

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **BEYOND THE BEAUTY SALON: SPORT,
WOMEN OF COLOR AND THEIR HAIR**

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Research concerning women of color in sport tends to center around several topics: barriers to participation, racial stereotyping, symbolic annihilation, and the intersecting axes of power that influence their involvement and representation. Furthermore, while there exists a rich body of literature that hair has inspired in black feminist scholarship, these works have overlooked the experiences of black female athletes. In this project I seek to bridge these two bodies of knowledge through focus groups and personal interviews with black female collegiate athletes. Specifically, I examine three issues related to hair in the context of black women's athletic experiences: 1) as a particular racialized, gendered, and sexualized expression of self; 2) as a signifier of "other" in sport and society; and 3) as a possible cultural barrier to specific athletic endeavors. By bridging the disconnect between the two fields, I will address the ways that hair is an embodied cultural form influencing the physical culture of women of color.

BEYOND THE BEAUTY SALON:
SPORT, WOMEN OF COLOR AND THEIR HAIR

By

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Dedication

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning.” -Maya Angelou

To the seventeen women whose stories, wisdom
and advice made this project a reality
-- thank you.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to recognize the Physical Cultural Studies Department at the University of Maryland, because it was in that department that my ideas for this project were nurtured and eventually found a home. I do not think that any other academic space would allow me to do the work in the way that I was able to for *Beyond the Beauty Salon*. Specifically, I would like to thank Jaime Schultz, my advisor, who has been a special part of my life over the past six years. From my first day of class my freshman year at Maryland, she has been encouraging, supportive and an irreplaceable source of knowledge to which I am forever grateful. I would also like to thank Dave Andrews for supporting this project, taking the time to understand my vision and signing an innumerable amount of papers in the process so that my thesis could become a reality. Special thanks to all of my coaches over the past 24 years - and that is a lot of people. It was your enthusiasm and excitement that instilled in me a love for athletics and a consciousness to give back and improve the sports that have given me so much. And finally this project could not have happened without my parents, Claudia and Jerry Collins. My mother awoke the feminist in me before I could put a name to it. Whether it was recounting stories of watching Billie Jean King in the Battle of the Sexes, attending AAUW meetings, signing me up for Girl's Overnight Leadership Development sleepovers or helping me remember the words to Helen Reddy's, "I Am Woman Hear Me Roar" – it all started with her. As for my father, his endless love of sports and personal stories of playing football during integration and the civil rights movement inspired my desire to undertake a project on racial inequity and discrimination in sport. I can't wait to get my green jacket just like the two of you.

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Table 1

Demographic chart of participant information

Name	FG/ PI	Age	College Sport	Other Sports Played	Total Years of Experience in Sport
Amelita* ¹	FG	20	Track and field	Baseball, softball, cheerleading, basketball, swimming, dance, cross country, track and field	14
Artie	PI	24	Lacrosse	Soccer, indoor track, fencing, tennis, swimming, golf, horse back riding, gymnastics, dance, basketball	17
Ashley F.*	PI	21	Lacrosse	Volleyball, basketball, track and field, softball	14
Ashley L.*	FG	21	Lacrosse	Basketball and lacrosse	14
Azalia (Lia)*	FG	21	Track and field	Track, basketball, karate	15
Blair	PI	21	Swimming	Volleyball, track and field	15
Brijet	PI	20	Lacrosse	Field hockey, track and field, swimming	8
Britta	PI	23	Lacrosse	Lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, track and field	13
Brittany J.*	FG	21	Track and field	Track and field	13
Brittany S.*	FG	23	Track and field	Track and field, cross country	15
Chastity*	FG	20	Lacrosse	Softball, soccer, lacrosse, basketball	14
Dominique	PI	21	Track and field	Soccer, indoor/outdoor track	14
Jami*	FG	20	Track and field	Basketball track, gymnastics	14
Janessa	PI	19	Field hockey	Basketball, gymnastics, track, soccer	14
Jennifer	PI	24	Lacrosse	Lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, softball, swimming, gymnastics	18
Jessy	PI	25	Lacrosse	Lacrosse, basketball, volleyball	13
Kim	PI	21	Basketball	Soccer, basketball	16
Skyy	PI	21	Soccer	Tennis, gymnastics, dance, field hockey, swimming, softball	15

¹ * Denotes the participant attended a Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was younger, I spent hours fighting my hair. It wasn't until recently that I finally could admit to myself that it was not a battle I would win, nor did I want to win. My naturally curly hair never *listened* to me. My hair didn't listen when I asked it to stop getting so knotty at soccer practice so it wouldn't hurt so much when I would brush it later that night. It didn't yield after I spent hours straightening it before a lacrosse game starting the game with a straight ponytail and ending it with a style that was reminiscent of the late Michael Jackson's gheri curl in the music video *Bad*. It didn't even understand when I begged it to not get frizzy and dried out after I got out of the pool from a race at a swim meet. Everyone else had their hair combed back or in nice neat braids during the awards ceremony and there I stood, not just the only black girl but also the one with the curliest, frizziest hair. I stuck out like a sore thumb.

In my youth, my kinky hair was practicing a form of civil disobedience that I could not understand or control. It wasn't that I didn't have the right products or skills to achieve straight hair, but I simply did not have the time it took to discipline the impossible curls that adorned my head into a state of normality. I often longed for a long, straight ponytail, the kind one sees in almost every women's sports logo. I wanted my hair to trail down my back and flip out at the end like the girl in these types of images, to flit and float in the wind with every movement of my body.

Growing up in the suburbs of Philadelphia I participated in multiple sports and later moved on to play Division I athletics; however, it is almost outside of my own imaginative realm that I would manage to make it through 23 years without being on

a team with another black female athlete.² Not only did this experience leave me acutely alert to disparities in participation for black girls and women in sport, but it heightened my own awareness of the issues in sport that address differences which are largely unaddressed, such as hair. During my youth and into my collegiate years, I felt alone in my frustrations with managing my hair, both on and off the field, for none of my teammates looked like me, shared my hair texture, or seemed to understand what made my hair different and the unique challenges I faced. These experiences left me wondering if other black female athletes shared in these feelings or if their athletic circumstances made their stories different than my own? These questions serve as the basis for my proposed study on the ways in which black women athletes negotiate the politics and experiences of their hair in the context of sport.

Controversies Going Unnoticed

Recent events highlight the centrality of hair in representations and understandings of black female athletes. For example, in 2007 radio personality Don Imus referred to the predominantly African American Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos," thereby drawing attention to the topic of hair in sport (Cooky, Wachs, Messner & Dworkin, 2010; Ifill, 2007; Stringer, 2008). Likewise, Jennifer Harris, a black, former Division I student-athlete, alleged that while playing basketball at Penn State University, then-coach Rene Portland insinuated her cornrows signified lesbianism (Lieber, 2006). In spite of these controversial events,

² In this project, I do not refer to race in quotations marks (i.e. "race") as many scholars do to signal their view of race as socially constructed (e.g., Carrington, 2002). Drawing from the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2005), I will refer to race such as black, without quotation marks because it is no more constructed than other systems of power (gender, sexuality), nor does its constructed nature make it any less real in the lives of black Americans (p. 17).

Physical Cultural Studies scholars have neglected to study the articulations between black women, sport, and hair. Furthermore, while black feminist scholars have produced a rich body of literature on the topic of hair, these works have overlooked further investigation into the lived realities of black female athletes.

In this thesis I seek to bridge these two bodies of knowledge through focus groups and personal interviews with black female athletes who participate(d) in Division I collegiate athletics. Specifically, I will look at three issues related to hair in the context of black women's athletic experiences: 1) as an expression of a particular racialized, gendered, and sexualized expression of self; 2) as a signifier of "other" in sport and society; and 3) as a possible cultural barrier to specific athletic endeavors. By placing sport literature and black feminist literature in conversation with one another in this essay, I will address the ways that hair influences, and is influenced by, the physical culture of women of color and how a more nuanced understanding of this topic contributes to a broader understanding of women in sport.

This framework centers attention on a specific gendered and racialized topic so that young girls, like the girl I once was, can find a sense of community through discussions of hair in a sporting world that emphasizes equality and diversity yet lives in racial disparity. This project ventures to bring together the theoretical tools and insights of two disciplines that may seem to be unrelated -- literature on black women in sport and black feminist work on hair -- in order to examine an issue that, to my knowledge, has never been studied: the experiences of black athletic women with their hair. Furthermore, this project is a reflection of the larger issues of how the participants in the research project are located, within specific interlocking frames of

cultural privilege/dominance and oppression/subordination (Cooky et al., 2010; Stratta, 1995; Wiggins & Miller, 2003). As Collins (1990) tells us, it is impossible to tease out the way that black female athletes experience their hair in sport without acknowledging the ways in which various forms of oppression (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class) overlap and intersect one another to create their lived experiences.

While the roots of this project may appear to be a preoccupation with vanity or reproduction of feminine ideals, I would like to revisit bell hooks' musings on race and representation that speaks to the importance of hair in our daily lives. hooks (1992) states that often, "for black people the pain of learning that we cannot control our images, how we see ourselves or how we are seen is so intense that it rends us. It rips and tears at the seams of our efforts to construct self and identity" (p. 4). More specifically, black female athletes are met with dominant media images of female athletes which seek to control and delimit their gendered and racialized expressions of self (Cooky et al., 2010). In this sense, hair is a means of self-representation, an individual choice we make everyday that is at once personal and representative of political, cultural and historical meanings beyond our control.

What is of utmost importance is the focus on the voices of real women and their experiences not only as female athletes, but as *black* female athletes. It is widely acknowledged in black feminist scholarship that, "oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group," resulting in the inability to fully address or express valuable ideas and opinions (Collins, 1990, p. vii). Hooks (1984) echoes this sentiment that even, "privileged feminists have been unable to

speak to, with, and for the diverse groups of women because they do not understand fully the interrelatedness of sex, race and class oppression or refuse to take this interrelatedness seriously” (p. 14).

It is in this vein that I ask readers to meditate on the differences and similarities that emerge from the multiple voices that express the richness, depth and seriousness of black experiences in sport in this specific historical moment. Allow the voices to resonate towards a realization of a critique on hegemonic social forms, whether it is through how inequalities are reproduced and re-engrained in black athletic communities, or how the participants of this study create their own counter discourse to challenge dominant beliefs about mainstream athletic appearances. Part of the aim of this project is not only to locate differences from mainstream understandings of women in sport, which is, in more instances than not, representative of dominant, white, middle class ideals; but, to reveal that black female athletic experience deserves a much more complex and theoretically advanced approach than what is currently available.

Locating the Voices

In, *Women of Color: Critical Autobiography and Sport*, Susan Birrell (1990)

offers up a poignant observation of a specific lacuna in sport studies. She writes:

The strong materialist base of both cultural studies and socialist feminism ensures attention to class relations, and socialist feminism ensures a focus on gender relations, but neither theory as presently conceptualized provides adequate theoretical attention to the issue of race relations. The neglect of race is a serious criticism leveled at scholars in all fields, not just those in sport. Many feminists have acknowledged this problem...unfortunately, sport studies scholars remain largely oblivious to these debates. (p. 185)

Although published over twenty years ago, Birrell’s critique of work on sport is one that still merits attention today and speaks to the silencing and seeming invisibility of

black women in current academic scholarship. Hargreaves (2004) partially attributes this lack of attention to the fact that, “very few...ethnic minority women have been attracted to the [sport feminist] movement and their histories and experiences have been marginalized” (p. 189). Therefore, it is through a marriage of sport studies and black feminist thought that I investigate how the politics of hair emerge at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class. The odd situation that literature on black women in sport discusses the experiences of black female athletes but does not discuss hair, and black feminist literature discusses hair but fails to include the experiences of black female athletes, is yet another reason why the two fields need to be brought together.

Specifically, I choose to engage these two fields because of my dual positionality as both a female scholar of color and a former black student-athlete, which connect me both personally and politically to the work I am doing. My black feminist consciousness is more clearly articulated by bell hooks (2000) in *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center*. She states:

Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of men and women who live on the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that can encompass a variety of human experiences. (p. xviii)

hook’s analysis supports my reasoning for choosing my theoretical structure because I want to avoid the oversimplification of hair experiences into a dominant (white) discourse as feminist theorists have done before me. I aim to complicate the discourse by revealing the variation of experiences *among* women of color and not simply highlight the differences *between* men and women. Often the omnipresence and hypervisibility of hair silences the marginal experiences that are integral to a holistic

understanding of what it means to be black, female and athletic.

Yancy (2000) also adds that, “whiteness assumes the authority to marginalize other identities, discourses, perspectives, and voices. By constituting itself as center, non-white voices are othered, marginalized and rendered voiceless” (p. 157). hooks and Yancy’s views on race as a hierarchicalized structure in American society is exactly my reasoning for creating a space where black female athletes are given a platform to counter the systematic silencing of their voices.

Most importantly, this perspective also acknowledges that while race is socially constructed, it has real implications in the lives of black Americans, and, therefore, must be discussed when addressing material bodies (Collins, 2005; hooks, 1996; Yancy, 2000). Patricia Hill Collins (2005) further explains the contestation on the issue of race outside of black feminist scholarship in her book, *Black Sexual Politics*. Collins remarks that many scholars believe race should be placed in quotation marks (i.e., “race”) because it demarcates that it is a social construction; however, she denounces this practice because race is no more socially constructed than gender, class or sexuality in our lives (p. 17). For this reason, I use *race* as a term to represent the common experiences among women who share a collective history that shapes their realities.

While this project speaks often of discourses and discursive formations, I want to clarify the term by offering up the definition that a discourse is, “a set of ideas and practices that when taken together organize both the way a society defines certain truths about itself and the way it puts together social power” (Collins, 2005, p. 17). Quantitative surveys and reports conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic

Association (NCAA) inform society of trends in participation; however, they do not allow us to understand the deeper issues and cultural implications that shape these trends (NCAA, 2010). As this project gives me an opportunity to work with sportswomen of color, it also opens up an occasion to begin a dialogue between participants through interviews and focus groups, and that dialogic relationship can begin to inform action (Collins, 2005). Therefore, this project serves a higher level of change that is not just simply in the readers, but in the knowledge and consciousness of the participants themselves.

Research Questions

The research questions I ask relate to the three theoretical aspects of this project: women in sport, black feminist thought and the work that is to be done at the intersection of the two fields. From the review of the literature on sport and literature on hair, it is apparent that changes must be made before black female athletes achieve parity in sport. Furthermore, the aim of this project is not to create solutions to the discriminating practices in women's sports today. This research project is meant to function as a diagnostic gauge, focusing on hair as an avenue for a more holistic understanding of the experiences of black female athletes. To borrow from McDonald and Birrell (2001), the research questions on hair and athletics are intended to, "ask new questions that open up new possibilities for new kinds of actions to emerge" (as cited in Hargreaves, 2004, p. 194). Therefore the following questions I will ask are reflective of a goal to realize the multiple truths about the lived experiences of black female athletes with their hair:

- 1) Do the cultural experiences of black female athletes with their hair differ from what the black feminist literature tells us about black females? What are their shared challenges/frustrations? Shared joys?
- 2) What effect, if any, does hair have on athletic participation for black female athletes? Physical? Emotional?
- 3) Can hair help us to understand how black female athletes construct cultural identities at the intersections of gender, race, sexuality and/or class?

Chapter Breakdown

In the following chapters I will address these research questions, beginning with the theoretical understandings that underlie my reasons for asking; and thus, progressing towards the original research wherein lie my answers to the questions I pose.

There are five chapters and five appendices in this thesis and within those sections I explore the empirical, theoretical methodological and political aspects of this project. In *Chapter 2*, I locate how this project is situated with the larger field of Physical Cultural Studies and how its location within the field is crucial to the radically contextualist nature of my research. Moreover, I discuss my engagement with literature on black women in sport and black feminist thought, as well as how I understand the intersection and overlap between the two bodies of knowledge to be crucial for a holistic understanding of black women in sport.

In *Chapter 3*, I address the methodological and ethical framework for this research project. In this section I will discuss my site description, data collection and analysis, quality of data, my reflexive practices as a researcher and former student

athlete, as well as the challenges and limitations I encountered during this project. *Chapter 4* is a pivotal chapter in this thesis, as it represents the stories, memories, frustrations and moments of hope and resistance told by the research participants. Given the conversational and intimate exchanges that occurred between the participants and myself, I have chosen to present, in narrative form, how their hair is an important part of their lives, both on and off the field. In this section I address the larger themes of sweating, swimming, styling hair, facing the elements (e.g. wind, rain, humidity, heat), and how these specific experiences speak to broader constructions of race, gender sexuality and class in their lives.

Lastly, in *Chapter 5*, I return to my research questions to examine the relationship between the framework proposed in Chapter 2 with the resulting information collected during the focus group and interviews. Through this process I confirm that it is my understanding that, although black women and black female athletes utilize similar cultural practices, they face different challenges when carrying out tasks such as styling, washing, maintaining and relating to their (mainly white) peers over hair. Furthermore, although the challenges imposed by an athletic and active lifestyle did not explicitly withhold participants from competing, they did have a sizeable impact on the way in which black female athletes prepare, train and experience athletics.

Chapter 2: Bridging the Gap: Radically Contextualizing Black Female Athletes and Their Hair

Cultural Studies with a “P”

It is my understanding that Physical Cultural Studies (PCS henceforth) is a field in progress, and hopefully always, a field in process. As a fairly new form of critical inquiry, PCS has emerged as a friendly, yet more theoretically promiscuous bedfellow to the field of Cultural Studies (Andrews, 2008). While the roots of PCS lie tangled in the canonical works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall (to name a few), the field has outgrown an exclusively Marxist understanding of culture. It has progressed into a theoretically driven, critical inquiry which foregrounds not only culture, but *physical* culture through many different academic lenses. Physical culture represents a myriad of movement-based practices, ranging from sport and bodybuilding, to exercise and dance (Ingham, 1997; Silk & Andrews, in press). In its commitment to understanding how power operates in and through the active body within a broader social, political and economic context, PCS engages multiple theoretical positions and methodologies.

Although tensions exist over the anti/inter/trans-disciplinarity of the field of PCS; what remains constant are its commitments to ground the body as the empirical site of investigation, to engage a multi-method approach representative of the rigors of the field, and to take seriously the ethical and moral responsibilities of a researcher committed to enacting social justice through physical culture (Andrews, 2008; Silk & Andrews, in press). Frow and Morris (2000) comment on the “eccentric” nature of research in studies of (physical) culture in that it starts, “with the particular, the detail, the scrap of ordinary or banal existence and then [works] to unpack the density of

relations and intersecting social domains that inform it” (p. 354). Specifically, the “unpacking” in PCS scholarship begins with the researcher and their ability to rigorously employ complex theoretical and methodological approaches to seemingly everyday phenomena.

Wrestling, Fighting and Finding a Theory

With an understanding that the active body is always in process, it is not surprising that a theoretical, one-size-fits-all, positionality is insufficient for analysis of physical cultural practices. Although the most challenging aspect of a theoretically diverse project like PCS is finding a theoretical perspective, Stuart Hall (1992) advises us, “the only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency” (p.280). Hall’s metaphor for grappling with theory speaks to the need to understand, rework, and find a theory that enables one to do quality work. Hall (2006) states:

The purpose of theorizing is not to enhance one’s intellectual or academic reputation but to enable, to grasp, understand, and explain- to produce a more adequate knowledge of- the historical world and its processes; and thereby to inform our practice so that we may transform it. (p. 36)

Current scholarship in Physical Cultural Studies engages a diverse array of theorists who represent a plurality of perspectives and possibilities for contributing to our social understanding of the active body. In essence, it is imperative that the PCS scholar becomes a type of cultural “bricoleur” -- a researcher who embraces interdisciplinarity, and can speak in the theoretical and methodological language of the fields/disciplines that s/he engages (Kincheloe, 2001). This contributes to deeper knowledges of the contexts that shape our corporeal practices.

More specifically, the bricoleur engages in *articulation* as a theory/method to understand various aspects of physical culture and provide what Stuart Hall deems a, “moment of arbitrary closure” (Slack, 1996, p. 116). To claim that, “context is everything and everything is context”, is to understand Grossberg’s (1997) radically contextualist approach to culture and the *necessary non-correspondences* that take on meaning, value and power in the physical cultural practices of everyday life, through the process of articulation (p. 255). It is not enough simply to accept the given relationships, which shape our realities, but as researchers we must engage in the drawing, mapping and remapping of articulations that create the conjunctures, which empower and disempower us, as well as, our research participants (Grossberg, 1997; King, 2005; Slack, 1996).

Furthermore, in our development of a, “contextually based understanding of the corporeal practices, discourses and subjectivities,” we must also look at the ethical and moral issues that come into play (Andrews, 2008, p. 55). Schwandt (2000) advises us to ask ourselves, “how should I be to the people I am researching?” in an effort to recognize and remain cognizant of the commitment to social change that breathes life and humanism into PCS research practices. Our social responsibilities as researchers are not only to the academic rigors of our field, and the ethical practice of trust and confidentiality in our research methods, but to the production of new knowledges that can “talk back” to our research participants and communities (Silk & Andrews, in press; Giardina, 2005; Giroux, 2001). It is through the voices and actions of our participants as co-producers of knowledge and agents of change that critical pedagogy and a public praxis of PCS become the final step in constructing the

Physical Cultural Studies paradigm from which my research project is borne. While I do not deny the fact that the “doing” of Physical Cultural Studies scholarship is challenging, difficult and, at times, frustrating work, it is in the attempt to, “give a better understanding of where we are so that we can get somewhere else, hopefully somewhere better, leaving open the question of what is better”, that I ground my work on black female athletes and their hair (Grossberg, 1997, p. 254).

Review of Relevant Literature

In the past decade the research on women of color has grown, both in terms of the number of published studies and in its theoretical sophistication. Although the majority of studies continue to examine black women’s barriers to access and participation in sport, recent media events involving black female athletes have been left unexamined in terms of the multiple articulations that construct their cultural significance. In spite of these recent developments that are beginning to answer the many calls by sport scholars for an increased focus on this minority athletic population, the literature remains relatively limited. For the purpose of this project, it is important to note that there seem to be no studies that address the issue of black women’s hair in the context of sport and physical culture. In the following section, I review the development of the scholarship on black women in sport in order to address the significance of my proposed project.

Black Women in Sport

This project involves an articulation of two theoretical perspectives, literature on black women in sport and black feminist thought, to analyze how gender and race work to empower and disempower black female athletes. To begin, it seems

necessary to start with the history of African American women in sport, which contributes to the current state of minority participation in women's sport. The wealth of literature on female athletes in sport paints an interesting picture on the climate of minority participation. The success of Title IX in expanding female athletics has been nationally recognized in high school and collegiate sport research.

The Women's Sports Foundation reports that participation rates of black women in sport have increased 955% since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Butler & Lopiano, 2003, p. 5). However, despite this success, black female athletes still face the double burden of racial and gender discrimination. In sport, black women are less likely to be invited to deliver speaking engagements, receive less sponsorship, and are under-represented in key functionary positions (Lopiano, 2001).

Silencing/ Invisibility

In *Recovering the Black Female Body*, Carla Peterson (2001) locates the instability of representations and perceptions of the black female body in her statement that colored bodies exist dichotomously as "invisible and hypervisible" (p. xi). In this sense, black women's bodies in sport are either absent from specific sports and therefore their needs are never heard, or their presence in a sport is so commonplace that those making decisions do not feel they have unmet needs. Situations such as this have become a trend in women's sport referred to as "silencing," where the concerns and opinions of women of color are overlooked and unfairly justified by the participatory tendencies (Smith, 1992). Just as black women have historically been silenced in society during slavery, the women's movement and

the civil rights movement, they continue to be silenced today in mainstream sporting discourse (Bruening et al., 2005; Lopiano, 2001; Smith, 1992).

Moreover, Bruening, Armstrong and Pastore (2005) argue that black female athletes are silenced in three ways:

- 1) Through the lack of research on black women their unique experiences are overlooked and undocumented as though they don't exist
- 2) Through the lack of representation of women of color in sport, specifically in coaching and administrative positions they are denied opportunity
- 3) Through a lack of inclusion in sport literature, and a pattern of mis-representation and/or marginal status they are left largely unstudied

These three forms of silencing speak to the challenges faced by those who exist on the margins of society. Black female athletes are silenced on many levels, which often converge and overlap to limit the ability to overcome discrimination in athletics.

Henderson (1989) provides an excellent summation of the phenomenon of “silencing” women of color in sport: “it is not that black women...have nothing to say, but rather that they have had no say” (p. 2). Therefore, this project is a response to the multiple calls for attention to the voices of black female athletes. Silence and invisibility of women of color in sport speaks to a myriad of issues that need to be addressed in order to do good, in-depth analysis of the issues at hand. It brings attention to the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of black female experiences and offers a forum in which black women's voices and opinions might be heard (Collins, 2005). The trends towards silencing highlights an immanent need for work on black sportswomen so that their issues are brought to the fore and given attention in academia.

Barriers to Participation

Scholarship attending the barriers to black women's participation in sport covers a wide range of topics. One such barrier has historically been stereotypical beliefs about women of color, continuing to limit the possibilities for participation in specific sports. For example, black athletes have long been associated with myths of innate athleticism, decreased intellectual ability, tall tales of extra muscles and rumors of genetically inherited strength and speed (Butler & Lopiano, 2003; Entine, 2000; Jameison et al., 2002). More recently, biological racism, the false belief that racial differences are directly related to genetic differences, has experienced a revival in popular culture (Banet-Wiser, 1999; Bruening et al., 2005; Entine, 2000; Goldsmith, 2003). Although none of the stereotypes pertaining to black athletes have any scientific basis, they significantly affect the experiences of women of color in sport, as they are kept alive by the beliefs of coaches and others in decision-making positions.

Bruening (2005) credits the myths about innate running and jumping abilities as a reason why black women have historically been over-represented in sports that highlight these skills (e.g., basketball and track and field). Indeed, the *2009-2010 NCAA Student Athlete Ethnicity Report* shows that basketball and indoor/outdoor track have the highest participation numbers of black female athletes (NCAA, 2010). Additionally, the two sports receive the most media attention and have a number of well-known black sportswomen who continue to increase interest and media attention, thus drawing young girls to participate. This trend towards clustering in specific sports, such as basketball and track and field, is one that has remained

constant over the past ten years, pointing to the fact that there has been a small or ineffective effort to diversify black women's participation in athletics.

In addition to over-representation, researchers have found that position stacking is another obstacle that women of color face (Lopiano, 2001; Jamieson et al., 2002). Position stacking, as described by Jamieson, Reel & Gill (2002), refers to “differential treatment by race ...including the opportunity to occupy specific positions, differential standards for success, and disproportionate numbers of ethnic minorities in ‘star-roles’” (p. 89). For example, in a 2000 study of the racial make-up of Division I softball, black female athletes were found to be over-represented in the outfield position. Interestingly, outfield is a highly physical position that requires speed and agility to track down fly balls, as well as strength to make long throws to the in-field positions. Position stacking affects black women in sport in much the same way that black male athletes are funneled into strength and speed positions on a roster while white players fill the thinking and ‘cerebral’ roles. Donna Lopiano (2001), former- Executive Director of the Women's Sports Foundation, accurately describes the reality of position stacking in the following statement:

The African American female is a victim of sport discrimination and positional stacking within sports. She is generally restricted to basketball, track and field and the least expensive sports. Within the sports she does play, she is underrepresented in the skill/outcome positions of setter in volleyball or point guard in basketball. (paragraph 3)

The reality of Lopiano's quote stresses the pervasive nature of stereotypes about black female athletes being more physically gifted and less intellectually capable than other female athletes, therefore, funneling them into specific positions despite the fact that options are already limited. While the literature on stacking is not extensive, I have included it in this review of literature because it displays a current conundrum in

women's sport that is in existence, yet lacks the theoretical complexity to fully articulate its effects on position and sport choices by women of color.

One of the final roadblocks to achieving parity between black female athletes and their white counterparts is the cultural images that control the ways black female athletes are represented by the media in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality (Cahn, 1994; Collins, 1990; Collins, 2005). It is a continued struggle for black women to receive, "respectful, quality coverage" in sports media (Cooky et al., p.141). Hancock (2008) points out that two dominant types of images, "the jezebel" and "the black lady," serve to regulate and shape the behaviors and cultural practices of black female athletes (p. 3). Specially, these images are located in contrast to the white, middle-class values, which represent the dominant ideals of what it means to be a woman and, therefore, "produce controlling images that are rife with stereotypes about subordinated groups" (Collins, 1990, in Cooky et al., 2010, p. 144). Women's contact team-sports in our society, such as basketball are still viewed as "masculine endeavors," therefore pressuring athletes to perform overt femininity in order to combat lesbian stereotypes in sport (Banet-Wiser, p. 414). Chisholm (2002) agrees with the claim that presenting a feminine appearance is a common "apologetic behavior" in women's sport that reduces an athlete's transgression of "gendered social norms" (p. 428).

While sport is meant to showcase the physical form and features that allow athletes to perform highly-skilled maneuvers, controlling images create boundaries as to how much the black female body can challenge dominant notions of female athleticism (Rooks, 2001). For example, "athletes such as Serena Williams continue

to have their bodies presented, analyzed and criticized - not merely for their performance, but for their sexual desirability,” which is representative of the black jezebel image (Hancock, 2008, p. 3; see also Douglas, 2002). To counter the jezebel image, many athletes experience the representational pigeonhole of the “black lady.” In line with long-standing politics of respectability for black women, the image of the “black lady” promotes femininity, heterosexuality and conservatism (Collins, 2005). For example, the media coverage of WNBA star Lisa Leslie frequently enmeshed references of her modeling career into stories covering women’s basketball, stressing that Leslie’s focus on sports *and* fashion legitimated her as a “true woman” (Banet-Wiser, 1999, p. 412). In the following excerpt from an article written about Leslie and her basketball prowess in a women’s fitness magazine, the author stresses that Leslie is worthy of approval because she is both feminine and athletic.

The worlds of hoops and haute couture seem galaxies apart to most people. Not Lisa Leslie. All poise and confidence, the Olympic gold medalist and aspiring supermodel is equally comfortable dribbling down the lane in a sweaty fury and breezing down the runway in four-inch heels and an Armani evening gown. (Huntington, 1996, as cited in Banet-Wiser, 1999, p. 413)

The pervasiveness of the images of the “jezebel” and “black lady” regulates the actions of black female athletes and their physical appearances, taking away from their ability to focus on their physical performances. While some may doubt the impact of stereotypical images, bell hooks (1992) tells us that, “images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginal groups have access” (p. 5). Given these sensibilities, it is especially difficult for black athletes to find, “the space to exist within and among the stereotypes” that endeavor to regulate their behavior and appearance (Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008, p. 352). In seeking to understand multiple representations of black

sportswomen, as told by the women themselves in the focus group and personal interviews, I endeavor to challenge these stereotypical images and offer up the possibility for different ways of looking at black female athletes.

Intersecting Axes of Power

While athletic participation rates for white women blossom, those for women of color continue to lag (Butler & Lopiano, 2003). Athletes of color still receive fewer scholarship dollars than their white peers, graduate at lower rates, and are under-represented in 20 out of 25 NCAA sports (Ibid, p .7; Fields, 2008; Lopiano, 2001). The disparities in participation leave black female athletes at a disadvantage because, while white female athletes are discriminated against on account of their sex, black female athletes experience gender discrimination at a higher-rate and it is almost always coupled with forms of racial discrimination. Even in comparison to black male athletes, black female athletes are subject to more discriminatory practices and patterns of inequality (Goldsmith, 2003).

In *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins (2005) explains that sexual and racial discrimination are highly intertwined and consequently, “racism can never be solved without seeing and challenging sexism” (p. 5). Hancock (2008) echoes this sentiment in “Black Female Athletes”, with the concept of a “both/and identity,” reiterating the theoretical understanding that it is impossible to separate an identity into being solely gendered or solely racial. Hancock references the specific 2007 event that involved radio shock-jock Don Imus’ on-air statement describing the Rutgers Women’s basketball team as, “nappy headed hos” (p. 4). Imus’s comment refers specifically to black stereotypes that place them in comparison to dominant

white cultural norms of femininity and heterosexuality (Poniewozick, 2007). The players were unfairly identified with the common conflation of race, class, gender and sexuality that places the black body as excessive-- too ethnic, too sexual, too out of control to be acceptable. Furthermore, Cooky, Wachs, Messner and Dworkin's (2010) in-depth look at the rhetoric of this specific sports media event points to the common counter-discourse describing the players as, "young ladies of class" and, "innocent victims", reinscribing white, middle class standards of femininity to combat the racialized discourse (p. 145; see also Kelley, Starr, Conant, 2007). The media attention that followed Imus' statement and his subsequent firing focused on either the players' sexuality or their blackness, but fell short in understanding the important intersections of the two.

An element of this issue that makes it even more salient to this project is the fact that Imus' comment focused on hair as a representative element of the women's cultural identities. The resulting tensions in understanding how the multiple frameworks come together and, at different levels of analysis can serve to expand or repress the agency of the Rutgers players, is an example of what Hancock believes limits the ability of athletes to construct their identities. This necessity for intersectional work on black women in sport is one that has been largely cited by scholars who see a need to bring in this type of work to areas of sport studies (Bruening, Armstrong & Pastore, 2005; Newhall and Buzuvis, 2008; Smith, 1992). In 1990, Susan Birrell asserted that one could, "count on one hand the number of published analyses that specifically focus on women athletes of color" (p. 186).

Although that number has grown, there is still the need for greater attention to the topic.

While this literature review involves the insight of many scholars on the history and current status of black women in sport, it does not encompass the theoretical tools necessary to address the pressing issues of the role of hair in the everyday experiences of black female athletes. Like many scholars doing work on black athletes within the sport feminist field, I see a need for specifically referencing black feminist scholarship in order to address cultural issues that are unique to the black female experience (Bruening, 2004; Breuning et al., 2005; Hancock, 2008; Smith, 1992). It is at this point that I move into black feminist literature on hair, an integral section to the larger argument about the importance of hair within sport.

Black Feminist Literature on Hair

I found it that it is impossible to consider the issue of black hair in sport, without engaging black feminist thought. What makes this standpoint unique and of value to this project is its dedication to place black feminist experience as a central concern, or as Shelia Radford-Hill (1986) explains,

To build an agenda that meets the needs of black women by helping black women mobilize around issues that they perceive to have direct impact on the overall quality of their lives. Such is the challenge that defined our struggle and constitutes our legacy. (p. 158)

In black feminist scholarship, one does not have to look very far to realize that black women's hair is a central issue in their lives. Black hair is an *investment*. It is an investment in the labor of constructing and achieving a specific gendered, racialized, sexualized and/or politicized performance of self. Black hair may not appear to represent any of these personal commitments explicitly, however, it is through the

daily performance of curling, pressing, washing, braiding, shaving and just letting hair go “natural”, that women imbue meaning and power into what their hair says about who they are and how they want to be perceived by others (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Gaskins, 2001; George, 2009; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Rooks, 2001; Prince, 2009; Weitz, 2004). Moreover, hair is both integral to and an extension of the black female body that has been historically constructed and understood as the antithesis of what is good, true and beautiful in dominant Western society. Black women have been demonized and dismissed solely on account of the way they look, like no other body in the United States, making hair and other self-stylizations important for understanding the history of black females (Bennett & Dickerson, 2001; Wolf, 1997).

Hair braiding and cornrows have long been a way to upkeep and style hair in black communities because of the ease of styling and the multiple ways of creating new and interesting styles (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). However, braids have also been a controversial topic in larger society, even resulting in lawsuits and claims of racial discrimination on multiple occasions. In 1996, for instance, two young black girls were sent home from junior high school because administrators deemed their cornrowed hair as excessive and distracting to their peers (“Schools,” 1997). More than ten years later Jennifer Harris, a black student-athlete at Penn State, was dismissed from her collegiate basketball team (Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008). Her coach, Rene Portland, repeatedly articulated a homophobic, “no drinking, no drugs and no lesbian” policy for her teams and, reportedly, her assumption that Harris’ cornrowed hairstyle indicated lesbianism triggered the dismissal (p. 349).

While Harris refused to change the way she looked for her coach to appear

more feminine, she claims that the hostile and offensive environment created by her coach, “broke her spirit” (Lieber, 2006). After two seasons of discrimination, Harris spoke up, asserting that Portland told her on multiple occasions to, “be more feminine and stop wearing cornrows” (Harris v. Portland, 2006, p. 23). On another occasion, Portland held a meeting with Harris to discuss her wearing, “her hair down or at least in more ‘feminine’ braids” (Ibid, p. 21). Emotionally, Harris recounts in a *USA Today* article that the results of Rene Portland’s homophobic and racial discriminatory practices is, “a horrible situation that I don't want anyone to go through. It's humiliating. It's painful. I want as many people to avoid that as possible” (Lieber, 2006). Even during her high school basketball career Harris’s parents were forced to address an opposing fan section that taunted her, calling her “Mister Harris” because of her appearance (Ibid). Unfortunately, Harris’s situation demonstrates the pervasiveness and intersectionality of raced, gendered and sexualized discriminatory practices that are common in women’s sport. While she made the decision to stand strong and not change her appearance, she ultimately suffered for her convictions. She transferred schools, lost a year of eligibility, sat out a season of basketball, and went through a very public defense of her own sexuality that left her mentally and emotionally shaken (Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008).

A main question surrounding the present state of black hair pertains to how the way it should be worn and styled has gained cultural acceptance in America. bell hooks (1996) expands on the topic of “good hair” in, *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, that the forces shaping these hair performance are related to larger issues within the dominant social structures of American society:

Real *good hair* is straight hair, hair like White folk's hair. Yet no one says your hair is beautiful, so nice, because it is like White folks hair. We pretend that the standards we measure our beauty by are our own invention. (p. 91, emphasis added)

These examples and the omnipresence of hair issues in popular media make us all witness to the cultural controversies surrounding black women and, in these specific instances, female athletes of color.

Formations of Identity

In *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us About Women's Lives*, Rose Weitz (2004) states that, "what hair means to people changes over time and across cultures" (p. xxi), reinforcing that cultural contexts change how hair is interpreted by different communities and individuals. Recent scholarly works stress that hair is integral to black women's identities and operates as a crucial aspect in the salience of gender, age, race and class in their daily lives (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; George, 2009; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Prince, 2009; Rooks, 2001; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Althea Prince's (2009) *The Politics of Black Women's Hair* explores how social and political issues, such as European standards of beauty, shape the relationships black women have with their hair across generations.

For example, the introduction of Rooks' (2001) "Wearing Your Race Wrong" chronicles how Rooks responds to a 12-year old girl at a lecture who inquires about why she is treated differently and made fun of for wearing her hair naturally in an afro. While Rooks gives an immediate and supportive response to the young girl, she later reflects that the situation boiled down to the fact that our individual present has, "everything to do with a collective past" (p. 287). Rooks (2001) offers a perspective on this issue stating,

There have long been consequences within and outside of African American communities, for wearing one's race wrong, and hairstyles are often the means others use to determine whether we are wearing a right, or wrong, racial identity. (p. 290)

The past experiences of Jennifer Harris and the Rutgers women's basketball team speaks to the consequences black women are subjected to solely on account of their hair, telling us that racism extends farther than just the color of your skin.

The situation described by Rooks (2001) is one of many examples found in black feminist scholarship that explicitly engages the different and distinctive experiences belonging to black women. It is situations such as these that make the construction of black identity worthy of investigation. The process of constructing identity is bolstered by the words of Cultural Studies theorist, Stuart Hall, which are embraced by bell hooks (1992) in her work, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*:

Cultural identity...is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (p.5)

In, *Good And Bad Hair*, Art and African American Studies professor, Bill Gaskins (1997), makes central the role of hair in black culture in a photojournalistic book featuring 60 different photographs of black men, women and children. His work illustrates the resistance of black women who chose to style their hair against the dominant discourse that regulates black beauty ideals which are steeped in interactions of, "history, culture and power." (p. 5). Not only does Gaskins' work highlight the fact that black women are not passive in their struggle, but that hair is a contributing factor to the formation of cultural identity. The public nature of hair in his research helps us to see the different positionalities that shape these identities and give meaning to specific hairstyles as conforming and resisting.

Discourses of Resistance and Relationships

In the midst of this section that seems to set up black women solely as the victims of oppression it is of utmost importance that I stress that black women are not passive. As Collins (1990) reminds us, “hegemonic dominance is not totalizing or complete” and, therefore, black women possess the power to resist and have resisted against being stereotyped, oppressed and othered (p. 228). During the civil rights movement, black hair became a symbol of black pride and personal politics. By wearing their hair in an afro, individuals such as Angela Davis and Kathleen Cleaver became symbols of what it meant to reclaim one’s blackness and have pride in one’s ancestry (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). However, by the 1970s, the popular cultural appropriation of the afro stripped the hairstyle of its political import.

Black women’s hair is deeply implicated in political and personal meanings. Another, form of resistance that black women have historically embraced has been the bonds and relationships resulting from the practices of doing hair. One overarching theme in the corpus of literature on black hair is the intimate relationships formed between mothers and daughters, women and their hairdresser, or just between friends in the process of doing hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; hooks, 1992; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Rooks, 2001). More commonly referred to as, “kinship”, Rooks (2001) cites a passage from Sherley Anne Williams’ novel, *Dessa Rose*, as it, “highlights one of the truly important aspects of hair as it relates to African American culture: the act of styling hair as both a social and learning occasion” (p. 287).

My sisters and I could not have been closer to our mother or grandmothers Celia and Marguerite than we were when they were braiding our hair. We sat propped between their strong legs, our shoulders leaning against their soft thighs, feeling touched and safe. Tenderheaded or not, those were times when our bodies and theirs, intimately intertwined and

held by the web of their fingers and our hair, were sweetly cared for, and immeasurably valued. (p. 70-71)³

While Williams' writing style makes it hard not to label the passage as romantic or nostalgic in nature, it is the real life accounts of women in black feminist writing which support the value of familial bonds and hair care (Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Prince, 2009). Because of the bonds between women in black communities over their hair, the cultural practices of styling, braiding and pressing have come to symbolize a, "closeness, comfort and community", that cannot be replicated any other way (Rooks, 2001, p.288).

Black Feminist Positionality

Jacobs-Huey's (2006) *From the Kitchen to the Parlor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care* is a compilation of ethnographic work which focuses specifically on the language black girls and women use to talk about their hair, as well as how their constructed black hair discourse is embodied in their self-perceptions and how they are perceived by others. Her work shares her experiences as an ethnographer working in a community that she is familiar with, yet still has trouble navigating as she conducts field work in cosmetology schools, beauty salons and a non-profit cosmetologist bible study (p. 10).

Jacobs-Huey's positionality as a researcher in *From the Kitchen to the Parlor* is a prime example of what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) refers to as the "outsider-within" status (p. 11). In this sense, "outsiders-within" simultaneously experience and analyze the social conditions that are their lived realities. As the introduction to this

³ Sherley Anne Williams is an African American poet and author who often wrote about her experiences growing up in the black community. In 1986, she published *Dessa Rose*, a fictional story of a young black girl and young white girl trying to find acceptance in 1847 in the antebellum South. Rook's usage of the quote from *Dessa Rose*, a play set in an entirely different time and place, speaks to the historical significance and strong cultural value placed on the forging of bonds through hair care in black culture.

thesis project chronicles, this is a situation that I face as I conduct research on black female collegiate athletes like myself. Furthermore, a review of black feminist literature reveals that many other scholars occupy this same, “outsider-within” status, providing a wealth of knowledge on navigating this positionality (Breuning et al., 2005; Prince, 2009; Rooks, 1996).

A common thread among the current literature is that the authors employ multiple methodologies, such as participant observations, personal narratives, interviews, focus groups and photographic analysis, as a means to understand how women discipline and liberate their hair on a daily basis (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Prince, 2009). Another notable factor uniting the body of scholarship on black hair is that the authors of these works are all women of color, influenced to investigate the issue because of personal experiences with their hair and commitments to feminism (George, 2009; Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Patton, 2006; Rooks, 2001). In order to contextualize hair in the black community, these authors also engage multiple methodologies as a means to avoid misrepresentation, over simplification, and the feeling that they are simply “outing” private cultural practices for academic scrutiny” (Jacobs-Huey, 2006, p.8). Seeing hair as an overtly public element and, simultaneously, as an intensely private endeavor of an entire culture is an issue that scholars admit to struggling with. However, through employing the right methodologies most are able to allow black girls and women different avenues to describe, in their own words, how their hair figures into the larger culture of black hair.

The Absence of Sport in Literature on Hair

This research project seeks to build on the previous scholarship and engage relationships between hair and everyday lived experiences of black girls and women using methodologies similar to Rooks (2001), Jacobs-Huey (2006) and Prince (2009). However, this project diverges from the everyday understanding of hair constructed by previous scholars, in an attempt to explore how black female athletes create their own discourse on hair to fit their active lifestyles and navigate the triple consciousness of being black, female and athletic.

Currently there is no scholarship specifically devoted to black female athletes and their hair, beyond passing comments on the threats posed by water sports to maintaining hairstyles (Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Craig, 1997; Weitz, 2005). The lack of analysis on black sportswomen's experiences is not surprising given the gendered nature of sport history and its tendency to exclude black women from serious discussions of cultural sporting practices (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). Engaging in "apologetic" behavior to emphasize femininity has been a widely noted counter-behavior of female athletes to the white, male hegemonic powers and masculine ideals, which shape sporting cultures (Cahn, 1994; Cole, 1994; Festle, 1996). However, to engage with the specific forces that serve to regulate black female athletes, one must look past the gendered and sexualized apologetic behaviors to an underlying politics of respectability that is specific to how black Americans navigate their everyday lives (White, 2001).

For example, in the 1950s Ed Temple, the coach of the legendary all-black Tennessee State University Tigerbelles track and field team which included Olympian Wilma Rudolph, was commonly known for his axioms, "I want foxes not oxes" and

“ladies first, Tigerbelles second” (Adkins, 1967, p.182). These phrases stressed the importance of physical appearances of femininity as a means for attaining respectability, even during physical exertion. Therefore, the issues discussed in the analysis of black hair in athletics are not a new, emergent discourse. Like many other cultural issues of black women, their absence from literature has perpetuated a cycle of silence. In my own experiences I have found that, despite the glaring absence of discussions on hair from sport literature and athletics from black scholarship on hair, the discourse has long existed in unstated terms within the black athletic community.

A variety of incidents in sport over the past years speak to the importance of hair as an increasingly prominent issue in women’s athletics. The late 20th century and early 21st century are witness to the rise of Venus and Serena with their beaded braids and silky weaves, the long, flowing hair of Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and the multiple cornrowed heads that grace the courts of the WNBA (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2006). Black female athletes, both amateur and professional, novice or expert, are consistently left out of the corpus of literature involving black hair, further marginalizing the experiences of black women athletes. With this project, it is my intention to create a space for expressing the perspectives of black female athletes on matters of their hair. By conducting personal interviews and focus groups with black female collegiate athletes, I endeavor to interpret and construct a black female sporting discourse on hair as told by the athletes themselves. Bruening’s (2005) belief that, “giving voice to African American sportswomen could have groundbreaking outcomes regarding equality in sport” fuels my own understanding of the importance of this project (p. 341). By soliciting black women’s ideas and

opinions I strive to interpret how black female athletes' hair, as an integral aspect of their active body, further informs sport scholarship about the changing discourses on race, gender and class identity in female athletics.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this project is to address the three research questions concerning black female athletes and their hair; therefore, the participants in the study must meet specific criteria. First, the participants must identify themselves as female, collegiate athletes of color who are either actively participating or have retired from participation. Although many studies on black women in sport reference clustering in basketball and track and field, this study is open to all sport participants to represent the range of cultural practices representative of athletes of color (Butler & Lopiano, 2003). The methodology employed in this project is qualitative in nature because qualitative methods are best employed in research that “seeks cultural description” or endeavors to “elicit multiple constructed realities, studied holistically,” which is precisely the intention of this research design (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.53). In this section I will discuss my site description, data collection and analysis, quality of data, my reflexive practices as a researcher and former student athlete, as well as the challenges and limitations I encountered during this project.

Site Description

As mentioned above, the intention of this project is to explore the experiences of black female athletes with their hair; therefore, the population of this study is exclusively women who met the research criteria. All participants identify as “black,” which, although a contentious and protean subjectivity, is also a political identity that women of color claim for themselves. As such, this study includes multi-racial women and relies upon the self-designation of racial-ethnic identities. The participants all attend(ed) large East Coast Universities and they are either currently

participating or have exhausted athletic eligibility in athletics at the Division I level. Division I athletics represent the highest level of competition in collegiate athletics in North America. The geographic location is chosen due to my own accessibility to the campuses.

I have come to this site selection because of the large amounts of research in the National Collegiate Athletic Association on college athletics (NCAA, 2008; NCAA, 2010). Although there is no definitive data on high-school aged athletic participation, the NCAA produces annual reports on all collegiate athletes such as the *National Student Athlete Race and Ethnicity Report* (2010) and the *NCAA Gender and Equity Report* (2008). The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) also publishes an annual *Racial and Gender Report Card*, which tracks the progress of collegiate and professional sport organizations (Lapchick, Hoff, & Kaiser, 2011).

The wealth of quantitative research on the participation numbers of black female athletes on college campuses leads me to believe that it is the best place to conduct research on my selected population. In the 2009-2010 academic year, the most recent data from *NCAA Student Athlete Ethnicity Report* shows that 12,378 black women participated in Division I athletics (NCAA, 2010, p. 192). While this is the second highest ethnic population of female student-athletes, it is still over 42,000 less than the total Division I population of white female student-athletes (p. 192). The data from the annual reports shows that bowling (40.8%), basketball (32.8%), and track and field (21.8%) at the Division I level have the highest totals of black female athlete populations, as well as total percentages of athletes in the NCAA (NCAA, 2008; NCAA, 2010). Additionally, these three sports have been the top sports in that

respective order for the past ten years that the NCAA has published their ethnicity reports. Moreover, by interviewing across different sporting cultures (e.g. basketball, track and field, soccer), as well as at different stages of participation, I will achieve a more diverse sample. Although I realize that the variety does not make my sample population any more representative of the black female student athlete community, it does allow me the opportunity to explore various subject positions which enriches my understanding of hair in sporting practices (Stroh, 2000).

Data Collection

I began the data collection procedures in early January 2011 and finished at the beginning of March 2011. During the data collection process, I conducted one focus group comprised of 7 individuals, along with ten personal interviews, which affords me a total of 17 black female athletes in this study. The focus group was 138 minutes in length and the personal interviews ranged from 48 minutes to 86 minutes, with the average interview running at about 60 minutes. In total, I collected just over 14 hours of audio-recorded data, not including the time spent reviewing the consent and confidentiality forms, and 20 hand-written pages of field notes.

My goal in the each personal interview was to create a comfortable environment to allow for honest and open sharing between myself and the participant, and I did this by identifying myself as a former student-athlete and engaging in short conversation about my identity before beginning the interview process. Often I reminded participants that, “there is no right or wrong answer” and that they were free to share as much, or as little, as they preferred. Furthermore, the open-ended nature of the interview and focus group questions helped to create a conversational

structure to each exchange, which put participants at ease in the interviewing environment (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Stroh, 2000). My goal in the personal interviews and focus group was to gain in-depth information about how each individual navigated caring for their hair while participating in athletics. I wanted to understand the individual challenges, emotions, personal histories and effort that constructed each individual's daily experiences. Overall, the interviews and focus groups allowed me to gain that knowledge, as well as information that came unsolicited during the conversational exchanges, such as stories and memories of the participants with their hair.

As the researcher, I meet the criteria of my own study and have just recently exhausted my own athletic eligibility in 2010, after a 5-year collegiate athletic career at the Division I level. Given my positionality as a former student-athlete I have important access to an extensive network of peers, therefore gaining access to the population was not a challenge to me. Although I found it easy to begin the sampling process, I chose to employ snowball sampling as a methodological approach to build my participant population for the personal interviews and focus group. The ease with which I entered the athletic research field allowed me to easily identify a key informant to begin the sampling process and also distanced me from the participant population. Not only did the distance allow me to be more professional with the participants because they were not friends or teammates, but it also afforded me credibility as a researcher due to the trust and respect that members of the population had for the key informant.

Snowball Sampling

The method that I employed to build my participant sample is snowball sampling, a means by which “the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy, 2008, p. 329). This process is repetitive and accumulative in nature. It is the most widely employed method across the social sciences, and, most specifically, it is highly useful for accessing marginal populations that possess a specific knowledge (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Biernack & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008). Female athletes of color are what Biernack and Waldorf (1981) describe as, “low-visibility” populations, therefore making them prime candidates for this sampling methodology. It is also of note that black feminist scholars such as Weitz (2004), Jacobs-Huey (2006), and Patton (2006) all utilize snowball-sampling techniques in their research of minority women. They all begin their projects with a key informant whose knowledge and accessibility to an isolated, marginal community helps them build connections to find qualifying subjects.

Weitz (2004), Noy (2008) and Bruening (2005) also included a table of demographic information (e.g. age, sport background, sport experience) as a supplement to snowball sampling in order to present a clearer representation of their participant population. In following suit with previous researching techniques in the field, I created my own demographic representation of my participant population, which can be found in Table 1. Another model that assisted in the visual organizational representation of my research methodologies is the Sampling Tree, or *Stemma*, which documents the paths of referrals between informants in Figure 1, beginning with the key informant, Kim.

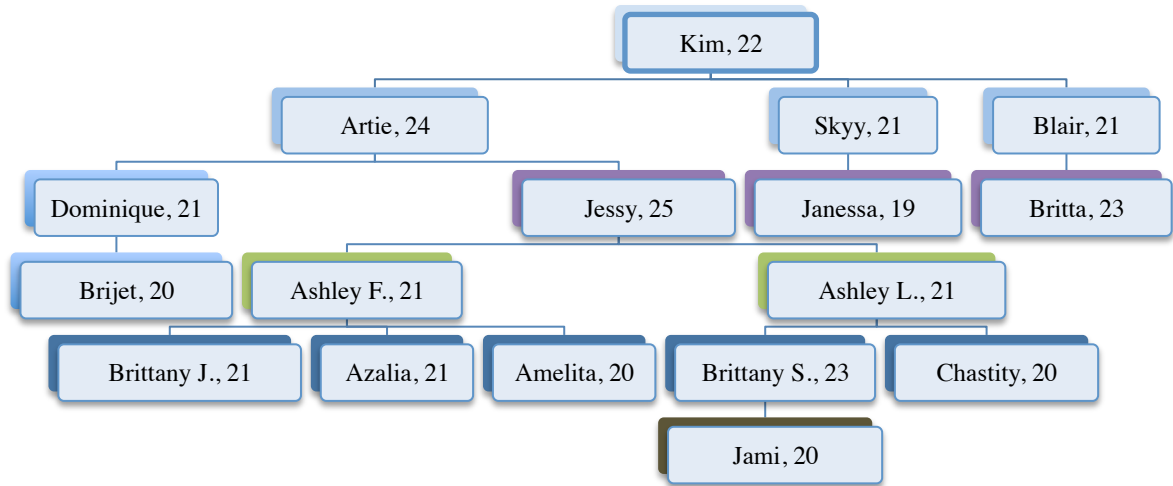


Figure 1 The sampling tree of participant referrals during snowball sampling, including the first name and age of each participant.

The sampling tree allowed me to be involved in the sampling process from initiation to termination and is also a means to increase validity and decrease bias (Biernack & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008). The sampling tree is also useful for the reader to see a visual representation of how the referral system works, as well as the relationships of the voices to one another.

The limitations of snowball sampling are most often overemphasis of cohesiveness in the population, and bias of the sample population. These shortcomings are mainly a result of participants referring those who are in the same social network and have the same beliefs and values, therefore influencing a bias in the sample population. By creating a sampling tree, participant’s social networks can be tracked to ensure the tree has shorter, discrete chains instead of larger, single trains - which decrease variation and often result in the exclusion of those who are ‘un-connected’ or on the margin (Noy, 2008, p. 333). Biernack and Waldorf (1981), reiterate that the researcher should continually ask themselves, “How many more cases should be part of this chain?” and “In what direction should the chain go?” (p.

156), which was often a question I asked myself. At the completion of each interview I spoke briefly with each participant about the referral process, which helps me to find more participants and asked them if they had any recommendations. It was recommended that the decision to continue with a referral chain should be guided by the observed repetition of data and representativeness of the sample, however, I found that each subsequent participant shared different lived experiences and did not find repetitiveness to be a problem.

Data Collection Procedures

My goal of data collection was to conduct one, 120-minute focus groups, comprised of six to eight elite athletes as well as ten or more, 60-100-minute personal interviews of athletes who are either actively participating or have exhausted collegiate eligibility from competition. I conducted the focus group, 10 interviews, as well as one supplemental personal interview, which I discuss in a subsequent section of this thesis. My intention to conduct the focus group first so that it could be used as a gauge to ensure that the pre-written personal interview questions were framed correctly and address the most salient issues, was set back by the challenge of coordinating the individual schedules of prospective participants (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). However, I found that during the beginning personal interviewing and transcriptions process I realized themes in discussion and was able to recognize topics of conversation that enhanced my ability to conduct the focus group and ask more poignant questions.

I continued the personal interviews until no new codes or themes occur, which is otherwise known as the “point of saturation” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The

focus group was conducted in person and addresses the 15 discussion topics surrounding black hair in sport that I previously set forth in my focus group instrument (see Appendix A). In order to produce accurate transcriptions of the focus groups, as well as to be able to revisit the dynamics of interaction during the session, I videotaped the focus group. My intent was to be able to discern the subjects as they are speaking in natural conversation and video footage aided in this process.

Due to the hectic nature of student-athlete schedules, the personal interviews were conducted in three different formats: in-person, over the telephone, and through video conferencing (e.g. Skype or iChat). However, it was my aim to conduct the personal interviews in a face-to-face format, when available, because it is conducive to forming a good rapport with the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Given the circumstances I conducted four interviews face-to-face, five over the videoconferencing service, and one over the telephone. The face-to-face interviews took place at on-campus locations that were chosen by the participant because they were more familiar with the setting and I felt they would choose places that were comfortable to them. However, I did recommend that they chose a space that is quiet and where we can talk uninterrupted for about an hour. The personal interview questions progressed from general hair history to more specific information on sport related issues with hair, and the full personal interview instrument can be found in Appendix B. In order to insure accurate transcription of discussion between the interviewer and participant, I audio-recorded every session on a computer program called TapeDeck™, which allows you to store, label and export files to audio analyzing software or for easy transport on an iPod.

Since this project deals with human subjects, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was submitted and approved in order to ensure the project meets ethical standards, as well as to protect the participants' right to confidentiality. Every subject was given the IRB-approved consent form to read and sign before an interview or focus group was conducted. Due to the exploratory nature of this project and the lack of existing scholarship on the particular subject matter, questions were structured in a more open-ended manner that fosters discovery within the topic of hair in sport (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Focus Groups

Once participants were selected from preliminary snowball sampling I began the process of contacting the individuals referred by Jessy⁴, because she mentioned that three individuals attended the same university, which would ease the task of coordinating a meeting time of five or more student athletes with very hectic schedules during the spring semester. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) cautioned that coordinating multiple individuals to meet would be challenging and I experienced this challenge first-hand. My previous attempt at coordinating a focus group in early January failed, due to the multiple extra-curricular activities and in-season schedules of the individual referrals that I contacted. After several tries I was unable to find a consensus time and decided to continue with a different referral. Fortunately, of the three referrals made by Jessy, two women responded back to me by email that they were interested and that they could refer friends that would be interested in participating in a focus group.

⁴ Jessy is a participant from the personal interview portion of this project. Throughout this project I refer to the participants solely by their first names in an effort to protect their privacy and conceal identifying information, as many of the participants are still active collegiate athletes.

After communicating over the telephone to coordinate a time and location, we agreed to conduct the focus group in Ashley L.'s apartment on campus because it was a central location on for the participants to meet. Her apartment was a convenient location because some of the focus group participants even lived in the building while the others were located just a few blocks away. Although the meeting space in her apartment was small for the eight of us, it created an intimate environment that naturally fostered discussion and comfort because it was a residential setting that the participants seemed familiar with.

The focus group I conducted consisted of 15 open-ended discussion questions (Appendix A). Although I started with six questions set out in my preliminary instrument, I decided to ask more questions to explore the new issues brought up by the participants that I felt would contribute to my contextual and theoretical understanding of their lived experiences (Amis, 2005, p. 116). Focus groups were used because they simulate natural discussion among participants in a familiar setting so that individuals can feel comfortable sharing information (Madriz, 2000; Sarachild, 1978). Moreover, focus groups were chosen for two reasons:

- 1) The group dynamic of focus groups encourages interaction among participants (Kvale, 1996)
- 2) Participants in the focus group are *active* participants in the research process, as opposed to being *passive* subjects (Bruening, 2004, p. 243)

The focus group instrument was comprised of eight discussion questions and I acted as the moderator during a 138-minute long session. During the session I encouraged participants to share information and made it known that it was acceptable to disagree

with one another, which was an effort to counter the “group think” phenomenon that is common in focus groups (Amis, 2005, p. 110). While the prior relationships of the focus group participants made the dynamic of conversation very balanced, I did, on a few occasions, interject to ask specific individuals their opinions or thoughts to ensure that the dynamic remained balanced.

In order to insure accurate transcription of discussion between focus group members, I videotaped and audio-recorded the session to ensure that I could clearly hear each voice due to the lowered sound quality on the small video camera. In “Focus Groups in Feminist Research”, Madriz (2000) emphasizes that the use of focus groups not only allows for a more natural interaction of participants, which decenters the researcher in the dialogic space, but, they also have long been “empowering for women of color” as a form of consciousness-raising (p. 843; see also Sarachild, 1978; Radway, 1991). Most importantly, my goal of authentically representing the multi-vocality of the black female athletic experience in this project became a reality because the discussion of the focus group ensured that, “the dominant voices” which emerged were that of the participants (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, p. 332).

Consciousness-raising has a long history, especially in the realm of black feminism, as an exercise for mobilizing social change and empowerment against the social structures that regulated the lives of African Americans (Kamberlis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The homogeneity of the participant sample, coupled with a confidentiality agreement, helped to establish the focus group as a relatively safe space for sharing knowledge. The focus group also afforded me the opportunity to

obtain a large amount of qualitative data in a short amount of time, therefore making it a practical instrument given the shortened timeline for my master's thesis completion (Ibid.).

Most importantly, I owe the success of the focus group to the openness and trust exhibited by the seven women who not only contributed 90 minutes out of their already busy schedules to sit down and discuss their hair, but invited me, a virtual stranger, into their residence for the focus group session. I would like to recognize and applaud the efforts of Ashley F. and Ashley L. to coordinate seven student-athletes to meet, as it is very much appreciated and made a substantial contribution to this project.

Personal Interviews

Aside from the seven women who participated in the focus group, I conducted personal interviews with ten other women in order to compile in-depth personal narratives from individual black female athletes. The interviews were used a tool to counter the “group think” phenomenon, which can often influence responses of focus group members (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705, see also Amis, 2005). By asking similar questions in personal interviews to those asked in the focus groups and comparing the answers, I was able to investigate how consistent the patterns are between individual opinions and the dominant discourses that appeared in previous interviews and the focus group. Furthermore, the personal interview instrument is comprised of 35 semi-structured questions that address the participant's personal hair history, hair adaptations for sport, and opinions on the importance of hair. Each interview began with a very general, conversation-inducing query: “what is the

texture of your hair?” This question was often met with lengthy descriptions and deep thoughts about how to accurately describe their hair. Every interview ended with me putting forth the opportunity to talk openly about topics they felt were not covered during the interview session, and about half of the participants took advantage of this moment to continue to share.

Additionally, pre-established probe questions were part of the personal interview instrument so that the interviews would maintain a similar structure and topic of information sharing. After each interview I transcribed and coded the audio recording so that I could compare common themes in my field notes, as well as adjust the personal interview instrument. Appendix C offers the final list of open coding themes that I generated during the transcription process. Although I started the interview process with a beginning list of 33, I finished with 99 open codes.

Sample Demographic Characteristics

As previously noted, the exploratory nature of this topic, as well as my interest in the similarities and differences of specific sporting cultures, makes it necessary that I keep track of very simple demographic information from participants. Although I did not present all of the information in Table 1, due to concerns over the confidentiality and consent forms, I collected the following information from every participant during the interview process: name, age, sport, university attended, graduation year, collegiate sport(s), other sports played, hometown and state, as well as total years of experience playing sports. While I will not reveal individual demographic information, I can provide a summary of the total sample population.

The participant population consisted of 17 individuals who self-identified as black female athletes and are either actively competing or have competed at the Division I collegiate level. Of the 17, 14 were actively participating in their sport and 3 had graduated from their respective universities. Participants ranged in age from 19-25 years, with an average age of 21.35 years. The participant sample draws from seven, east coast Division I Universities that range in size from 5,000 to just over 35,000 matriculating students. Additionally, the 7 participants of the focus group all attended a historically black college/university (HBCU)⁵.

The sample participants' hometowns are located in eleven different states. Furthermore, the participants have participated in 18 different sports including, but not limited to, fencing, gymnastics, golf, volleyball, karate, with the most common sports being track and field, basketball and soccer. None of the participants competed in more than one sport at the collegiate level and the average total years of experience in organized sport was 15.12 years. Overall, the sample population had 257 total years of experience in sport participation.

It is worth noting that eight of the participants either compete or competed in lacrosse during their collegiate careers, which is a result of the general referral process of snowball sampling, as well as the fact that three of the focus group members played lacrosse. Alternatively, the lacrosse athletes did also have experience in a variety of other sports during their youth and teenage years, which helped to

⁵ While it was not planned, the juxtaposition of the HBCU student-athletes against the experiences of the remainder of participants provided an interesting and pointed critique of the different experiences in athletics. In 2005 Bruening issued a call for more research on HBCU athletic programs for women and I feel that this is still an area that deserves more attention in scholarship on black sportswomen.

balance their accounts of participation. In total, the participant population is undoubtedly a richly diverse sample of the black female athletic population.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As noted by Amis (2005) the data analysis and interpretation process begins as soon as the researcher enters the field and engages with participants. Therefore, my data analysis began January 12, 2011 and by March 3, 2011 I completed the focus group and ten personal interviews, as well as the transcriptions of each session. Given the short timeline of my data collection I completed two or three interviews a week, with the intent to transcribe each interview after its completion, however I did get behind in this endeavor because of time restraints in my daily schedule. I found the analysis process of transcribing and coding the interview to be an intensely laborious task, often taking five to six hours of transcription time per interview. The focus group specifically took eight hours to transcribe due to the process of discerning voices, noting non-verbal interactions and replaying muffled or background comments. Despite the large amount of time it took to transcribe, it was advantageous in that it allowed me to become more familiar with the information and helped me to re-experience each interview and take particular note of the individual personalities and emotions during the process (Amis, 2005; Patton, 2002). The 14 hours of total audio-recordings that I collected, along with the field notes translated to over 200 single-spaced pages of data and roughly 60 hours spent transcribing, allowing me to be fully immersed in the data I collected.

Coding Analysis

Given the volume of the data I accumulated, the time constraints of completing this project, and the reality that I was undertaking the data analysis process alone, I chose to use coding analysis as a means of organizing the large amount of data. Without order, the data would remain an, “unwieldy, unstructured, amorphous mass” that would be of little use in my analysis (Amis, 2005, p. 128). Stroh (2000) recommends coding as the method of choice because, “the sheer amount of unstructured data [collected during qualitative research] means that an organizing system is needed into which material can be broken down into manageable chunks” (p. 210). Many scholars also advise that coding is most effectively undertaken with the use of a computer software program, which lends itself well to my research due to the fact that the transcriptions are all located on my personal computer and can be easily uploaded to software programs for coding (Amis, 2005; Patton, 2002; Stroh, 2000; Weitzman, 1999). I did, however, encounter problems in that most coding software is PC-based and there were few Mac-based programs that had been discussed in previous scholarship on coding.

TAMS Analyzer

The program that I used and feel was highly effective in the analysis process was TAMS Analyzer (Text Analysis Markup System) (Weinstein, 2008). TAMS Analyzer allowed me to easily import and code my transcriptions, insert field notes, recognize the frequency of codes and themes, as well as restructure my original codes into broader concepts and themes. Much like the transcription process, coding was also highly labor-intensive as I coded, re-coded and selectively extracted data. During coding I undertook a three-stage process of: *open coding*, *axial coding* and

selective coding (Gratton & Jones, 2004). In *open coding*, I reviewed each transcript carefully and, starting with my preliminary coding list, began to generate more codes that related to the topics discussed by participants. As noted earlier, my open coding list grew from 33 to 99 codes in the initial coding phase. Revisiting the black feminist framework for this research, it is necessary to note how systems of power (e.g. race, class, sexuality, gender) serve to regulate the participants' self-identification (Collins, 1990; hooks; 1996). Therefore this was reflected in the preliminary development of coding themes and built upon as I became immersed in the data. TAMS Analyzer also allowed me the ability to track the frequency of recurring codes, which acted as a supplemental means of determining what themes are stronger or more popular in the participants' discussion. As a result, the top five recurring codes are, in order of frequency: "mother", "(hair) management", "swimming", "straight hair", and "braids". The numerical representation of codes helped me to begin relating the most discussed topics to the literature on black hair as I recognized affirmations and dissent to the common issues presented in that corpus of literature.

Next I undertook the second stage of *axial coding*, where I restructured the open codes into more general groups that represented similarities and relationships between participant's ideas (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Finally, during *selective coding*, I used the nine axial codes to organize the larger themes that run throughout the interviews and focus group. These themes could later be used as empirical data to support and refute my theoretical understanding of black female athletic lived experiences in sport. I was also able to export my data and begin selection of specific

quotes that best illustrate the concepts and variety of experiences brought to bear by the 17 research participants.

Given the amount of time the coding process took, I was able to continue to get closer to the voices of my participants, as I undertook a second re-reading of their ideas, comments and opinions. Also, upon the completion of coding, I felt that my data was more accessible, organized and was much more manageable than the original stack of transcripts I began the process with. I feel it is of utmost importance to bring attention to the reality that, although I employed the aid of computerized analysis in my research, the software coding programs do not replace my role as the researcher or alter my ability to represent the individuals in my study. Amis (2005) supports my claim, stating that while qualitative coding software can aid in the analysis process it, “cannot actually do the analysis - this still has to come from the researcher” (p. 6). Weitzman (1999) echoes this sentiment that, “there is no software that can make the kinds of interpretive judgments that are inherent in qualitative analysis” (p. 1261). From this point in the analysis process, I used the nine themes developed during coding in the follow chapter that addresses my results, and then further relate those to the overarching themes of race, class, gender and sexuality in the discussion section.

Credibility, Validity and Limitations

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have recently addressed the “crisis of legitimation” faced by qualitative researchers, which takes aim at the criteria for evaluating and interpreting data (p. 19). Creswell and Miller (2000) define *validity* as, “how accurately the account represents participants realities of the social

phenomena and is credible to them,” while they explain *credibility* to be contingent upon the, “strategies used by researchers to establish the validity of their study” (p. 125). Often establishing quality in qualitative research is achieved by employing multiple methods for establishing validity in one’s procedures, as well as identifying ways to ethically and morally establish credibility as a researcher. In their article, “Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry,” Creswell and Miller (2000) define nine different approaches available to the qualitative researcher: triangulation, saturation, member checking, thick description, reflexivity, peer debriefing, collaboration, external auditing and disconfirming evidence (p. 126). Despite the variety of options, it is integral that the researcher takes multiple steps to insure integrity and consistency through the research process (Seal, 1999). In my research I engage in four of the nine procedures to increase validity and I take pains to develop credibility as a researcher during my engagement with participants.

In terms of establishing credibility during the research procedures, I completed member checking, triangulation, saturation and reflexive practices. Upon transcribing each interview, I returned the transcribed copy to the participant via email as a means of involving them in the research process. Participants were given the chance to review their statements made during the interview or focus group, elaborate or refute on their thoughts, as well as provide any feedback on the data collection process they participated in. Of the 17 participants involved in the study, 11 responded back to me via email that they approved the transcript and felt it was an accurate representation of our exchange. One respondent replied that she felt

awkward about the language she used in the interview; however, all others simply replied that they approved of their transcript.

While Creswell and Miller (2000) believed that the deployment of multiple methodologies, or *triangulation*, would establish qualitative rigor, there has been a shift away from the assumption that, “there is a fixed point or object that can be triangulated” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). Instead, the researchers move towards the method of *crystallization*, or the belief that there are multiple perspectives with which we can approach the world as researchers (p. 963). Further elaborating on this concept, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) state,

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns and arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose.... Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of validity, and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously we know there is always more to know. (p. 963)

In this sense, crystallization provides a more complete and comprehensive, yet unfinished understanding of qualitative work in that the view of the crystal is dependent on positionality. Thus, acknowledging that my positionality as a researcher - what I know as a researcher and how I have come to this understanding - is important and imperative to the research process. Not only do I employ multiple methods of personal interviews, focus groups and field notes from participant observation, but I am acutely aware and constantly revisiting my relationship to my work through reflexive practices.

In terms of *saturation*, I personally conducted all of the interviews and moderated the focus group, as well as partaking in multiple readings of the participant data during the transcription, coding and re-coding process. Furthermore, in line with feminist methodological approaches, I established credibility as a researcher by

engaging in reciprocal practices with the participants to establish a relationship of trustworthiness (Harrison, 2001). A limitation that is worthy of note is that I did not have to time to complete a more thorough member checking, as I only returned the transcripts to participants. If I had more time in the research process I would have also returned a sample of the research interpretation to the participants as well so that they could also validate my interpretation of their accounts.

The Role of the Researcher: Reflexivity

Consistent with my previous beliefs, my identity as a black female collegiate athlete was extremely helpful in establishing a rapport and forming a bond with participants (Jacobs-Huey, 2006). Since I fit into the criterion of the participant population I anticipate posing less of a threat, therefore, decreasing hostility and suspicion to create a more comfortable environment (Biernack & Waldorf, 1981). In addition, my unique positionality to the participants, as well as my feminist and cultural studies consciousness, emphasizes a need to acknowledge reflexivity as a crucial tool for “working the hyphen” of the *self-other* relationship between myself and the participants (Fine, 1994). Consistent with my black feminist consciousness, I was drawn to reflexivity, not only as a means to examine my methodology, but also as a praxis of reciprocity with my participants to engage in procedures that do not dehumanize them as individuals, or “others”, but attempts to decrease the unequal power relations through my research practices. Drawing from the work of public intellectual and reflexive theorist Pierre Bourdieu, reflexivity is defined as, “the inclusion of theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society” (Wacquant, 1992, p.36, as cited in Jolles,

p.78, 2007). Not only does a reflexive framework accord me greater accountability as a researcher, but also it aids in closing the gap between theory and practice moving towards a more public praxis of PCS (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Jolles, 2007).

The Personal Is Political

Not surprisingly, reflexivity throughout the research process unearthed many latent beliefs, values and biases that I brought to my research. I entered the research process feeling that, as a black female athlete I would be able to relate to the experiences of the participants because they shared a similar identity and, in turn, similar experiences and subjectivities. However, the reality of my “outsider-within” status and the multiple truths about identity became more of a reality to me as the interviewing process wore on. During the personal interviews and focus group, I found myself wanting to ask questions about a phrase used by a participant or affirm their specific frustration with their hair, only to realize that I could not relate. We did not all have the same hair texture, we did not grow up in the same circumstances, and we did not face all of the same challenges simply because we identified as black female athletes.

In contrast, there were a few participants that I felt I could truly connect with during the interview process and have kept in touch with after the commencement of data collection procedures. These experiences of budding friendships and the joy that they brought me created a stark contrast against the reality that these research participants could be my very first black friends. The realization that, until this point I have, not only had no black teammates, but also no black female friends was a

shocking revelation for me. Although I have spent the last six years of my academic and personal life working to affect race relations in sport by addressing issues of racial inequalities through my research, it took encounters in the research field to move me to question my own intentions. *What have I done in my own life to combat these issues? What authority do I have to speak on these topics when this is the reality of my subjectivity?*

Shortly after these revelations, my black feminist consciousness was metaphorically rescued by the words of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) in her book, *Black Feminist Thought*. It seemed to be a fluke that in re-reading the introduction I stumbled across her own reflection:

How can I as one person speak for such a large and complex group as African-American women?" I asked myself. The answer is that I cannot and should not because each of us must learn to speak for herself. In the course of writing the book I came to see my work as being part of a larger process, as one voice in a dialogue among people who have been silenced...my hope is that others who were formerly and are currently silenced will find their voices. I, for one, certainly want to hear what they have to say. (p. ix).

It was hard, yet liberating, to finally understand and acknowledge a part of myself which had always remained hidden, and comforting to know that even a published and acclaimed scholar such as Patricia Hill Collins questioned her ability to represent her research population.

In paying attention to reflexivity, not only as a means of increasing rigor but also ethics, I was moved to question the ethics of my research aims and my own personal motivations for this project (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004). Subsequently, this questioning moved me to consider the words of Ruth Behar, who equivocates

We ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make other vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable. Our informants are then left carrying the burden of representation as we hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality. (in Fine, 2000, p. 169)

Behar's quotation refers to the notion of reciprocity that we all face as researchers when it comes to the nature of power dynamics in social research and ethnographic methodologies. Harrison's (2001) own close and intimate relationships with her research subjects raise questions about coming to terms with the unavoidable imbalance of power in dialogic spaces. She states, "where power effects may be reduced in some areas, the potential for exploitation of more intimate relationships remains wherever reciprocity and friendship are implicated in feminist research processes" (p. 335). Therefore, in reaction to the words of Behar and Harrison, I have elected to add into my project my own responses to the 35-question personal interview instrument (Appendix D) as an act of reciprocity. I feel it is the least I can do for the 17 participants who have shared with me their invaluable words, ideas and experiences for the sake of this research.

Chapter 4: Listening to the Voices

In the time I spent listening to the stories, memories, frustrations and moments of hope and resistance told by the research participants, it became clear that their journeys with their hair were complex and multi-dimensional. Their words needed to be represented in a narrative form that allowed their personalities and emotions to accompany what they had to say. Each participant shared different descriptions of their hair texture, ranging from “rough around the edges”, “natural”, “kinky”, “tight and curly”, “soft” or “relaxed”. However, the differences in their hair did not discount the overwhelming theme that being a black female athlete poses challenges, which affect their experiences in sport, relationships with teammates and coaches, as well as the ability to construct value in their identities both on and off the field. In spite of the issues I speak of, the women were not passive victims of their subjectivities, often creating alternative solutions to hair care that contributed to a subtle, yet effective, discourse of resistance.

What is most evident is that, in terms of being a black female athlete and caring for their hair, it is not an experience that ended when they left the field. Many of their stories chronicled the trial-and-error process that started in their youth when they began participating in athletics and has progressed in a myriad of forms into adulthood. A continual topic in the conversations I had with the women was the lack of information on black hair care in athletics, a lack of positive and possible hairstyles in the media to support their hair choices and a lack of teammates to share their experiences with. Despite the barriers and obstacles with which they were faced, it

remained a constant truth that hair did not stop them from competing and succeeding in their respective sports.

The task of being a collegiate athlete, competing at the highest level of play, is easily comparable to a full-time job in terms of the time spent practicing, traveling, getting treatment for injuries and competing in games or meets. Thus, the combination of navigating the rigors of collegiate athletic requirements and trying to look and feel good on and off the field is a site of struggle that receives the majority of attention in the stories shared. As Artie, a collegiate lacrosse player who grew up playing multiple sports, explains,

The biggest thing about being a competitor is being comfortable, first and foremost. If you don't feel comfortable in what you're wearing and how you look when you perform, you know... it ruins your whole performance. I mean, you know, as a competitive athlete, you're not trying to look cute but you want to look like you're presentable.

Skyy, a soccer player, remembers finding herself trying to navigate a similar positionality to Artie

...there was one time when I didn't have gel and I was pissed off the entire game and it was kind of a distraction because my cowlicks kept falling in my eyes. And it looked frizzy and I feel like I just looked hideous, I don't know. Like, yea people say like, you shouldn't care about what you look like when you're playing sport. It's a sport. You're sweating anyway. But I at least want to have a nice, put together bun and then it'll be easy.

Superficially it may seem as though this preoccupation with appearance or hair is a purely cosmetic effort to achieve a certain look, but it is a reflection of the societal pressures that have a real influence on how women perceive themselves or are perceived by others. With an understanding that hair care is a gendered and racialized performance of self, the women's stories speak truth to these pressures and norms that shape their performances. While the participants remained cognizant of the challenges they face on the field, it was their investments in their hair off the field

that complete a holistic understanding of black female athletes and how they handle their hair.

As they narrate their transition between the two arenas, specific issues are addressed such as the relationships and bonds between teammates, differing levels of support both inside and outside of the athletic community and realizations of racial difference. In the final section of this chapter, I draw attention to a sense of hope and happiness embraced by players as they discuss their expectations of what their post-collegiate lives will be like. Whether real or imagined, it remains a common theme that they believe their hair will be easier, and in some ways better, after they stop competing in sport.

In this chapter, I present the narratives on hair as told by the women themselves into two sections, on-field and off-field, as these two settings confront different and unique issues on hair. Furthermore, I ask that readers remain attuned to the interplay and overlap of discourses on issues of race, class, gender and sexuality which are woven throughout the stories told by the seventeen voices in this research project.

On The Field: Expecting the Unexpected

In the opening minutes of the focus group, the discussion turned to the definition of “good hair.” While each of the seven women had her own idea of what “good hair” was, it was a consensus in the group that it was harder to achieve that type of hair while practicing or playing a sport,

Jami: it’s embarrassing

Lia: your hair just goes [motions hair puffing out around her hair] in the middle of the meet, and, aw shit, you gotta take off your hood

Jami: you’re looking all cute and stuff, and then here comes the rain

Moments later the conversation returned to the topic when three of the track and field athletes discussed having “good hair” in their sport.

Jami: it’s not... it’s not acceptable to look rough. Like at all. Even after you run. You go to the bathroom, you brush your hair. I’ve seen girls in the bathroom with flat irons, plugged in, doing their hair in the bathroom. Like, it is not a joke!

Brittany S.: like, you wanna look good so we try our hardest...I know with track... we are all like, in the relays, like how my hair look? I look good? We really pride ourselves on looking good, so we really try to look our best at the meets. So you know...

Lia: And when we’re doing our hair we take into account the wind blowing through our hair when we’re running

Jami: people take pictures

Brittany S.: They take pictures of us! While we’re running!

Lia: You want it to-- flow. Because when you’re running you’re supposed to relax so if your face looks relaxed and your hair looks... stressed [everyone laughs]

While Lia lightens the seriousness of the mood with humor it does not take away from the theme of “looking good when you compete” and the politics of respectability that influence how Jami, Brittany S. and Lia handle their hair in sport. Moreover, the way hair looks seems to reflect how the women gauge their personal appearance as a whole, pointing to the importance of hair in constructing specific performances of self.

Comparatively, there are sacrifices and compromises that women make with hair when it comes to the managing the commitments of being an athlete and being involved in other activities. In describing her experience with navigating her involvement with extra-curricular activities while in season, Amelita relays how she managed the task of pledging a sorority on campus last year.

I’m in a sorority and one of their main premises is looking pretty all the time. ...and I try to tell them though, it’s hard with my hair. And they’ll be like, “Amelita why don’t you get a perm?” because they know my hair is long too. And I try to explain to them—they have curly hair like yours⁶... and they don’t do athletics. So they straighten it and it will stay straight. Or they get weaves and it’ll stay straight. Or they have perms. *Nobody is an athlete with natural nappy hair!* So when I come up into the program, like last year when I was pursuing to be a

⁶ In all of the interviews I wore my hair naturally curly, and in many instances, participants referred to my hair as a way to explain what they were talking about in terms of texture, style or length.

part of it, I would flat iron my hair everyday and a lot of my hair broke off. Like, that was just a sacrifice I took. But this year I'm not doing that and, so I be lookin' rough. And they just don't understand it's hard to explain to them everyday that, like, my hair can't be down and curly and popped *everyday*.

Amelita's experience speaks to the misunderstandings and lack of knowledge that even other black women have about how to care for hair and what is, and isn't possible if you are practicing or competing as an athlete. While other women have the freedom to choose their styles and maintain their hair as they please, athletes often have to make compromises and find specific ways to manage their hair and keep it healthy that is different than others. Black female athletes simply cannot rely on reproducing the same techniques as other black women because their schedules are more demanding and pose alternative challenges.

Braids

Braiding is a popular style that emerges in discussions as a way to manage hair with an athletic lifestyle and still look presentable. Dominique and Janessa explain that it takes, on average, eight to nine hours, to get their hair braided, but it is worthwhile because it ultimately shortens their daily routines because braids will stay intact for weeks at a time. Dominique noted that because of "lack of time" to do her hair and "intense practices", she opts to wear braids. Similarly, Janessa remembers getting braids but, despite the ease of style, they got in the way of her ability to play.

I did have microbraids⁷ when I played soccer and they were really heavy and that was kind of hard. It was a lot more weight and heading the ball and being able to like run. It was a little bit harder. It was more of an adjustment.

⁷ Microbraids (also commonly shortened to "micros") are a hairstyle where hair is braided into hundreds of thin braids, almost resembling the look of strands of hair. Sometimes the braids are supplemented with natural or synthetic hair to add length, color or curl to the hair.

When she was younger, Blair recounts her mom styling her hair in microbraids because they were easy to deal with due to the constant washing from swimming.

I was really little...I would say, seven? Eight? It [her hair] was so thick that my cap would be like out here [holds hands inches away from her head], and if my dad tried to put it up in my cap it wouldn't fit. So it was pretty funny, you know like, looking at pictures now. But then-- I couldn't fit my hair in my cap and it was just like, weighing me down and I would take them out and I would be so much faster.

In discussion, all the athletes brought up a multitude of ways that they styled their hair, such as Blair and Janessa talking about how they figured out competing with microbraids. However, one style that was absent from the discussions was the common stylization of cornrows⁸. Despite their history as a fairly low-maintenance and lasting style, cornrows were not identified as a viable option for managing black hair, but as a signifier of gender non-normatively. When I asked if they believed their current hairstyle said anything about their sexuality, most women either replied “no”, or talked about cornrows as a style they felt was outside of the norm or acceptable realm.

Even though many participants mentioned their boyfriends or past relationships during discussions, they did not choose to discuss how their own hair was a reflection of their femininity or heterosexual ideals, but instead how others' presentations reaffirm their normative heterosexuality. As one participant responded, “I think when they have the cornrows going back and the like... headband. It kinda looks, they kinda look like a guy, and so people stereotype them and stuff”. Another woman commented that cornrows are, “a gay thing to do,” while yet another athlete equivocated, “you automatically assume that like, they might be gay or something

⁸ Cornrows are a hairstyle, dating back to slavery, where the hair is sectioned off into rows and then braided flat to the head (Prince, 2009). In recent years, hair is not always sectioned off into straight rows, but manipulated into artistic patterns.

like that, but I don't judge people... but that is kind of where my mind goes." In the next breath however, the same participant went on to address an interesting issue of how she believed being gay would be liberating in women's athletics.

...there is more freedom, I think, with someone who is gay than there is for a girl, a straight girl, who has to fit into a mold and be like, miss prissy pretty on and off the field and stuff like that.

The last comment raises interesting questions about how much "freedom" black female athletes have in expressing themselves and styling their hair before they are labeled as non-normative. The implications that hair has, in terms of gender performances and dominant ideals of femininity, limits the freedom to wear specific styles such as cornrows or dreadlocks which have been historicized in dominant culture as masculine styles.

The Elements

No matter how the athletes chose to style their hair during competitions or games, the fact remains that the environmental elements - wind, water, heat or humidity - all have different and uncontrollable effects on hair. Not only could water ruin a hairstyle in the form of rain or humidity, but constant washing increases the risk of damaging hair and swimming is a sport that most of the participants partake in sparingly. Britta laments that, "balancing your lifestyle and athletics, you can't always have that look you want." The reality that water and sweat will turn straight hair back to its original curly state was enough to prompt one participant to "not run as hard on hot days when my hair is straight because I don't want to sweat it [her straight hair] out". Additionally, Janessa provides first hand knowledge of how her hair was damaged through constant washing.

...it got really dry, because I was in this phase when I was trying to be like all my friends who could wash their hair everyday and did everything like them. And realized that was not a good idea, because I was a little bit different. And it got really dry and just kind of fell out.

In terms of dealing with damage, Brittany S. retells her experience at a previous school where her efforts to protect her hair were not understood or accepted by white teammates. Not only does her comment spark discussion from the other women, but they point to broader issues on racial difference in sport in their exchange.

Brittany S.: Before I came here I went to another college, and that's a white school. And it would rain, and the girls, or the black girls, there was like...three black girls on the team. And then, we would put on shower caps or plastic bags over our head. And the white people would really be like [makes skeptical face]... they really thought we were crazy like, *what is going on? Why do y'all have that on?* And all this other type of stuff. And it wasn't acceptable and we looked stupid. And I just feel grateful being here and being around other black people, and I can like, wear scarves. So I don't know, I've experienced both sides. [others agree with her and nod]

Lia: And I hate when coaches like title it as "ghetto"

Brittany S.: yea, ghetto...

Lia: Like, "that's ghetto"...no! I mean we live in a Eurocentric culture [a few girls nod] and therefore there is a certain standard that comes with our hair. How the hell do you expect for my hair to be a certain way if I'm sittin' over here getting it wet. If I sit there I'm gonna look stupid either way. So you gotta go with one of the ...lesser evils. So you figure that you're gonna practice one or two hours a day, but you gotta go throughout your whole day for another, let's say, six or seven [hours]. I'm gonna look stupid for those two hours. Like that's just the way it's gonna go.

Brittany J: And I hate when you come to practice, and say... say you're a person who don't really care about your hair. They're like "woof! What happened?". *This* is what happened when you don't take care of your hair, and you wonder why we come in here with scarves and plastic bags over our head! And then ya'll look at us like we actin' stupid. No! This is what happens.

Brittany S.: you can't win

In her story, Brittany S. voices her feelings of gratitude for being at an HBCU where there are other female athletes taking care of their hair in the same way that she was.

While she felt uncomfortable and an outsider at her previous school, the majority black environment at her current school diffused the racial tension. Furthermore, Lia makes a poignant comment about the difficulty of navigating and living up to "Eurocentric" standards without having to make compromises such as covering one's hair with a scarf or a plastic bag. In this instance, it is apparent that the women in the

focus group were acutely aware of the implications of race in their everyday lives. Specifically they locate their triple consciousness of being black, female, and athletic as a reason it is more difficult to meet the dominant ideals of beauty. Instead of acknowledging their ingenuity of using their resources to solve a problem, there remained a persistent preoccupation with racial difference and marginality that was magnified through hair.

Swimming

Conversations regarding swimming and the swimming pool were among the most provocative topics addressed during the interviews and focus group. The athletes all had strong opinions about swimming, getting their hair wet, and the damages posed by chlorine. In the focus group, all of the participants agreed that they would not and have not let their hair influence the sports they participate in – except for swimming. Jami referred to frequently swimming as, “a recipe for baldness...just saying you don’t want your hair.” More specifically, style played a role in an individual’s willingness to swim or participate in team swimming workouts.

Jessy, Artie, Kim and Skyy, who wear their hair naturally curly on a regular basis, were the only participants who claimed they had no problem getting in the pool; however, other girls were more tentative about issues with swimming. Britta commented that the days her team had pool workouts were the days she was “sick” and Brijet spoke of her extensive routine to ensure her hair did not get damaged when she swam.

I would rinse it out, put conditioner in it and then like rinse it out and put a cap on. I read something in a magazine like, that to hydrate your hair... I was putting bottled water on my hair... because I had read something that it was supposed to be good for your hair.

Blair, who is a collegiate swimmer and is in the pool up to three times a day when she is training in-season, explains how she has developed a routine to deal with the threats chlorine can have on hair.

I make sure to condition it after every time so it doesn't get too damaged...if I have practice I wash out the chlorine after practice and shampoo and condition it. If I'm going out I will do all of that and leave a repairing mask on it later for about 10 min, and then blow it dry and flat iron it. If I am just leaving it wet I will put a leave-in conditioner on and wear it down curly or put it in a bun.

The focus group conversation took an interesting turn when it was brought up that their HBCU mandates swimming for all students because, "black people don't know how to swim" (Ashley L.).⁹ The prevalent myth that "black people don't swim" was something that was echoed by numerous participants and even joked about by Skyy when she laughed and said she is "one of the few black people who would ever say that [they like to swim]". It was also a trend that while all of the women knew how to swim, they all learned in their youth when their appearance did not carry as much social capital. Additionally, the most popular solution for wearing their hair and swimming was to braid their hair so that the time-consuming process of daily styling could be avoided. Now that the participants have grown up, they are not willing to voluntarily sacrifice their style due to concerns over the money they spend to achieve their desired style and the time it will take to re-do their hair again.

Educating Their Coaches

Education of peers and coaches on the general nature of what they go through as black women to style their hair and the value of hair in their lives is also a common theme among participants. The topic of coaches and hair is an issue that produced

⁹ Three other women confirmed that they were told by their swimming instructors that swimming was mandatory because "black people can't swim" and that they felt making it mandatory would change that.

lively discussion about how hair is understood across racial and gender lines. Artie expressed, with vigor how she stood up to her coach over a conflicting practice time,

I will never forget my senior prom. My coach said she needed us to have practice...and I made it very clear to her that I personally, could not have practice after I had got my hair done because there would have been no point in getting my hair done. I kind of said it in a little negative way and I was like, "I am not like all of you girls, I have black people hair and you can not just go and do whatever and think it's gonna last. If I want to sit in a hair salon all day, I for sure am not doing *nothing* to have a piece of hair out of place!

In my following interviews I found that Artie was not alone in her frustration with the fact that her coach did not innately understand her dilemma. Although her coach was female, she was not sensitive to black hair care and hairstyling as someone of color might have been. Britta also remembers an incident when she refused to put up her hair after going to the salon, and was left to face questions and laughter by her teammates and coaches.

One practice I was like, "*I seriously am not putting my hair up. I do not want a crease*"... And I played with my hair down and it was the most annoying thing I've never done in my life. They were like, "why is your hair down?" and I'm like, "do you see these locks flowing right now? I'm not putting my hair up" and they like laughed at me the entire practice.

In contrast, when Kim spoke of her experiences with pool workouts she specifically mentioned that her Strength and Conditioning coach, a black woman, was understanding and sensitive to issues of hair, and made sure to let them know in advance: "we are going to be doing a pool workout, so make sure you do x, y and z or whatever to take care of your hair". Mainly, frustrations stemmed from the ignorance of coaches, and even teammates, to cultural practices such as hair care that were located outside of the dominant white ideology of beauty. What was taken-for-granted knowledge in their black communities, was often found humorous or unimportant by coaches due to their lack of knowledge, leaving it up to the individual players to stand up for themselves.

Off The Field: Reflecting on Athletic Experience

At this point in the discussion it is important to contextualize the investments made in hair in terms of time, money and effort, which contributes to the high value placed on hair in black culture. The styles worn by the participants run the gamut of relaxers, weaves, braids or naturally curly -- all of which carry different weight in terms of how much money they cost, how often one must visit the salon for maintenance, as well as what products and personal commitments are needed for upkeep. In surveying the information provided by participants, they report that microbraids take 8-9 hours and cost \$280 for hair and the braids. Chemical relaxers can take 2-5 hours and cost around \$70 every 6 weeks. It costs approximately \$65 for a weekly visit to get a weave washed and styled and the actual weave itself costs around \$200 and will last for 2 months if cared for correctly. Jami reflects on what she goes through.

Oh, weaves cost.... Honey, I don't want to tell you how much I will pay on camera, cause it's just- *it's a lot of money*. You have to pay for the hair, and then to get it done and then it *hurts!*

Although these are all simply reflections of what the participants pay to get their hair done at a salon, the above list does not include the personal commitment for upkeep that must be taken on a daily basis. When located within the context that a student-athlete regularly juggles class, practice, games, team travel, tutors, eating and sleeping, time becomes even more of a luxury. Janessa addressed the issue of finding time in her schedule: "I had to go [to the hair braider] on the one Sunday I had off all month. Because I was in high school so I was playing three different sports, so I think that was hard... finding a time when I was actually free or my mom was free from

work.” In a sarcastic tone, Dominique joked about what it takes to maintain her braids: “yea when people are like, ‘yo, you need to get your hair done again,’ and I’m like ‘shit, maybe *you* should get me some money to get my hair done again!’”.

Ashley F. expresses concern over the commercial business of black hair admitting that, “we [black women] do spend the most money in the hair care industry and I really wish that it wasn’t like that.” However, she also spoke at length about how she combats feeding the capitalist system by styling her hair at home or less frequently visiting the salon if she can learn to do it herself. As another form of resistance and, in some ways, liberation, Artie discusses her decision to go “natural”, and the pleasure she takes in her new found “versatility” and freedom for the time and money her hair used to take.

A lot of times, I’d have scabs in my hair [from chemical burn after a relaxer]. I don’t know, I mean I still tie my hair up at night, but, I mean, I don’t have to wrap it and all that. I can just keep it loose or keep it in a ponytail ... I don’t have to worry about going to get my hair done every two weeks. I would go and get a perm and that was \$50 and then I would have to get my ends trimmed and a deep condition and a protein treatment, and like before you know it you spent like \$120. And you have to come back in two weeks anyway just to maintain so you’re just getting started...

Even those who avoid salon visits are still often burdened by the task of managing their time so that they can maintain their desired hairstyle. While Lia and Jami try to explain how they navigate big meets and being in-season, Ashley L. offers an alternative approach.

Lia: Let’s say that we going to, like, a whack meet, I’m probably not gonna do my hair that Friday, I’ll probably do it that Saturday when I wake up. But if we’re going to Penn State my hair will be done Wednesday... and I will not practice until we get to the meet.

Jami: Cross country season this past season I had my weave in, and then I wanted to have my real hair out but I had to coordinate the time so I waited the day after our last conference meet before I took it out. Because I knew I could not train with my real hair so I’ll have to wait until after the season is over

Lia: yea you have to make plans

Ashley L.: look... when season is here, you plan on looking *fucked up*. We are planning like, okay season is starting in January... so we bout to look fucked up until about May. After that... summertime? What? Can’t tell us *nothin’!*

In a moment of resistance, Ashley acknowledges that during her lacrosse season she won't be spending the same time and energy on styling her hair as she does out of season, but she reconciles with that fact, knowing that the summer (off-season) will allow her the freedom she desires.

The summertime was also understood as a time when the participants all agreed they could give their hair a "break" from the constant washing and styling that was necessary when they were sweating and competing on a daily basis. It was very clear during my exchanges with the women that they appreciated their days off, weekends and summertime because it was a time when they had the time and flexibility to plan how to do their hair in a way that made their active lifestyles easier.

Kinship

As noted previously, black feminist literature on hair foregrounds kinship as a way that black women find a collective sense of resistance to negative and oppressive images and meanings surrounding their hair. In remembering their experiences with athletics in their youth, it was unanimous that their mothers, aunts, grandmothers and female relatives played a large role in maintaining their hair and keeping it healthy. Not surprisingly, mothers played a dominant role in deciding how to style and care for their daughter's hair, and eventually in teaching them to keep their hair healthy while playing sports or swimming. Even the women who commented that their mothers were not good at braiding or doing hair felt that they relied on them to learn and acquire the skills and knowledge it took to manage their hair.

I do not feel it was accidental that I found talk of this cultural practice in relation to sport to emerge only from the voices of the women who attended the

HBCU. Within the focus group, talk about teammates was overwhelmingly positive, as the athletes recounted how certain teammate's talents with hair were of good use in the athletic community. At length, they reminisce and discuss times when they styled each other's hair and the value that their exchanges over hair had in their lives. Lia was so moved by her experiences that she felt it was necessary to acknowledge her friend and teammate, Brittany S, for helping her make her hair more manageable,

Lia: I think that it's easier.... just because, Brittany used to do my hair and, *Oh my God!* My hair used to look *fabulous!* [laughs] All the time! *That* [points to Brittany] is my hairdresser. Brittany used to tell me about, about, uh, products and stuff to use. Because I really feel like she understood. Like, if anyone... if I had to choose ... who knew what my hair was like, "*in the struggle*" [laughter breaks out], I would probably pick Brittany.

Despite the comedic tone of Lia's comment, the sincerity of her statement and general gratitude for her relationship with Brittany over her hair was one that could be felt in the room. In the following conversation, it became even more apparent of the relationships and learning opportunities that the athletes in the focus group shared over their hair.

Jami: we do each others [others agree]

Lia: she [Brittany J.] does everyone's hair

Brittany J: well Amelita does it too, but Amelita, she'll trim my ends because I don't know how to trim ends for nothing. But I'll straighten, do my hair, everything

Jami: Yea, I live in between them two [Brittany J. and Amelita), so I'm in the middle suite. I'll get my hair trimmed by Amelita and then I get my hair done by Brittany and then I go to sleep. And people be like, "well what do you do?". And I'm like... I sit there ...and I get my laughs. And it work's perfectly for me

Brittany J: But she's slowly learning, I'm making her learn

Jami: I can't do my hair [laughs]

Lia: yea it's definitely a union, Amelita does the hair, Brittany does the products

Brittany J: But she... Lia, taught me how to do sew in weaves, like, she was like, "Brittany can you do this for me real quick?". And I'm like, "I don't even know how". And she's like, *you take the thread, you do like this* and ever since then, that's how I learned

Amelita: I do my own hair

Chastity: yea she does my hair when it's not like this. I can't do my hair

From this conversation, and many other discussions on topics of kinship with other participants, it is apparent that personal relationships are vital to learning how to care for your hair and, if needed, for finding others that can offer assistance. It is the

connections within the black community that have nurtured this cultural practice and bonding over hair from centuries past, and it is obvious from these conversations that it continues today.

Racial difference: Being the “token black girl”

To digress from the similarities and relationships shared by the female athletes in the focus group, I feel that the previous conversations present themselves in stark contrast to the collegiate experiences of racial difference that were shared with me by the women who attended the six other universities -- a mix of both public and private institutions. Despite the fact that they played different sports and attended different universities in various regions of the country, it was a recurrent theme that they were often alone to navigate their athletic experiences in the whitewashed background of women’s collegiate athletics today. The other nine women in the study did not converse at length about how their teammates do their hair, or how they do their teammates hair because, with the current racial climate at their respective universities, it was not a possibility.

While interviewing Skyy, she referred to herself as the “token black girl” on her team, articulating a catch phrase symbolic of racial difference which was all too common among the other black female athletes who contributed to this project. For Skyy, being the “token black girl” was her reality in sports, and hair contributed specifically to her understanding of racial difference.

My teammates on my soccer teams were white... I was the token black girl. And I just always like, noticed that they could just put their hair in a ponytail and wear it down and go out in two seconds. And like... *minimum* an hour on my hair to get it to look the way that I wanted to. So I would be so envious and would just want straight hair permanently.

For Ashley F., who attends an HBCU, her hair was a symbol of racial otherness in high school -- a situation that has changed since she arrived on campus.

...high school was a little bit different. I was on an all-white team and I was the only black girl. So, I guess when I did wear braids they were like, "oh you have braids?", you know, "why do you have braids?". And I was kind of like the outcast, so it was a lot more noticeable in high school... or it was *different*. But I think that in college it has been different or... better.

Although, Ashley's experience as an "outcast" in high school because she looked different than her teammates and wore her hair different was not uncommon, it was unique that she had the opportunity to experience an alternative situation, as most athletes did not have that luxury.

Brijet attributes her "token black girl" status to the fact that she played "white sports", like "field hockey, swimming and lacrosse." This speaks to the larger issues of underrepresentation and clustering that plague specific sports. In the lines below, Britta shares a similar high school experience as Brijet.

School-wise I was in a predominantly white school, but in my neighborhood it was, I guess, predominantly black. Yea, so I guess that's where I found the balance. But it was hard, just because, I mean, you don't have anyone like who looks like you on your team growing up.

As Britta continued to recount her youth and high school experiences, she began to explain how her perception of her situation changed and how she became more aware of racial disparity in sport.

I think as I got older I became more aware, because when you're young it's like all fun and, *aw I've been playing lacrosse with the big fat ribbons in my hair. Life is good.* And then, as you get older, you're like, *geeze, the game really hasn't changed in like 10 years*, or however long it's been. So I think growing up you start to see it more as you become more educated.

From my interactions with the participants, I did find that they identified specific sports that offered a welcome shelter from the bleak, black-white binary in sport.

Specifically, Dominique, Artie, Brijet, Britta and Janessa noted track and field as a sport where they felt comfortable and regularly had black teammates to relate to.

After being the only athlete of color on her soccer and field hockey teams, and getting teased by her white teammates, Janessa left the spring sport and found solace in track.

Well growing up, where I live... it's not a whole lot of diversity at my high school. So, most of my friends were white. But when I ran track was like the first time in high school... my junior and senior year... was the first time I had, black teammates. So that was... a different experience. I had more in common with my friend that ran track with me. She was black and she always had the same issues I did. And so we would talk about it a lot. And she's gone through wearing braids, and having weaves sewn in to relaxers and not relaxers. So we kind of had discussed that kind of stuff when we ran track... she had the same exact problems because she had mostly white friends too and she did the same things.

Janessa's comment does not imply that all black athletes will have common hair issues, or that white teammates are unfriendly; however, it does speak to the reality that track and field has the second highest population of black athletes female athletes. Thus, an athlete would be more likely to have other black teammates that understand and support the challenges they face both on and off the field.

Post-collegiate Experience

As each interview drew to a close, one of the final structured questions was whether the participants would change the way they wore their hair after they are done competing in their sport. In looking towards the future after athletics, the women who were currently still competing seemed reinvigorated at the thought that they would have alternative options for styling their hair. In the focus group, the women began discussing the possibilities.

Ashley L.: especially with the people who are graduating or you have your last season... you don't have to worry about this anymore....

Amelita: I can't wait until that day...

Ashley L.: My hair will be done *every day*,

Lia: hell yes!

Ashley L.: like I don't care where I'm going. . You only have one class? Yupp. Why your hair look like that? *Because it can.* [laughter and nods from the others]

Jami: No more excuses

Ashley L.: yes, I'll be able to try new hairstyles. Like if I want to cut my hair short. I can. I don't have to worry about, oh well I have to put goggles on so I have to put my hair in a ponytail

Amelita: I'm going to color it for graduation. I've always wanted to color my hair, that way it will be nice and I won't have to worry about all the damage. It'll be great

Jami: I haven't even thought about that, not having to do my hair everyday when I stop running

Lia: It'll be great

Lia: And we can be one of the people that go to the track meet in heels and stuff [laughter]

Jami: That's cool, I can't wait

For athletes who had to go through arduous and time-consuming steps to style their hair, imagining the post-college years was a positive and hopeful exercise.

Comparatively, Kim acknowledged that she might change her hair because she worried that the “unpredictable” nature of her curls might make her look, “unkempt” or send the wrong message to an employer.

For Britta, Artie and Jessy, who have graduated and are now navigating the professional world, it seemed that they found the societal pressures did not disappear, but took a different form. Britta comments on her transition from athletics to her current job.

When you're in college and stuff you can be more risky. But here it's like, *why do you have that sideways bun in the top of your hair?* And like *why is your hair in a fro?* Or like, I was talking to one of the girls... she's starting to get like dreads so it's like little dinks, and you know, she was saying how other jobs have just been like straight up, “ya, that's not gonna work”

In a separate interview, Jessy speaks of a similar experience.

I remember I had a job where I couldn't wear my hair out like crazy... I would like slick it back, straighten it, wear it in like a conservative bun. But when I wear my hair out, crazy, it's more childish. I know I look younger when I do it.

In terms of the differences between the two groups, it is interesting to compare how participants conceptualize life after athletics versus those who are living it now. It still remains true that there will be new and different challenges despite the setting.

Although I cite in a previous section that the lack of information or advice further complicates the ability of women to reaffirm their sense of self, enact change or ease the burden of their hair, it is in this section that I feel reciprocity can be

productively engaged to address this issue. At the close of each interview and focus groups, the participants offered advice on hair pertaining to what they wish they knew when they were younger. It is from this dialogic moment that I have conceptualized a means of “talking back” to the community from which the women came. In line with current creative analytical practices, I feel that writing an open letter to young girls which weaves the stories, advice and wisdom of the participants into one letter would be an appropriate and constructive method for dissemination their knowledge outside of academia (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Furthermore, while I understand that their words aren’t representative of the entire community, it is my hope that they will, at the very least, provoke dialogic exchanges about black women in sport and their hair. This letter can be found in Appendix E.

As told by the women who contributed to this project themselves, the collegiate athletic arena is a unique site that poses challenges to black hair care in specific and nuanced ways. While the larger social conditions that pose these challenges are not created within sport, they are reproduced and reinscribed by the active bodies of teammates, coaches, fans, administrators and the black athletes themselves. In order to enact change, we must not look only to hair, but to the interwoven issues of race, class, gender and sexuality that intersect one another to complicate our understanding of black female athletes and their hair.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Alternatives for the Present

In this study, I embraced three objectives in order to gain a more complete, yet admittedly always partial, understanding of black female athletic experience with hair. I ventured to understand how black female athletic experience was similar and/or different from the current black feminist literature on hair, in what ways the athletes' hair affected their athletic performance and, through a radical contextualization of these experiences, if I could I understand the complex ways in which race, class, gender and sexuality intersect and overlap to empower/disempower women. My research study confirms that, although black women and black female athletes utilize similar cultural practices, they face different challenges when carrying out tasks such as styling, washing, maintaining and relating to their peers over hair. Furthermore, although the challenges imposed by an athletic and active lifestyle did not explicitly withhold participants from competing, they did have a sizeable impact on the way in which black female athletes prepare, train and experience athletics. Finally, the effects of the overlap and intersection of socially constructed power relations were amplified in the lives of black female athletes because of their multiple consciousnesses and instances when hair amplified these social forces.

Starting with, "the scrap of ordinary", I have toiled to unpack the density of experiences and voices concerning hair, which constitute a nascent discourse of how power operates through, with and on black female athletic bodies (Frow & Morris, p. 354). While hair may appear an odd entryway into understanding how cultural forces are brought to bear on the active body, it's centrality in black culture, and more

specifically, its socially and historically prominent place in the lives of black women have helped me to locate it as a form of embodied culture worthy of study.

In the unpacking of the dialogue collected for ten interviews and a focus group with 17 women, it became increasingly hard to ignore the persistent references to race as a black and white construct. When referencing racial difference, conversations turned into “us vs. them,” “black vs. white,” and “good vs. bad” dichotomies, as the black female athletes struggled to find ways to express their differences and their relation to the dominant ideals of femininity. While the point is not to reinscribe binaries or uncritically assess the complexities of race, the racialized discourse that ran throughout the conversations can, more critically, be understood as a reflection on how the participants perceive the current state of women’s collegiate athletics. With white female athletes comprising 77.2%, and black female athletes 11.6% of the overall Division I student-athlete population in 2010, it is, in many ways difficult to not notice and articulate this racial disparity (NCAA, 2010). Moreover, it is worth noting that although the NCAA does list other ethnic groups (e.g. Indian, Asian, Native American, Hispanic), at no point in the discussions was there any mention of race outside of simply black or white.

Through discussions of hair emerged memories, thoughts and opinions that point to the past and present state of race and gender relations in women’s sports. In “drawing the lines of articulation” between the interactions of history, culture and power, we can begin to see the interplay that oppresses and silences an entire community of women (Grossberg, 1996; hooks, 1992). A historical lack of black female coaches and administrators in the NCAA, as well as at the youth and high

school level, place added burdens on the participants. The lack of knowledge of black hair, even by female coaches, served to amplify difference and reinscribed black female athletes as “other”. Although many of the women shared their stories of resistance, and how they spoke out to inform others of the difficulties of managing black hair and playing sports, it is not practical to expect all athletes to react in this manner. Without a “safe space” to share opinions and information between teammates and coaches, marginalized voices often go unheard and unnoticed (Collins, 2000).

The knowledge and understanding of how to care for their hair and the high value placed on personal appearance are closely linked to the cultural histories of black Americans, as well as gender norms in sport. Byrd and Tharps (2001) situate the topic of hair and personal appearance, stating that at the turn of the 20th century, “taking on as many Eurocentric attributes as possible was a goal for the well-dressed person of color, man or woman” (p. 26). The politics of respectability is one that has persisted over a century, and still dictates and shapes black women’s dominant understanding of self in relation to whiteness. It shapes what is possible in terms of hairstyles, what is acceptable and what is to be avoided. Resounding throughout the voices of the women was that to look unkempt, or too ethnic (i.e. “nappy”), both on and off the field was unacceptable. The difficulty of looking good while playing was the most difficult task undertaken by the participants, but was understood by all as a necessary endeavor. Constantly sweating, washing their hair, dealing with the elements or going swimming all threatened the upkeep of hair and its vulnerability to

damage, potentially risking their carefully constructed identities of black female respectability.

Women's athletics is still inscribed within the heterosexual matrix, matching heterosexuality with femininity as a normative gender performance that is of high value, as suspicions of lesbianism in sport are high (Butler, 1999). To not present oneself as feminine and engage in aggressive, high-level competition is to call into question not only one's gender, but sexuality as well. Through the interview process the women address the racial pressures that dictate how they care for their hair, but the overlap of race with an expected emphasized femininity in sport only serve to up the ante of personal presentation (Chisholm, 2002).

In returning to the impossibility of achieving the dominant ideal of white, middle-class femininity, hair is an overt marker of otherness in the lives of black female athletes from a very young age. Many women told stories of realizing in their youth that they could not style or care for their hair in the same ways that their other teammates did and that issues with hair essentially positioned them outside of mainstream understandings of beauty from the very beginning. As Bruening et al. (2005) states, "it was impossible to separate female from African American... impossible to be truly outside or completely within either identity," speaking to the multiple consciousness needed by black women to understand their lived experiences (p. 97).

To situate the given discourses of resistance, I turn to the words of Collins (1990), who reminds us that, "hegemonic dominance is never totalizing or complete" (p. 228). The power relations between social norms are always being repositioned to

create new subjectivities, such as being a black female athlete. The participants resisted in the way they styled their hair during practices and games, some resisted by wearing their hair naturally curly, while still others resisted by finding ways to maintain their hair when the rain or humidity threatened to damage it. Specific to the focus group participants, the bonds and relationships forged over hair care created a community of resistance that supported positive conceptions of black female athleticism. It is my hope that through an accurate representation of the black female athletes' words and feelings I am able to present a comprehensive and contextually situated contribution to the discourse on black hair and understanding of hair as an integral part of physical cultural practices in sport.

Future Considerations

In the closing of this research project, readers may be asking themselves *what is the solution?*, or *how do we improve the current state of race and gender relations in athletics?* At the conclusions of the interviews I conducted, a few women even commented that they were interested in seeing the “results”; however, the diagnostic nature of this project does not provide for a concrete answer.

While this project may not result in solutions it does indicate that there are gaps in the scholarly work being done to further understand the lived experiences of black female athletes. Throughout the dialogue, innumerable references were made by the participants that they realized racial difference in childhood and that their youth sporting experiences played a large role in their perception of women's athletics. Their reality points to a need for intersectional work to be done not only in collegiate sporting experiences, but in youth sports when these issues first present

themselves. In many instances, the athletes' concerns or questions about being different from their peers or feeling "othered" went unaddressed until after the very formative teenage years, presenting a site for intervention that could be generative for change.

At this moment, while I do not possess a concrete solution for change, I do believe that the power for change lies in the hands of other black female athletes much like the participants and myself. bell hooks (1992) elaborates on how black women can conceptualize change by asking ourselves:

From what political perspective do we dream, look, create and take action? For those of us who dare to desire differently, who seek to look away from the conventional ways of seeing blackness and ourselves, the issue of race and representation is not just a question of critiquing the *status quo*. It is about transforming...creating alternatives... questioning ourselves...and transforming our worldviews that move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad. (emphasis in original, p. 4)

In short, before black female athletes can become actors for social change in the larger community, we must first take the time to critically interrogate our own understandings of cultural representations of blackness. Consequently coming to terms with our own personal politics. It is only after we work through these issues that we can begin to engage in dialogue that is productive, transgressive and catalyzing for change.

Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Guidelines

Moderator: Jennifer Collins

Time: 120 minutes

The focus group began with brief introductions by each individual, as well as my own introduction and a short description of my project.

1. How would you describe good hair?
2. Is it more difficult to meet your definition of good hair while playing?
 - a. What do you have to go through that makes it more difficult?
3. Do you style your hair a specific way because of athletics?
4. Do your family members play a role in your hair care? Or do you go to a hairdresser?
5. How have you done your hair throughout your athletic career?
6. Will you go swimming or do you have swimming workouts?
7. Do you think your coaches understand what you go through with your hair?
8. Do you get support from girls that are not athletes? Or are you still trying to educate them about your specific hair care?
9. Do you feel a sense of community being with mostly black athletes?
10. Do you do each other's hair?
11. Do you have a best and worst athletic hairstyle?
12. What is the most challenging aspect about your hair and sports? (Style, hygiene, cost, time commitment, stereotypes, etc.)
13. Do you think you will change your hair after you stop playing?
14. Do you think you have more 'bad hair' days because you are an athlete?
15. Do you care about how you look on the court/field during practice? During competition?

Appendix B: Personal Interview Guidelines

Interviewer: Jennifer Collins

Time: 60-100 minutes

Each interview began with brief introductions and a short description of my project.

1. How would you describe the texture of your hair?
2. Tell me about the history of your hair?
 - a. Have you changed the length? Why?
 - b. Have you changed the color? Why?
 - c. Have you changed the style? Why?
 - d. What are your options for wear? (natural, relaxed, straightened, curly)
3. Do you ever wear your hair natural?
 - a. If no, why not?
 - b. If yes, how often?
4. Has your hair ever been chemically relaxed?
 - a. If yes, how old were you at first relaxer?
 - b. Do you have any specific memories?
 - c. Was there a reason that you got a relaxer?
5. Take a minute to think about the Peak and Pit of your athletic hairstyles: with the peak being your best hairstyle and the pit being your worst hairstyle.
6. How do you manage your hair in your everyday life?
 - a. What is your routine? (washing/styling etc.)
7. Who do you talk about your hair with in your life?
 - a. Family
 - b. Friends
 - c. Teammates
 - d. Significant other
 - e. Hairdresser
8. Who taught you how to style and care for you hair?
 - a. Female family member? Relative? Hairdresser? Yourself?
9. Who is your hairdresser?
 - a. How often do you see her?
 - b. How long are your visits?
 - c. How much do you typically spend on a single visit?
10. What products do you use on your hair?
 - a. Do you use these products specifically because you are an athlete?
11. What hair tools do you own? (straightener, blow dryer, hot comb, rollers, etc.)
12. What hair tools do you use most frequently?
13. Has your hair ever made you feel uncomfortable in sports?
14. What is your favorite quality about your hair?
15. What is your least favorite quality about your hair?
16. Do you have any frustrations with your hair?

17. Do you think your hair says anything about your sexuality?
18. Do you remember when you started competing in your sport?
 - a. How old were you?
19. Are there any hair trends you can identify in your sport? Popular styles?
20. Do you ever do your teammates hair or get your hair done by your teammates?
21. Do you ever go swimming?
 - a. If no, why not?
 - b. If yes, do you do anything specific to protect your hair?
22. Do you practice inside?
 - a. If yes, how do you deal with sweating on a regular basis?
23. Do you practice outside?
 - a. If yes, how does this influence your hair care routine?
 - b. If yes, how do you deal with sweating on a regular basis?
24. Since you are an active athlete, do you consider your lifestyle when choosing a hairstyle?
 - a. If yes, what are some specifics of a good hairstyle?
25. Do your hairstyles differ in and out of season?
 - a. If yes, how would you describe your in-season hair? Your out-of-season hair?
 - b. What is the reason for the change between seasons?
26. What are some of the challenges to being female athlete and caring for your hair?
27. If you could change your hair type, would you?
28. Have your coaches ever influenced your hair choices?
29. Do you have any team rules surrounding hair? Personal presentation?
30. Do you ever play with your hair down?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, when might I be acceptable to do so?
31. Do you have any specific memories about your hair during a game/meet?
32. What do you think your hair says about you as an individual?
33. Will you change the way you wear your hair after you stop playing?
34. Do you have any recommendations for young girls who play sports about how to manage their hair?
35. I would like to give you the opportunity to talk openly about issues you have with your hair that may not have been addressed in the interview

Appendix C: Open Coding List

Coding Analysis Key

Advices	Humidity	Rain
Afro	Imus	Relaxer
Black	Information	Religion
Braid	In-season	Scalp burn
Bun	Insecure	Scarf
Change	Inside	Significant other
Coach	Interview reflection	Similarity
Confidence	Jenny	Snow
Cornrows	Kinship	Society
Curly	Kitchen	Sports
Daily routine	Learn	Stereotype
Damage	Length	Straight hair
Difference	Management	Styling
Dirty	Masculine	Summer
Diversity	Microbraid	Sweat
Dominican	Military	Swimming
Educate	Money	Teammate- good
Equipment	Mother	Teammate- bad
Extensions	Nappy	Texture
Father	Natural	Texturizer
Feminine	Nervous	Time
Gay	No color	Tomboy
Ghetto	Oil	Touch
Good hair	Out-season	Trained
Change	Outside	Trends
Hair down	Ponytail	Uncomfortable
Hair tools	Practice	Unique
Hair color	Presentation	Versatile
Hair cut	Product	Washing
Headwear	Professional	Weave
Healthy	Proud	White
Heat	Questions	Winning
Horrible	Race	Working out

Appendix D: Personal Interview- Jennifer Collins

Interview: Jennifer Collins

Date: 3/20/2011

Format: In person

Q: How would you describe the texture of your hair?

A: I would say my hair is curly. It's very fine and long and it's kind of dry depending on how much I wash it. Like it will get really frizzy and dry if I don't wash it everyday but it looks smoother and shinier and healthier if I wash it everyday. But I also think washing it everyday does dry it out, so really the only time it gets oily is when it's straight. It grows pretty slow too but I think that's also because it's so long.

Q: Tell me about the history of your hair? Have you changed the length?

A: Well, let's see. I have changed the length throughout my life. Well when I was little, for a long time, I was just trying to let it grow and get long. Because when I was a baby I started out with a fro and it took a while for my hair to grow out and look like it had some length to it. It was above my shoulders when I was little and then in elementary school I started wearing ponytails so it had to be long enough to put up. I grew it long in middle school and high school because everyone had long hair I guess, but now that I look back my bun was HUGE, an my hair kinda looked like a lion's mane. And in college I chopped my hair off to like my chin because, well, the hairdresser was new and I swear she was trying to sell my hair because she cut off 6 inches, when she was supposed to cut 3. And also because my boyfriend and I broke up and I needed a big change. And then I cut it short again in college because my ex boyfriend said he loved my long hair and I was pissed at him when we broke up. Kinda stupid, I know.

Q: Have you changed the color?

A: I think I tried to highlight it once or twice but it never really turned out to be anything special or drastic. I would highlight my friend's hair but just not mine.

Q: Have you changed the style?

A: yes! [laughs]. Well when I was little and I was always so active my hair would be in what my mom called my "buffies". My buffies were my 2 buns. It wasn't long enough to put in a ponytail but it needed to be pulled back so it didn't get tangled from all the activity I did. I feel like I looked like your typical black girl with afro puffs. Then when it got long enough my mom would slick the front back really tight and put it in a ponytail and then I would put a big bow in it. I had a whole box of bows that I would clip onto the base of my ponytails. And then when I got out of middle school I didn't like how frizzy and big my ponytail got so I started wearing it down and when I played sports it was always in a high bun. And I guess in high school I also went back to the "buffies", or in lax [lacrosse] people call them "knobs",

but that started looking kind of juvenile after freshman year of college so I wore the bun.

Q: What are your options for wear? (Natural, relaxed, straightened, curly)

A: My options for wear are natural or straight I guess. I wear it curly and natural everyday mostly and I straighten it for special occasions and only really between like November to February- when it's cold and there isn't any humidity. I relaxed it in middle school once but I really never straightened it, I just liked that the relaxer changed up my curls and made them looser for a little.

Q: Do you ever wear your hair natural?

A: Yupp, everyday it's natural. I like my curly hair and it's pretty easy to care for and it's healthy because I don't put heat on it. I don't have too much breakage and it's not dry and my ends aren't bad because I don't use heat. I used to want it to be straight all the time though.

Q: Has your hair ever been chemically relaxed?

A: My hair was relaxed when I was... in 8th grade. I only ever got one because it sucked. My scalp got really burned because I washed my hair that morning and I itch my head a lot. And I had NO IDEA that you don't do that before a relaxer and I guess my mom didn't either. I think that the hairdresser just assumed I knew. I think she actually knew I washed it though before I sat down in the chair but she did it anyway. I waited a really long time to tell her it was burning and she kinda put some protectant stuff on my hairline but I got burns all through my scalp and it was the worst. I remember it hurt SO bad when she washed out the relaxer and for like a week or so after. I hated putting water on my hair because it would touch the scalp burns and hurt. I got a relaxer because I thought it would make my hair really straight and that it would be shiny and sleek straight when it got straightened. It kind of ended up being like a texturizer because it relaxed my curls a little and made them looser and my hair was really soft. And I do remember leaving the hair salon that day so proud of my straight hair and hoping that people would see me because I felt like a different person- despite all of those burns on my scalp. Nothing could bring me down that day.

Q: Take a minute to think about the Peak and Pit of your athletic hairstyles: with the peak being your best hairstyle and the pit being your worst hairstyle.

A: Ok, so the peak would have to be this one day when we had a lax game. I think I was a junior and it was perfect weather for straightening hair. Cold enough that I wouldn't really sweat, like in early spring when it's kind of breezy but not windy enough that it would mess up my hair. And I straightened my hair and then put in 2 thick ponytail holders so that it would be the perfect high pony. One hair tie wasn't enough because my hair didn't poof up enough at the top. Like, you could see just enough of the pony over the top of my hair and it was kind of curled under at the ends.

Q: How do you manage your hair in your everyday life?

A: well I wash it everyday. I like to take showers every morning because it kind of resets my hair. It usually gets frizzy when I sleep at night so I'll shower when I wake up. After I wash it I always let it air dry and I either wear it half up/half down in a claw clippy thing, or down, or after it dries I put it in a bun.

Q: What is your routine? (Washing/styling etc.)

A: I have it down to a science now....I get in the shower, wet it, put in conditioner. I kind of finger comb the conditioner through, then I'll wash that out, flip my head over in the shower soaking wet.... I think I am single handedly responsible for ruining the paint on the ceiling above every shower in the houses I've lived in..... but then typically I put more conditioner in. The first condition is to reset my curls and then the second kind of like locks them into a good pattern, I guess. I'll do all my other shower stuff and then the last thing I do is wash out the conditioner, flip my head over again and leave it upside down and wrap a towel around my head. I leave it like that until I'm ready to get dressed and then take the towel off and spray it with a curl spray. I don't touch it after that. I don't shampoo either, like ever. It sounds complicated but it's really easy...just very particular.

Q: Who do you talk about your hair with in your life?

A: I think I've talked to friends about my hair, but it's more telling them about my hair. I've never had a friend I could talk to and they understood, or had advice, or could relate. My mom had no idea. She had advice, or would try to like cut out things she read or tell me stuff she read, but I was mostly on my own. I never ever felt good leaving a hair salon so I didn't ever go back to a hairdresser and I never had a good one. I actually JUST found a good lady, she cut my hair and straightened it so well, but I mean I'm 24. What was I doing the past 24 years.

Q: Who taught you how to style and care for you hair?

A: I did. I think when I was about 7 or 8 I wouldn't let my mom touch it anymore and I would put it in ponytails. And my mom got me this American Girl book about how to do different braids and so I taught myself how to braid and braided my dolls hair and then I learned how to do different braid things to my own. And side note: you know what I think is ridiculous, I remember growing up and reading magazines to try to figure things out on my own, and the only recommendation I could ever find was to put gel on every individual curl and twirl it around your finger. Do you know how long I would be doing my hair if I tried to place every curl on my head into a perfect spiral? And of course, the magazine would show a long curly blonde haired girl, sitting in a hairstyling chair with a perfect head of curls. Like, who does that?

Q: Who is your hairdresser?

A: I don't have one hairdresser. I've had a lot. It's always awkward because you get a wash, cut and style, but the way that I like my hair is in bigger curls and I do that whole hair flip thing in the shower. And I never brush it. And that is all hairdressers want to do. They want to brush it and put gel in it and it looks terrible when I leave

because it's in a million tiny curls and super poofy so I typically try to avoid hairdressers. Except for the last lady.

Q: What products do you use on your hair?

A: I use things with lots of moisture and sprays, so I don't touch my curls because touching them makes them frizzy. I used mixed chicks [laughs], how ironic. But mixed chicks conditioner and then a curl spray that makes my hair look smooth and shiny.

Q: Do you use these products specifically because you are an athlete?

A: well working out and playing makes my hair frizzy and I don't like it like that so I take a lot of showers to get rid of the frizz. So I need A LOT of conditioner so it doesn't get dried out and frizzy. I shower a lot, like typically twice a day but I think not using shampoo helps because that dries my hair out.

Q: What hair tools do you own? (Straightener, blow dryer, hot comb, rollers, etc.)

A: It's kind of a joke with my friends that I don't own a brush...because I guess I never brush my hair? Brushing it makes it frizzy so I have a big blow drying brush that I ONLY use when I blow dry my hair and a chi for straightening it. Oh, and I have a blow dryer, obviously.

Q: What hair tools do you use most frequently?

A: none, I don't touch my hair and I don't like it when other people touch it either. I think it's because so many people end up petting me, or when I was little the kids sitting behind me in school would pull my curls all the time because when you pull them down they spring back up. I just try to leave well enough alone.

Q: Has your hair ever made you feel uncomfortable in sports?

A: yea, definitely. When I was little I had crazy curly hair and I feel like it didn't look as good as other girl's hair that was straight and long. And teammates would always make comments about my hair being different- it wasn't always a bad different but I didn't like that it was always kind of a joke or I was singled out. And everyone always had similar game-day styles except for me. Once my hair is dry I really can't change it so I wasn't one of the girls on the bus doing their hair or getting their hair braided by someone else. A lot of it stems from being the only black girl, but even things like when I would be so proud of my straight hair in college and my teammates would point out that it looks greasy or it has been straight for a few days and I haven't washed it. And that would make me feel uncomfortable but if I wanted my hair to be straight and it was going to take me at least 2 hours to wash, dry and straighten it, I'm not going to just have it straight for one day and I have to use different products. Everything is just different. I couldn't win with curly or straight hair.

Q: What is your favorite quality about your hair?

A: My curls because they are so different. I haven't really met many people with hair like mine, except for maybe Jessy or Skyy. But a lot of people tell me it's pretty and

they wish they had curls like mine so that makes me feel good. I also like that I can switch it up and my hair gets really silky and smooth when it's straight.

Q: What is your least favorite quality about your hair?

A: it's unruly. It kind of does it's own thing because it's curly and I can't really control how big it will be, if it gets frizzy, if it looks flat. And I can't really do many curly styles, my hair pretty much always looks the same, either down or in a bun.

Q: Do you have any frustrations with your hair?

A: it's really long now and I keep getting knots in my hair. Like crazy knots and I don't really know why but I think it's because it's so long and when I move around it gets tangled.

Q: Do you think your hair says anything about your sexuality?

A: I mean, I think that I have a pretty feminine style because my hair is so long. I hate when my hair is pulled back and you can't see my curls or anything because I think that's kind of an androgynous look...I don't think my face looks super feminine so my hair kind of keeps it all together. I feel more confident and feminine when I have my hair down and long. And like, when my hair was really short, I felt kind of infantile...it's like long hair is a sign of womanhood. Or I guess you could go the other way and moms always cut their hair short into that "mom cut". But I hope I never have that.

Q: Do you remember when you started competing in your sport?

A: I started swimming and playing rec soccer when I was, 6. That summer I swam and I started soccer in the fall. I had an older brother and I kind of just followed him because he did a lot of sports.

Q: Are there any hair trends you can identify in your sport? Popular styles?

A: I would say the ponytail is big, you see tons of pictures of girls playing lacrosse with long ponytails or ponytail braids. We always have a lot of braiding and bobby-pinning and straightening and hair-spraying going on in the locker room before games.

Q: Do you ever do your teammates hair or get your hair done by your teammates?

A: I have braided teammates hair a lot but I was never anyone's go-to braider. Most people on the team had the same person that would braid their hair, but I don't know, I have a hard time braiding straight hair because it's harder to hold and you can always see the part lines when I braid other people's hair but it's never like that with mine. I think I did my teammate's hair more when I was in high school. And no! I have never ever had my hair done by my teammates. Whatever my hair looks like when I get out of the shower that day is how it is going to look during the game that day. To be honest, no one has ever asked to do my hair before a game either.

Q: Do you ever go swimming?

A: yupp, all the time. I love to swim and it was my first sport and the first thing I was really good at. I swam year round from like 6-14. I always powdered my swim caps before I put them on because then they didn't stick on my hair line and break my hair off. When it came to protecting my hair, I think that I didn't really know what to do with my hair when I was younger, and it's weird because they have all those anti-chlorine conditioners. Like, ultra swim, but chlorine dries out my hair and then the shampoo dries it out. So I don't even bother with that stuff, I just condition it a lot.

Q: Do you practice outside?

A: yupp, we practiced outside every day unless it was like a really bad rainstorm or snowstorm, but we would be out in all kinds of weather, Heat, humidity, snow, rain, sleet, I think even hail once. Being outside didn't really affect it because I didn't worry about my hair until after practice. Obviously I would never straighten it for practice because that's just dumb. I think one time I tried to just give a lesson to a player with my hair straight and after the hour lesson of like maybe jogging and passing her balls my hair was a wreck straight. But sweating is never too much of an issue if I have my curly hair, I actually kind of like it because when my hair is sweaty it looks smoother in the front and the moisture keeps all my little baby hairs in the front down. Is that gross? [laughs]. Oh and sweating just makes me wash it more, so I will always shower after practice.

Q: Since you are an active athlete, do you consider your lifestyle when choosing a hairstyle?

A: I just need it to be long. After that big chop freshman year it was a disaster because the back of my hair wouldn't go up in a ponytail and I couldn't even wear a bun because it was just a little nub on my head. Looking back I don't even know how I did that.... but I know I wore a lot of curly ponytails. Which I hate. So... as long as I can get it in a bun and I can't feel it moving around, then I'm good.

Q: Do your hairstyles differ in and out of season?

A: ummm, well I straighten my hair a lot more out of season like in the late-fall and winter and then once the season starts I wont anymore. Mostly because when I sweat and play it makes my roots curly or the end of a ponytail that touches my neck. And if it's not the sweat then it's the humidity of Maryland in April, May and June. It's brutal.

Q: What are some of the challenges to being female athlete and caring for your hair?

A: I think....hm, my own challenges were just feeling accepted because I was the only one with different hair and it was a very obvious difference. And there would be jokes about how crazy my hair was, or like jokes about me being black. And they weren't like malicious, but looking back it makes me awkward and uneasy to think about. I couldn't do all the cute athletic styles and if I ever did something different, like I braided my whole head once and I thought it was so cool but I just remember comments kinda tore me down. No one was there to appreciate the time and effort I put into doing my hair the way I could do it, ya know? I think a challenge is just

looking good and feeling good about your hair. My college coach would always say, “90% of playing good is looking good”, and it’s true that it’s hard to play when you are distracted by how you look. In all of my experiences with sport, and granted I never did track or basketball which have the highest African American populations, but an all-black team in most other sports is hard to come by. We didn’t play other teams with black girls, maybe they had one. But you’re kind of on your own in figuring out what to do and in validating yourself and taking pride in how you look.

Q: If you could change your hair type, would you?

A: Nope, I think it would be cool to like have a week where I could wake up and my hair would just dry straight, just because that would never be a reality for me. But I guess there are other people that will never be a reality for either. A lot of my teammates got Japanese straightening on their hair and I thought about doing that because it would make things easier because my hair could only be one way, but then I feel like I wouldn’t look like myself. If you had asked me this 10 years ago though I would have changed in a heartbeat, I can tell you that much.

Q: Have your coaches ever influenced your hair choices?

A: no, not that I can think of. I mean they won’t let me, or anyone else on the team wear our hair down but that’s about it.

Q: Do you have any team rules surrounding hair? Personal presentation?

A: hair? No. I mean my white teammates have done cornrows and all kinds of styles and it’s never been an issue. Personal presentation? We can’t wear pinnies without t-shirts under them, which I think is dumb. It gets so hot and to wear 2 layers is just awkward and makes you overheat. Field hockey does it, but we can’t.

Q: Do you ever play with your hair down?

A: as a joke, because it’s always been a joke that people with their hair down aren’t serious about sports. You want your hair to be up and out of the way so you can concentrate on the game and not your hair.

Q: Do you have any specific memories about your hair during a game/meet?

A: Hmm, I don’t really remember much in college but I do remember when I was younger, my hair was always so dry from all the swimming. Especially in the winter with all the cold weather and it being wet all the time from practice everyday. But at swim meets you swim an event every hour or so and it would always be awkward that my hair would be wet. And it would dry and get super puffy and curly because I couldn’t condition it between getting it wet at races. So I would go into the shower between events so that my hair wouldn’t look ridiculous, especially if I was getting a trophy at the end. I would shower after my last race so I didn’t have crazy hair in pictures.

Q: What do you think your hair says about you as an individual?

A: I think the craziness of my curls really reflects my energy and personality. I've always been very active and outgoing and I think my hair just has a lot of movement in it.

Q: Will you change the way you wear your hair after you stop playing?

A: [laughs] no! There is no way I would straighten my hair everyday, or relax it again. It would break off if I braided it and I think that as long as my hair is long it looks professional.

Q: Do you have any recommendations for young girls who play sports about how to manage their hair?

A: I would say that realistically, depending on the sport you play or where you live it could be hard diversity-wise. I don't think that can be sugar coated and I think a lot of the negative experiences would have been easier had those issues been addressed in my life. Or if someone had made me aware of the reality that certain parts of how I look are going to make me feel different. I think that the more you can find an easy, manageable style, learn to work with it. Because that is what I needed. I loved my curls once they weren't frizzy and unruly, but I needed to learn how to wash it and style it and get the right products and that only took me... 24 years? [laughs]. All that trial and error was a lot of ups and downs that I think could have been avoided. I think a lot comes down to self-confidence in young girls and that is definitely one of the over arching issues that needs to be addressed in society. I know those were issues that were addressed for me when I was younger when I went to these all-girls workshops and they would talk about how women make 77 cents to every dollar a man makes, and all of these gender statistics and realities. But they never addressed race or class, and I understand that that is very challenging and possibly too much for girls who are 10 and 12 to understand how all of these things come together like race, class gender, age.... but I think it's an issue and we need to find some way to address it all together in a way that is understandable and manageable for girls.

Appendix E: Creative Analytical Practice, An Open Letter

To the girl I once was¹⁰,

Looking back on my childhood and teenage years there are so many things that I wish you knew, not just about life or about friendships or relationships or all of those other seemingly awkward social moments -- but about hair. You see, I am participating in this research project right now and it has really got me thinking about how important my hair has been in my life. For as long as I can remember I have always been athletic. Always had a ball or a bat in my hand or a swim cap and goggles on my head. But I don't think I ever sat down and thought about how *hair* figured into my athletic experiences.

I mean, think about it, I have had every hairstyle in the book. When I was little, my mom used to braid my hair into pigtails for practice because it always looked neat and was easy for her. To change it up I got micros a few times, but that always took so long. Plus, they were really heavy and sometimes got in the way, so I always went back to the more simple styles my mom could do. In middle school I just wanted to be like my friends and teammates and so I got a relaxer and would straighten my hair daily – even if it meant I had to wash it everyday! I remember before that, my hair always used to be so healthy and smooth and soft, but all of the washing and straightening has damaged the hair I have now.

I remember I was the only black girl in the 8th grade and all I wanted was for my hair to be straight and easy. All the girls would sit on the bus and braid each other's hair on the way to games but no one ever did my hair. Plus, everyone wore ponytails, but my hair just never looked the same in a ponytail. On really good days it would swish back and forth on my neck when I ran, but that was only until I got sweaty or the humidity took its toll. I refused to put in fake hair because one time I saw another girl's fall out during a game and she looked really embarrassed.

For a little while I wore that weave in college because I made a lot of money from my summer job and I could afford the upkeep, and let me tell you- it was easy! It always looked good and was really quick to style, but when my roots would grow you could always see the difference between my real hair and the extensions. If it rained or if it was one of those hot, sticky days of August I would have to wrap a scarf really tight or braid it just to maintain my hair at practice. Geeze, the things I went through to try to look nice when I played...it makes me wonder what I could have done with all that time.

I can't really begin to describe the questions and comments I always got from teammates on my hair. You know, why it looked or felt the way it did, why I didn't do my hair like theirs or why I didn't always wash it in the shower after practice everyday. I explained more times than I can remember that my hair was different, that I had to care for it differently and that I couldn't always wash it, even though I

¹⁰ This letter is a compilation of the advice provided by the 17 participants of this project when asked what they would say to younger black female athletes and what they wish they knew during their youth.

was sweaty. It was especially hard to confront my coaches about conflicts and confusion over hairstyles. I half expected the male coaches not to understand, but the female coaches were the toughest to get through to because they thought we were all the *same*. Like, why did they think I would get into a chlorinated pool two days after I got a relaxer?? That is like a recipe for baldness! Plus, all of that money and time I spent at the salon would have been a total waste and, with our crazy schedules in college, it was the only day I could go. Time management was definitely is one of the hardest parts.

But truly, the hardest part is learning to embrace what makes you different from other people. You may be in a sport that doesn't have a lot of diversity, or you may even find yourself in the majority on some teams, but the fact remains that no one is going to be just like you. Not even the other black girls. The coaches are never going to stop practice or cancel a game just because it's raining, so you have to find ways to work around those challenges. Learn to care for your hair early—how to wash it, braid it, style it and keep it healthy, and find a style that works when you play. Playing sports isn't a fashion show, it's not about looking pretty but about pushing the limits of what's possible, and it's harder to break records and achieve your dreams if you are worrying about your hair on the side.

Everyone on a team has to wear the same uniform, so whether your hair is curly or kinky, soft or rough, natural or relaxed; being confident in your differences and seeing them as opportunities to stand out from the crowd is what will help you overcome these issues as your grow. Although it may not be an easy road you are about to go down, it is ultimately your choice as to what you want to do with your hair and how you want to style it. You can talk to your mom, your hairdresser or other athletes about what to do, but the strands on your head are uniquely yours and represent a strong, powerful athlete that is much more than just hair.

With Love,
Jenny

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