knowledge in a field, community service, positive self-concept, and preference for long-term goals) predicted student athletes' GPA and persistence in the first year of college. By analyzing the results of the noncognitive questionnaire, GPA, and standardized test scores, Ting discovered that noncognitive predictors impacted a student athletes' 1st year GPA. Results indicated that helping student athletes to participate in opportunities for their psychosocial development (e.g. adjustment, motivation, and perception), to develop long-term goals, and to understand potential applications of their academic majors are important for academic success. Additionally, participation in community service seemed to be related to student athlete academic success because it allows athletes to see their abilities outside of their sport and make a meaning contribution to society (Ting, 2009).

Conclusions. It seems that juggling the additional role of being an athlete can impact an African American woman's psychological well-being. However, it appears that African American women have developed ways not only to cope with challenges they might encounter, but also ways to perform well academically and athletically. There are many ways that African American women can persevere through these challenges such as through sources of positive internal and external motivation. It seems that enhanced coping strategies and increased levels of motivation may contribute to a more positive collegiate experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present literature review seeks to serve as a foundation for research about the lived experiences of African American women athletes who attend PWIs since there is a current gap in the research about this population. Since African American women are considered the "double jeopardy" the PSC framework can be used to analyze the holistic experience of African American women athletes by exploring elements such as the individual, the environment, and their culture (Collins, 1998). Within these categories, several themes have been identified which illustrates the unique experience of African American women athletes. For example, it seems that certain stereotypes about African American women may affect the development of their social support and self-esteem, which

ultimately impacts their psychological well-being. On the other hand, being a student athlete can present areas of perceived growth for African American women. For example, participation in sports may result in the development of skills and competencies that are important in later life such as learning to make commitments, self-control, patience, and discipline (Sellers et al., 1998). It also seems that the intersecting identities of being African American, woman, and an athlete impact the overall collegiate experience.

Given the limited literature on the experiences of African American women athletes, a study using the PSC framework should be conducted to assess how the lived experiences of African American women athletes differ from other athletes and even African American women non-athletes. To gather data about the experiences of African American women athletes, semi- structured interviews should be conducted with the participants that assess psychological, social and cultural aspects of their experiences. Below are examples of questions that could be incorporated in a qualitative study:

1. Psychological: Can you describe a situation where you felt like you discriminated against or treated differently because of your race and gender (or as a African American woman) during your sport career?
    i. How did you cope with the situation?
2. Social: As an African American woman collegiate athlete, can you describe what your experience has been at a predominately White institution? What has your experience been with your coaches, teammates, peers, and faculty members?
3. Cultural: In today's society, it often seems that women who play sports, especially African American women, are recognized for their physical appearance more than their sport accomplishments. Can you share your thoughts on this topic?

There is a growing appreciation for the use of qualitative research to study the experiences of athletes. Collecting data by talking and listening gives the researcher a personal view of many aspects of being African American and a woman in the collegiate sport setting. Qualitative studies can provide a detailed perspective of the experiences of African American women athletes whose voices can be muffled by traditional studies of women athlete outcomes. Additionally, qualitative studies offer African American women athletes an opportunity to tell their own stories of life and athletic performance, which benefits both the athlete and the entire world. In addition to the PSC framework, it may also be beneficial for future researchers to incorporate elements of African American feminist theory (Collins, 1998) to guide their interview protocol as well as how they view the experiences of African American women athletes. A primary feminist principle focused on by African American women is having a voice (Collins, 1998). Therefore, African American feminist thought emphasizes the importance of the visibility of African American women.

Studies using quantitative measures could also provide additional information about the ways intersecting identities impact the athletic experience for African American women athletes. For example, through quantitative measures a research project could explore additional findings about psychological experiences of African American women athletes by assessing how this population copes with episodes of perceived discrimination at a PWI. Additionally, since only a few African American women continue into professional sports leagues after their undergraduate careers, quantitative measures could also assess social supports that African American women athletes have during their transition from a student athlete to a particular career. Lastly, a study could be created to assess how stereotypes associated with a particular group (e.g. race and gender) can impact how others view employment opportunities that available to that group. For example, researchers could

develop a study where students are instructed to observe a variety of headshots and then designated a job with the particular image. It would be interesting to see how many participants pair the African American woman's face with the career option of professional athlete.

Results from a study using the PSC framework could help Athletic Departments implement workshops or services that can address the psychological, social, and cultural factors of their students, especially minority athletes. For example, to solve some of the problematic issues relating to student athlete academic performance and motivation, a group of former student-athletes, created a nonprofit called Scholar-Baller that utilizes culturally relevant incentive based educational programs at the high school and college levels (Harrison et al., 2010). Harrison et al. indicated that this program helps to bridge the gap between education, sport, and popular culture to help reposition the current role of sport in American society. Implementing other organizations such as this one could improve social support (social aspects) and self-esteem (psychological aspects) for African American women athletes; research is needed to examine this. These supportive environments are important because researchers have found racial inequities present among revenue-producing collegiate sports, especially for African American males. For example, Harper, Williams, and Blackman (2013), conducted an investigation over six years comparing the overrepresentation of African American males in college sports and their graduation rates. Results indicated that across the 76 colleges and universities that they surveyed, African American male student athletes graduate at 5.3 points lower than African American male nonathletes. Although their article highlights the alarming graduation rates of African American men, they also briefly mentioned that there is still an overrepresentation of African American women in collegiate sports. However, the academic statistics of African American women seem to be better than African American men especially in the South Eastern Conference (SEC). Statistics reported the median six-year graduation rate was 74.6% for African American women student-athletes, 72.9% for White women student-athletes and 68.5% for all undergraduate students attending the SEC institutions they surveyed. Although these numbers are much higher than African American men, African American women still encounter the same athletic, personal, and academic challenges as their same raced peers. Thus, a future study should be conducted to determine if African American women athletes face the same challenges in regard to sexism and racism as African American men. Ultimately, the information gathered from a report of this nature could aim to improve the culture for minority athletes at predominately White institutions.

Implications for Counseling Psychology Practice

In recent years, more universities across the nation have hired licensed psychologists to work full time with student athletes. Given that most athletes spend the majority of their time in their institutions athletic department, many Athletic Directions thought it would be convenient to hire a psychologist within the department. Therefore, it is important for counseling psychologists working with collegiate athletes to be aware of policies that govern universities and their student athletes. For example, policies such as Title IX have already been implemented to ensure gender equality for women athletes. The NCAA has also taken additional measures to protect female athletes by recently implementing the Model Pregnancy and Parenting Policy or "Model Policy" (Hogshead-Makar & Sorensen, 2008). The Model Policy is designed to provide information and resources to member institutions and their student-athletes to effectively meet the needs of student-athletes dealing with a pregnancy. It will improve compliance with federal law and NCAA bylaws, and help institutions create a safe, healthy environment while fulfilling their educational missions (Hogshead-Makar &

Sorensen, 2008). Therefore, being aware of athletic policies will protect the student and the counselor.

There are many key roles a psychologist may have when working with athletes. First, it will be important for counseling psychologists to understand the unique experience of being a student-athlete. Student athletes have to balance not only their academics but also the demands of their particular sport. Juggling these two identities may create stress and challenges for some athletes and counseling psychologist should be willing to find ways to help athletes cope with this situation by exploring their family of origins, support systems, and means of motivation. For a psychologist working with African American women athletes, it will be important to assess how the intersections of their race and gender might be impacting their sport and academic experiences. As a therapist, it is imperative to understand that the experiences of athletes within the same race and gender are not all the same and be able to recognize the within- group and individual differences of individuals. Melendez and Melendez (2010) reported that women of color tend to seek mental health services more often than do their male counterparts.

This can have negative consequences for women of color, as they are more likely to be misunderstood and pathologized. Women of color also tend to be placed along a developmental continuum that belittles the importance of cultural values and gender roles that have been stereotypically female (Melendez & Melendez, 2010). Therefore, it is essential that counselors do not fall victim to stereotyping and create a negative environment that might resemble the challenges that African American female athletes might face on campus as well as in society.

Mental health professionals may also need to consult with sport psychologists to gain a deeper understanding of the mental components of sports. Mental toughness is defined as specific ways of viewing the competitive situation and skills relating to self-control and concentration (USA Swimming and U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association, 2006). Mentally tough athletes psychologically appraise themselves during intense situations as a means to arouse a positive desire to achieve a particular athletic task. If an athlete is not worried about failing, it allows them to concentrate on the task rather than being consumed with other thoughts. Another specific skill that contributes to mental toughness is the ability to keep physical arousal within manageable limits (USA Swimming and U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association, 2006). Sport psychologists can help an athlete reach an optimal level of arousal to optimize their performance.

Therefore, by combining the expertise of a counseling professional and a sport psychologist, a student athlete will be better able to cope with their daily stressors. A counseling psychologist can help with the day-to-day concerns of the athlete, while the sport psychologist can aid in the development of sports related techniques.

Conclusion

The limited research on the experiences of African American women athletes indicates that this is a population that warrants additional exploration. This project encourages a more detailed study of the lived experiences of African American women athletes by using the PSC framework. By exploring the psychological, social, and cultural factors of African American women athletes, researchers would be able to gather a more holistic understanding of the ways intersecting identities (race, gender, and occupation) impact ones experience. Understanding each of these factors is key to

ensuring that African American women are successful in the classroom as well as on the court/field. For example, knowledge about academic outcomes and satisfaction could aid in the recruitment and transition of African American women athletes from high school to college. Additionally, learning about the access and exposure that African American women have to sports could increase the percentages of both athletes and coaches in sports other than basketball and track. The presence of African American female coaches also seems to be important because exposure to female role models and leaders in a context that matters to young people (e.g., sport) may help to change values and beliefs about women in positions of power and leadership. Also, if girls and young women see females in coaching roles, they will more likely think about coaching as a legitimate and attainable career and possibly inspire them to become a coach in the future. Overall, this information will also be beneficial for mental health professionals as well as athletic departments so that they know how to better meet the needs of their student-athletes.

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