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The purpose of this study was to offer a deeply contextualized explanation of factors that influence post-competitive physical activity involvement among participants who are black, women, 25-45 years old, and former Division I elite sprinters, hurdlers, or jumpers. A study using exploratory methodology undergirded by a womanist epistemology was used to accomplish this goal.

Based on data from four focus groups and a total of 17 participants, three categories of factors emerged as influencing post-competitive physical activity in this select group of women. Participants described track and field familiarities, social networks, and self-presentation concerns as influencing their activity. Several themes also emerged as influencing physical activity in this group. The themes were the mis-education of the athlete, contours of adult lives, and factors of difference.

Collectively, the data suggested that participants simultaneously identify with multiple cultural categories and social groups, each with overlapping sets of values and expectations. These expectations influence participant's post-competitive physical activity in multiple, diverse ways.

WHAT DO BLACK WOMEN WHO WERE DIVISION I ELITE TRACK AND FIELD  
ATHLETES IDENTIFY AS INFLUENCING POST-COMPETITIVE  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

by

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To my family for all of their unconditional love, encouragement, and support.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Americans display low rates of participation in physical activity and a high prevalence of chronic diseases and disabilities associated with inactivity (Haskell & Nelson, 2008) thus, increasing physical activity is a public health concern for all demographic groups of the U.S. population (Sharpe et al., 2008; Whitt-Glover, Taylor, Heath, & Macera, 2007). Numerous studies from the CDC suggest that adult black females are especially in need of attention from kinesiologists given that black women are reportedly among the least active of all demographic groups (Kruger, 2005). The current physical activity inquiry, therefore, focuses on a unique group<sup>1</sup> of black women.

It appears that recommendations put forth by the U.S. government and other powerful private agencies are not adequate in encouraging significant numbers of black women to adopt lifestyles that include sufficient levels of physical activity<sup>2</sup>. In fact, as the

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<sup>1</sup> A group is a social system involving regular interaction among members who have a share sense of identity that distinguishes them from other groups. It is within groups that social activities and socialization takes place (Johnson, 2000). In this study, it is important to realize that a person is simultaneously a member of multiple groups and each group influences the individual.

<sup>2</sup> Physical activity, defined as “any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscles that substantially increases energy expenditure” (Katzmarzyk, 2006, p. 122). The American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association recommend achieving 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days of the week or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity three days per week and eight to ten strength-training exercises twice a week in order to maintain health and avoid chronic diseases (Haskell et al., 2007). Adults who achieve this level of activity are considered sufficiently active.

volume of statistics describing dismal participation rates and the connection between low participation and chronic disease has increased, activity levels have risen only slightly in the adult black female population (Behavioral risk factor surveillance system: prevalence and trends data, 2008). Therefore, a new approach to physical activity promotion is necessary if great improvements in participation numbers are to occur. This new approach must move beyond basic education (Henderson Ainsworth, 2003; Young, He, Harris, & Mabry, 2002) and should begin with an attempt to understand what physical activity means to individuals and groups of black women. This project, in which I have used a womanist epistemology to undergird the study of physical activity, reflects this new approach.

A womanist epistemology allows an analysis of the influences that race, gender, and other identity categories simultaneously have on the physical activity behaviors of women in a way that centers and acknowledges their individual and collective perspectives and ideas (Banks-Wallace, 2000b). In particular, a womanist epistemology illuminates the reality that race and gender only partially define social group membership and any related socially-influenced physical activity behaviors. A womanist approach also, importantly, provides insight into the diversity that exists within black female communities. Thus, research plans and results that adequately reflect expression of a womanist epistemology add depth to current understandings of social facilitators and barriers to physical activity while also illuminating previously hidden factors.

### Current Understandings of Physical Activity Involvement

Existing literature provides limited insight into why African American women participate in physical activity in such low numbers. This literature identifies numerous barriers to activity including social issues related to beauty ideals, role conflicts, and non-supportive physical activity images. Unfortunately, researchers have offered descriptive accounts of these barriers without an accompanying, in-depth understanding of the social experiences of black women. The current study is also descriptive but begins to offer social, cultural, and historical contexts to participants' beliefs and behaviors. This extra step is necessary to help develop and generate otherwise inaccessible interpretations and understandings of physical activity (Andrews, 2008).

In addition to the fact that a basic descriptive reporting only partially addresses issues that, if fully-explored, could greatly help interventionists, the choice to allow particular black women to represent all black women has produced an incomplete understanding of influences on physical activity behavior. Previous tactics in the study of physical activity have treated race, class, age, gender, sexuality and ability as independent variables. Findings, therefore, are presented as if activity or inactivity is a function of a particular, singular, easily-labeled identity. For instance, many studies featuring black women present results as if "black women" constitutes a homogenous group. Under this practice, within-group diversity disappears and faults, flaws, and "insufficiencies" are presented as a function of black race and/or feminine gender. In reality however, most of the studies in support of the notion that black women are insufficiently active involve women who are adolescent or older than age 45 or women who have low levels of

educational achievement or low SES status. According to published reports, these social factors are each negatively associated with physical activity levels (Behavioral risk factor surveillance system: prevalence and trends data, 2008) and the choice to study black women who belong to these intersecting social groups creates a negative discourse that falsely locates inactivity within a black female body and also falsely homogenizes all black women. Under these circumstances in which a majority of studies neglect to display the behaviors of black women who are highly educated, professional, middle-class, and/or sufficiently active, the fact that some groups of black women are physically active in significantly higher numbers than others is lost (Wilbur, Chandler, Dancy, and Lee, 2003). Also, under these practices, the conditions under which some black women are active remain understudied.

Black women who are former collegiate athletes represent a group whose experience has been lost or neglected within previous physical activity studies. For example, a lack of exposure to physical activity is a commonly-sited barrier in studies of adult black women (Harley, Odoms-Young, Beard, Katz, and Heaney, 2009; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003). Even though this may be true for many women, it is unlikely that black women who are former athletes and were exposed to years of physical training would site this barrier. Studies also suggest that black women prefer a large body size and avoid physical activity for fear that it will result in unwanted weight loss (Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Katzmarzyk, 2006; Malpede, et al., 2007). Again, while some black women may fit this description, others who were elite athletes and associate a strong, muscular physique with successful athletic performance might hold different

beliefs about the look of the ideal body. In short, participation in elite athletics may have a profound influence on ideologies that affect physical activity behaviors. It is inadequate, therefore, to continue to ignore diversity within groups of black women while presenting physical activity findings as being caused by or reflective of race and/or gender alone; it is important to explain behaviors in ways that reflect the complexity of a person's social identity and cultural experience.

Within the adult black female population, former high-level collegiate track and field athletes represent a group that deserves such attention from kinesiologists. These women may express similar perspectives as other black women but will likely also express perspectives that are more similar to other athletes, black and female or not. In this way, a properly implemented study will more accurately explain the complex realities of life for these women. Further, in presenting information in ways that acknowledge participants' simultaneous membership in multiple social groups, this study connects their physical activity experiences to athletes of other races and genders and may indirectly contribute to knowledge about social integration and social change.

The core of womanist theory includes an emphasis on emotional wholeness, psychological strength, and resilience (Braun-Williams, 1999). However, lack of such a perspective in the physical activity literature has, in part, resulted in an overwhelmingly, short-sighted focus on why black women do not participate in physical activity. As a result, there is currently a paucity of studies that adequately give voice to their perspectives or weave factors together to portray an overall understanding of how black women become and stay physically active (Harley, Buckworth, et al., 2009). Therefore,

while there is ample evidence to suggest that some black women do not move enough, there is not currently enough accessible, constructive, and socially empowering information to assist groups of women in achieving national recommendations for physical activity. The current study served as an important first step toward better understanding the physical activity behaviors of black women and, in this case, a particular group of black women who are former collegiate track and field athletes. Given that adult, female, black, former high-level collegiate athletes are a unique group to study related to the physical activity literature, exploratory research methodologies were well-suited for use concerning this inquiry.

#### Rationale for Study

It was important to study former elite athletes because research on physical activity in adults neglects to address the effects of elite athletics on post-competitive physical activity behaviors. Millions of girls and women participate in sports each year (Coakley J. , *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, 2008). While most do not achieve the level of elite status, the culture of elite athletics significantly influences a large number of these women as all levels of sports are increasingly defined by the competition-centered performance ethic<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, perspectives of participants in this study likely also reflect experiences of millions of other former athletes.

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<sup>3</sup> The performance ethic is a set of ideas and beliefs emphasizing that the quality of the sport experience can be measured in terms of improved skills, especially in relation to others. Fun grows to be defined in terms of becoming a better athlete, becoming more competitive, and being promoted into more highly skilled training and competition categories. (Coakley, *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, 2008, pp. 129-30)

In regard to better understanding physical activity in the adult black female population, track and field athletes were chosen for this study because seventy-four percent of black women who participate in NCAA Division I athletics are basketball or track and field athletes (Coakley, 2008). Therefore, if the field of Kinesiology is to ever have a professional literature that informs us about physical activity behaviors in black women who are former athletes, researchers must focus adequate investigation on the social influence of track and field. Overall, examination of these women's perspectives offers insight into factors that influence physical activity behaviors in other former elite track and field athletes, and possibly, other women and men, black and non-black, who have also been influenced by sport participation.

Since women in this study share characteristics that are underrepresented in the physical activity literature and had not previously been studied through the use of qualitative methodologies, this project offered the opportunity to uncover new information regarding factors that impact physical activity in women who are influenced by a number of different, intersecting social identifications. Therefore, this study applied a womanist epistemology and exploratory methodology to study the question "What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?"

### Background/ Context of Study and Reflexivity Statement

The current study arose in part out of my own experience as a black American woman who is a former elite collegiate track and field athlete and has had personal

challenges with adopting and maintaining a lifestyle that includes “sufficient” levels of physical activity. Following the end of my eligibility as a collegiate athlete and an unsuccessful attempt to continue on as an elite Olympic hopeful (as a result of injury), I endured years of “insufficient” physical activity. Throughout that experience, I always valued physical activity primarily as a means for competitive reward and social recognition but did not grow over the years to value physical activity for its health-benefiting properties. Not that my identities may be separated but, for me, this lack of physical activity involvement feels as much a function of my elite training as it is a function of my own blackness. Thus, in some part, this study was an endeavor to broaden the kinesiology conversation that continues to locate me and others like me as “black” and as being problematic in terms of physical activity involvement.

Additionally, as I read the literature concerning the “inadequate” levels of activity among black women, I do so as a middle-class, thirty-two year old black American woman who is surrounded by a social group of black women, some of whom are sufficiently active and some are not. Within this social group, most are college-educated, middle-class, normal weight and members of Generations X or Y and are not personally afflicted with heart disease, diabetes, or cancer. Some of these women are happily and easily sufficiently active; some have continued to struggle with the idea that they are not physically active but should be; still others could care less about adding sufficient levels of vigorous physical activity into their lives and are confused that I would dedicate my academic career to studying such a “trivial” behavior. In all cases, I realized that the voices of these women were not presented in the research literature in the ways that they

have been shared with me and I wanted to be a part of voicing the experiences and choices of these women. Whether they were “sufficiently” active or not, their reasons for their own behaviors should be heard; I believed we could learn from what they had to say. Thus, I began my inquiry with a special group I know well – black women who are former track and field athletes.

My interdisciplinary academic training prepared me to value physical activity as a health-related behavior but also prepared me to understand physical activity as a cultural practice that is influenced by tradition and group-specific knowledge. Therefore, my research and promotion of physical activity comes from a position of respect for those who share my beliefs and background and for those who do not. Through my interactions with kinesiology professionals, then, I will not only help to facilitate increases in numbers of people who are sufficiently physically active, I will do so by working with people in ways that are respectful of their cultural understandings, social realities and needs.

#### Statement of Purpose

This study offers a deeply contextualized explanation of factors that influence post-competitive physical activity involvement among participants who are black (self-identified black, black American, African-American), women, 25-45, and former Division I elite sprinters, hurdlers, or jumpers. Results from this study are of value in providing new information regarding social values, attitudes, and experiences that influence physical activity behaviors in this group of black women. Further, results will

likely be useful in future endeavors to assist women in adopting post-competitive physical activity routines. This project adds a perspective to kinesiology in which multiple identities of women are acknowledged and their perspective are not presented as a function of race or gender alone. Therefore, this study offers kinesiologists a new model through which to study, evaluate, and discuss physical activity in all groups, particularly groups of black women.

#### Research Question and Plan

The current research project sought contextualized explanations to the question “What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?” A study using a womanist epistemology and exploratory methodology was used to examine this question.

#### Significance of Study

Current physical activity literature lacks an acknowledgement that diversity exists within the category “black woman.” By use of a womanist epistemology in the study of a group of black women, this study provided insight into the impact that simultaneous membership in various social groups has on physical activity behavior. Further, the current literature lacks inclusion of the former elite athletes’ perspective concerning adult, post-competitive physical activity; this study provided insight into the influence that participation in elite college athletics and the cultural rules transmitted in that environment have on post-competitive physical activity. Overall, this research extends

the debate concerning the low physical activity participation rates reported for the U. S. black female population, and it extends a debate about the physical activity and lifestyle behaviors of post-collegiate athletes.

## CHAPTER II

### TOWARD A WOMANIST VIEW OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

African Americans are ... more sedentary and participate in less leisure-time physical activity than European-Americans, independent of age, education, or Body Mass Index . Women are consistently found to be less active than men, and ethnic minority women are less active than White women. Thus, physical activity programs are particularly needed for ethnic minority women. (Castro, Sallis, Hickman, Lee and Chen, 1999, p. 278).

The previous quote is an example of a logic which says, given that health disparities still exist between social groups in U.S. society, priority should be given to research designed for the study of physical activity issues relating to minority groups. Another message promoted through quotes like the one above is that physical inactivity is a function of ethnic minority female status. These simple calls to action encourage researchers and interventionists to continue with more of the same comparisons, surface descriptions, and interventions that reflect their own values and goals rather than those of minorities (Henderson, 1988-89). This approach, as the evidence shows, has not produced increases in physical activity among any racial-ethnic or gender group, much less those who are non-white and female. Given the inadequacy of these messages, a new approach to the study of “ethnic minority women” and physical activity was necessary to help better understand factors that might improve participation numbers in these groups. In order to reach the major public health goal of increasing numbers of U.S. adults who are sufficiently physically active, kinesiologists must study members of minority groups

with intent to understand them as the complex individuals they are, including a focus of attention on various intersecting social messages that influence physical activity behaviors. Toward this end, I used a womanist approach to study black women and physical activity.

The field of Kinesiology has supported a long-time assumption that race, gender, social class, sexuality, age, and ability are discrete variables rather than intersecting aspects of complex, lived experiences that influence physical activity behaviors of individuals and communities (Andrews, 2008; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Henderson, 1988-89). More specifically, the reliance on large, generalizable data sets to suggest that particular population groups are inactive without also offering social context to these findings serves to suggest that some groups are “naturally” more physically in/active than others. Current data and research reporting practices common in Kinesiology serve to suggest that “black women” are a group that is naturally inactive. In efforts to challenge this simple claim, the current study asked a group of black women, former Division I track and field athletes in the 25-45 age group, to describe what influences their physical activity behaviors.

This chapter includes the current knowledge developed through published physical activity studies in populations of black women and former athletes. A description of womanism follows with an illustration of how the use of a womanist epistemology helped to better understand the complicated social realities and physical activity behaviors of women in this study.

## Published Physical Activity Research

### “Black Women” and Physical Activity

The CDC’s National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) provide the only sources of national-level information about type, frequency, intensity, and duration of physical activity (Whitt-Glover et al., 2007). As is the trend with other kinesiology studies, most of these CDC reports provide population-level estimates in which race, gender, social class, age, and other identity categories are treated as independent variables. In general, yearly results from these studies have consistently shown that men, younger adults, and people in the highest education and income categories report more activity than women, older adults and people in the lower education and income categories, respectively (Whitt-Glover et al., 2007). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data also include race/gender categories and, regarding physical activity trends in the black female population, show that inactivity rates have increased slightly since 1994. Black women, however, have consistently reported rates of inactivity that are higher than all racial/ethnic categories of men and most racial/ethnic categories of women; only Asian/ Pacific Islander women report higher rates of inactivity than black women (Kruger, 2005).

The Women’s Cardiovascular Health Network Project is another large study that provided physical activity data on multiple groups of women located in various regions of the United States. Each group was racially/ethnically homogenous and some sites of study were rural while others were urban. This study included African American women

from Illinois, Maryland, South Carolina, and Alabama (Eyler et al., 2003). The study also included white women from Missouri and adult Latinas from Illinois, Maryland and North Carolina. When the sites involving African American participants were compared, results showed great variation in the percentages of women who were physically active. In their conclusions, researchers stated the importance of reporting interests of particular populations since, as the results showed, physical activity status varied by both population group (race) and population location. In other words, they were not comfortable reporting results as “raced” characteristics.

In addition to large, survey methods of assessing physical activity behavior, a number of researchers have used individual interviews and focus groups to address issues of physical activity adoption and adherence among U.S. black females. These qualitative studies suggest that there are a number of social, cultural, environmental, and psychological facilitators and barriers to their physical activity behaviors. Commonly reported barriers include a lack of exposure to physical activity (Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009), cultural norms which privilege larger body sizes and an avoidance of activities thought to contribute to weight loss (Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Katzmarzyk, 2006; Malpede et al., 2007), concerns about hair (Airhihenbuwa, Kumanyika, & Lowe, 1995; Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Malpede et al., 2007), perceived time constraints (Ainsworth, Wilcox, Thompson, Richter, & Henderson, 2003; Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Eyler et al., 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001; Malpede et al., 2007; Sharpe et al., 2008), family responsibilities and role conflicts in which “me time” is considered selfish and

irresponsible (Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Nies, Vollman, & Cook, 1999; Sharpe et al., 2008; Young et al., 2002), lack of social support around physical activity (Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Duncan, 1994; Nies et al., 1999), a lack of motivation (Ainsworth et al., 2003; Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Eyler et al., 1998; Henderson, 1988-89; Malpede et al., 2007; Young et al., 2002), a lack of energy following a physically laborious day of work (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1995; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001) and a belief that “working-out” is for boys and men, not girls and women (Duncan, 1994; Nies et al., 1999).

Commonly-reported facilitators of physical activity include having a physical activity program at church (Bopp et al., 2006; Eyler, Matson-Koffman, et al., 2003), having ample social support (Eyler et al., 1998; Murrock & Madigan, 2008), knowing people who exercise and having a favorable rating of women who exercise (Ainsworth et al., 2003; Eyler, Matson-Koffman, et al., 2003), having access to flexible, convenient activities (Nies et al., 1999; Harley, Buckworth, et al., 2009) and possessing higher levels of educational attainment and social class status (Wilbur et al., 2003).

#### Former Athletes and Physical Activity

Few studies have used a longitudinal design to track physical activity participation of adult, former athletes (Malina, 2001). The literature does, however, contain a number of statements suggesting that, through motor skill development in sport, children grow comfortable with physical activity and acquire kinesthetic knowledge necessary to participate in physical activity as adults. In this way, childhood and adolescent sports participation transfers into leisure-time physical activity in adulthood

(Gill and Williams, 2008; The Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport [TCRGWS], 1997; Waddington, 2004).

Numerous studies support this finding that athletes continue to lead physically active lives after competition ends. Scott and Willits (1989) analyzed data from 1,298 students who had been studied during their high school years and again during their fifties. For women in the study, adolescent sport participation was a significant predictor of adult sport participation (Scott & Willits, 1989). In a study involving middle-aged men, Taylor and colleagues found a positive correlation between participation in team sports during the preteen years and adult physical activity (Taylor, Blair, Cummings, Wun, & Malina, 1999). In a descriptive epidemiological review of physical activity studies in African American women, Adams-Campbell found that, in adults, the factor most positively associated with walking for leisure was a high level of strenuous exercise in high school. Further, this study showed that both moderate and strenuous activity was higher among adult women who exercised strenuously in high school (Adams-Campbell et al., 2000).

While some studies suggest that sport participation is positively correlated with leisure-time physical activity participation in adulthood, other literature disputes this claim. Critics of the idea that sports participation leads to adult activity illuminate important differences between sport and physical activity. To reflect this point, Zielinski and colleagues (2006) individually measured physical activity undertaken as a function of work, physical activity undertaken in leisure time, and physical activity related to sport. They clearly held an assumption that the three categories were distinct and should not be

conflated (Zielinski, Krol-Zielinska, & Kusy, 2006). Important sport-physical activity differences include the competitive focus of sport versus the process orientation of leisurely physical activity; the highly-vigorous motions involved in sport versus the moderate intensities involved in most leisure time physical activity; and sport-specific training and skill versus skills necessary for lifelong physical activity (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Zielinski et al., 2006). This assumption that physical activity and sports contain diverging characteristics contradicts the notion that sports teach lessons and skills needed for physical activity over the lifespan.

In addition to the suggestion that sports skills differ greatly from physical activity skills, other researchers suggest that the retirement-from-sports process, itself, discourages physical activity. Kouskouris (1991) suggested that, during the transition out of competitive participation, athletes might neglect personal fitness. Stephan and Bilard (2003) concluded that, upon retirement, athletes experience weight gain and a decrease in muscle mass. In a 1985 literature review of the determinants of physical activity and exercise, Dishman, Sallis, and Orenstein reported that active male participants in adult fitness programs were likely to have had a sports background; however, at that time no prospective studies had shown a relationship between adherence to cardiac rehabilitation exercise programs and participation in interscholastic or intercollegiate athletics. In fact, their results showed that middle-aged, former male college athletes were less active than men who had not participated in sports (Dishman, Sallis, & Orenstein, 1985).

### Track and Field Participation and Post-Competitive Physical Activity

As demonstrated in the previous section, the research is inconclusive about whether sport participation, in general, encourages physical activity across the lifespan. Within this debate, track and field participation deserves special attention. First, as athletes in a sport that contains blurred lines between “amateur” and “professional,” outgoing collegiate track and field participants face an uncertain but constant possibility of an elite/professional career. This dilemma might have effects on if and how post-collegiate track and field athletes continue to be physically active. Second, research has shown that participation in the type of vigorous physical activity associated with sprint/jump training is not necessary to derive substantial health benefits in adulthood. In fact, these “painful” (Galloway, 2007) vigorous programs are associated with decreased adherence in most adult groups (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007). Sprinters, hurdlers, and jumpers, therefore, represent an athlete group in which sport-related physical activity differs greatly from the moderate-intensity programs associated with greater adherence rates and maintenance of health (Waddington, 2004). For these reasons, kinesiologists must study the possible influences that sport participation and, in particular, participation in track and field sprinting, hurdling, and jumping have on the physical activity behaviors of post-competitive athletes.

Large, generalizable population-level data show that black women are insufficiently active. Since these data, like many in kinesiology, treat race, gender, social class, ability, sexuality, age, etc. as discrete variables, these conclusions about “black women” are not representative or reflective of diversity that exists among groups of black

women. For instance, some research suggests that athletic participation has an independent effect on post-competitive physical activity. Specifically, training in sprinting and jumping track and field events seems to have a negative effect on post-competitive physical activity. Black women who are former track and field athletes, then, will likely have perspectives and experiences that are unique and, potentially, have been mis-understood or incorrectly attributed to race, gender or ability when results were presented in traditional ways. Kinesiologists must, therefore, apply a new approach to the study of physical activity in minority groups.

#### Womanism as a Framework for Understanding Physical Activity Engagements

Womanist epistemology centers on the everyday experiences of African American women and supports an agenda of black women's self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 1989; Banks-Wallace, 2000b). Womanist ways of knowing are simultaneously influenced by race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Banks-Wallace, 2000b; Braun-Williams, 1999) and use of a womanist model helps to avoid a tendency to essentialize the experiences of black women. Instead, a womanist study of physical activity allows women to express how their various social identities intersect to influence their unique social perspectives concerning physical activity.

Essentialist assumptions about race and gender are presented in research findings as "truths" regarding the identity of African Americans and women (Braun-Williams, 1999). The problem with essentialist constructions is their tendency to ascribe to humans an internal state without regard to social demands or without regard for evidence that

contradicts essentialist norms (Braun-Williams, 1999). An essentialist construction of black women, for example, assumes that all black American women share a singular cultural experience without investigation into ways that concurrent membership in various social groups simultaneously influences individuals. Such a construction relies on images of African Americans as having no interaction with other cultures, a proposition that has no basis in reality (hooks, 1992). Use of this practice in kinesiology studies results in differences among groups being attributed to race rather than to variation in individual socialization experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001). In order to influence progress in participation numbers, members of the field must avoid essentialization of the notions of race or gender (or other identity categories) and should pay attention to the structure of constraints within which people make lifestyle choices (Schulz & Mullings, 2006). A womanist approach supports an understanding that black women who are former Division I track and field athletes may, as a function of athletic participation, have individual social experiences that, along with other intersecting social affiliations, make them a worthy group of study within the falsely-homogenous category of “black women.” These intersecting differences may uniquely influence their interactions with physical activity as a lifestyle behavior.

Another benefit of using a womanist approach in the study of these women was that their experiences were not judged against a white norm. This practice of comparing minority racial/ethnic groups to a white norm is common and results in an inauthentic representation of black experiences (Welcome, 2006). This happens in physical activity studies when, for example, inactivity in the black female population is compared to that

of white women. In keeping with dominant racist ideologies, the number associated with the white population becomes the norm and the number associated with the black population is associated with deviance (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). To use the quote by Castro et al. that was presented in the introduction to this section as an example, such statements imply that black women (and women from other ethnic minority groups) deserve the attention of researchers because they do not reach the white standard of activity. This type of statement produces a thought that, as a function of their race or gender, minorities fail to reach proper levels of physical activity while suggesting that participation levels in the white community are ideal. While it may be true that numbers of ethnic minorities who are physically active are dismal, the numbers of whites who participate are equally disappointing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In this case, a better approach than comparing the groups would involve focusing on the ethnic minority group under consideration without comparing it to a white standard. After all, kinesiologists do not wish to simply encourage ethnic minority women to match the efforts of white women – we want to encourage increases in current activity levels of all demographic groups. Further, researchers must stop the practice of assuming that race and/or gender are the only major categories that factor into participation or non-participation.

This “fallacious” comparison practice also limits the range of black agency and suggests that blacks passively respond to and adopt white standards. Therefore, this practice does not fully allow description of black experience in which people are active agents, not simply passive reactors. Womanist studies allow for this centering of a black

experience and avoids marginalizing important aspects of African American women's identities (Braun-Williams, 1999). In this way, a womanist approach allowed space to focus exclusively on the agency, resilience, goals, resources and experiences of black women (Welcome, 2006) in this study.

The following example further expresses the need to apply a black-woman-centered investigation of physical activity: When Bylle Avery described a meeting designed to “educate” a group of severely obese black women, she expressed her shock when one of the women said, “We know all of that information, but what we also know is that living in the world that we are in, we feel like we are absolutely nothing” (Avery, 1990, p. 7). When Avery initially approached the intervention group with simple, externally-developed information about nutrition and exercise with the expectation that the women were in need of that education, she found their needs to be completely different from those of other groups. Avery used her experience as motivation to develop the National Black Women's Health Project, now the National Black Women's Health Imperative. The NBWHI has the goal of speaking with black women about health issues in ways that offer inner healing, not simple education (Arnold, 1990). Avery only achieved this understanding when she committed to listening to the stories of the women without comparing them or their lives to any other standard. A womanist perspective allows space to achieve such a commitment.

Womanism overlaps with intersectionality theory in that they were both developed in response to a need for acknowledgement of experience of living with intersecting identities. Intersectionality theory was developed as a response to the

marginalization of the black woman's experience within the anti-racist and feminist scholarship (Crenshaw, 1991; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). The intersectionality theoretical approach rejects traditional ideas of identity politics in which race, gender, and other identity categories are treated as individually influential (Crenshaw, 1991) and recognizes that identity categories are neither additive nor linear (McCormick et al., 1998). The intersectionality approach allows for nuanced understandings of simultaneously-experienced identities and, like womanism, intersectionality scholarship centers around lived experience at the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Dill et al., 2007). This approach allows discovery of inter-group differences that may occur based on sexual orientation, religion, social class (Crenshaw, 1991) or, in the case of this study, former elite athlete status.

Like other critical theories, intersectionality theorists share a strong commitment to diversity, multiculturalism and human rights and desire to create a more equitable society that recognizes, validates, and celebrates diversity and seeks to achieve social justice (Dill et al., 2007; Collins, 2009). Use of this theory in research validates the lives and stories of previously ignored groups of people and, thus, can be used as a tool to help empower communities and people within them (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Dill et al., 2007). An intersectionality approach is especially useful for uncovering analyses that had not previously been investigated (Dill et al., 2007). Since the women in the current study have a set of intersecting identities that are unique within the physical activity literature, it is important to acknowledge all of the social influences on their behaviors as they

describe them; they must not be reduced to “raced” women, as has been the tendency in other kinesiology studies.

Important portions of Alice Walker’s definition of “womanist” include, “A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually; Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility, and women’s strength; Sometimes loves individual men, sexually or non-sexually; Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female; Not a separatist, except periodically, for health; Traditionally universalist...Traditionally capable...Loves the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*” (Walker, 1983). Collins (2001) calls Walker’s definition of the term womanism “visionary” because it speaks to the heterogeneity of black women and the philosophical differences that exist among African American women (Collins, 2001). For instance, black women may differ based on sexual orientation and these different social locations may determine that homosexual and heterosexual women experience dissimilar social realities even given that they share a racial identity.

This idea that heterogeneity exists within groups of black women is precisely why kinesiologists should take a womanist approach to the study of black women and physical activity. The following sections will demonstrate how the physical activity behaviors of participants in this study-- all black, all women, all members of generations X and Y and all former collegiate track and field athletes-- could each be understood and performed differently based on a combination of their intersecting social identities. In particular, approaching this study from a womanist epistemological perspective will reveal how

intersecting social locations influence the ideas these women have concerning physical activity as well as how social understandings may influence physical activity behaviors.

### Womanism and Research

Though no research to date has specifically addressed physical activity behaviors in black women from a womanist perspective, studies from related fields suggest such a perspective would yield valuable results. These studies demonstrate that intersecting identity factors must be considered in discussions about health practices and behaviors of black women. Azzarito and Solomon (2005) applied a feminist/ poststructuralist analysis to gender, race, and social class discourses around the body in sports and physical education. They found these categories to be fluid and contradictory in nature and argued for a feminist/poststructuralist approach to physical education research. Henderson expressed the need for critical theory in the study of leisure in minority groups. In her article she insisted that, moving forward, research questions should focus on how human beings reflect on their social lives. She also encouraged researchers to seek understandings of how individuals or groups view leisure within the context of the social worlds in which they live (Henderson, 1988-89). In other words, Henderson argued for a participant-centered study of leisure just as womanism requires a black woman-centered perspective on, in this case, physical activity.

Floyd and colleagues researched the relationship between race, class, and leisure. They found that leisure choices between middle-class blacks and middle-class whites were similar while leisure choices in the poor and working classes differed by race (Floyd, Shiner, McGuire, & Noe, 1994). Based on those results, they argued that social

class affiliation, as well as race, should be recognized as having a significant influence on lifestyle. In another leisure study concerning black and American Indian women, Henderson and Ainsworth (2001) concluded that it is “fallacious” to assume that all women of color perceive situations similarly. Their study sample included women of similar ages and ethnic backgrounds but the authors found that idiosyncratic events joined these factors to affect individual women differently.

As these researchers from other fields have demonstrated, it is important to acknowledge that intersecting identities simultaneously affect health behaviors; these external influences converge in complicated ways to influence individuals and groups. Published kinesiology studies have not acknowledged this diversity and, as such, present findings about beauty ideals, role expectations and images as static constructs that consistently influence physical activity behaviors of “black women” in similar ways. In the following sections, evidence will be presented to suggest that this practice results in a false description of the black woman’s perspective on physical activity.

#### External Influences and Physical Activity Engagements: Beauty Ideals, Role Expectations, and Physical Activity Images

Many qualitative studies have examined the social and cultural context of physical activity in samples of black women. One study presented by Harley, Odoms-Young, et al. (2009) involved a sample of black women who were sufficiently active. The researchers suggested that women navigated issues of hair-maintenance, lack of physical activity exposure, and physical activity norms and beliefs to successfully include

sufficient levels of physical activity in their daily lives. Similar challenges also appeared in other studies under the more general categories of beauty ideals, role expectations, and physical activity images. These external factors influence how, why, and possibly if women will be physically active. Further, as the following sections show, women's simultaneous membership in various social groups that each have different ideologies suggests a womanist/intersectional approach to understanding external influences is necessary when investigating and explaining black women and physical activity.

### Beauty Ideals

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, and traditions that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. Culture plays a vital role in shaping all of our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors – including our preferences for certain body types (Bailey, 2008, p. 12).

Margaret Duncan concluded that *Shape* magazine de-emphasized the theme of health while foregrounding the theme of beauty when promoting physical activity (Duncan, 1994). This practice is also reinforced through other popular messages regarding physical activity. Some personal trainers even walk a thin line between making sure that clients achieve results while reminding them that they have not yet reached aesthetic goals (Frew & McGillivray, 2005). Thus, it is understandable that some women, influenced by societal expectations that place value in their appearance (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), engage in physical activity with ideas of achieving beauty ideals in mind. Existing literature suggests that two major beauty-related issues are linked to physical activity behaviors among black women: concerns over hair styles and an acceptance/preference of a curvy body. This section begins from a perspective that physical activity,

or a lack of physical activity, is a technique used to achieve socially-determined beauty standards.

### Hair Standards and Black Women

Qualitative studies show that hair is a significant issue in the decisions black women make about their physical activity (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1995; Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Malpede et al., 2007). Literature from other disciplines describes the historical significance of hair styles in black communities. For instance, Bailey suggested that hair has been one of the few elements that African Americans have been able to express culturally since arriving in the new world (Bailey, 2008). bell hooks (1993) suggested that the first body issue to affect black female identity is hair texture; the natural hair texture of many blacks is kinky, and thus, does not match the straight texture of the Euro-centric ideal. Overall, this literature suggests that hair is a serious subject and decisions black women make about hair are suggestive of their social affiliations and cultural beliefs.

Collins (2000) suggested that institutions controlled by whites discriminate against African-Americans who appear to reject white images of beauty; wearing kinky hair is one such rejection. In support of her argument, Collins offered a quote from a Sonia Sanchez report, "Sisters tell me...that when they go out for jobs they straighten their hair because if they go in with their hair natural or braided, they probably won't get the job" (Collins, 2000, p. 91). hooks (1993) echoed this suggestion that professional goals may influence whether black women choose to wear their hair in natural styles or if they process it (with chemicals or severe heat) in order to achieve a straight look.

Madame C.J. Walker was the first American self-made female millionaire – she accomplished this feat by selling hair care products designed to help black women achieve a straight look (Banks, 2000). Physical activity compromises the straight look while natural styles hold up better under sweaty conditions. If women are insecure about wearing natural styles for reasons related to mainstream social acceptance, they may avoid physical activity in order to maintain the straight, accepted look.

### Body Ideals in Black Communities

African-American women seem to subscribe to a flexible standard of beauty that characterizes a wide range of body types and body sizes as beautiful (Gillespie, 1993; Kumanyika, Wilson, & Guilford-Davenport, 1993). Researchers have suggested that this flexible beauty ideal and in some cases, a preference for “thick” female bodies, deters black women from physical activity (Allen, Mayo, & Michel, 1993). Bailey (2008, p. 2) demonstrated this thought with a quote from a hypothetical person who is a member of the black community, “Why are you exercising; you’re going to be too thin!” Shaw (2006) suggested that the tendency of members of the African Diaspora to resist an idealization of slenderness traces back to African tribes and fattening houses. Fattening houses were designed to teach culture to young women while fattening them up –both activities thought to make them more attractive for marriage. In her book, Shaw suggested that a mainstream promotion of the skinny ideal is another attempt to marginalize blacks – along with a privileging of light skin and European features. She also suggested the possibility that the fat black body represents chosen disobedience on the part of the actor. “It’s not that she is not capable of complying [with this body ideal];

her fat may indicate an unwillingness to comply or an indifference to those norms” (Shaw, 2006, p. 9). As some researchers suggest, this “indifference” may manifest as an “unwillingness to comply” with regular physical activity programs.

While many studies have focused on the impact that race has on ideas about ideal body size, race is actually only one aspect of any woman’s social experience. Therefore, consideration must be given to the reality that ideals of intersecting social groups may simultaneously influence women in this study. For instance, studies show that African American women in the low-SES group are more likely to share an appreciation for the large female body (Allen et al., 1993). In this group, overweight may be associated with strength, stamina, and presence and as is the case in other countries, plumpness can be also be associated with sexual desirability, economic success, marital success, health, and happiness (Allen et al., 1993). In contrast, studies show that black women who have been influenced by a middle-class cultural experience and are more assimilated into the dominant American culture may hold beauty ideals that require a slim or normal-weight body (Abrams, Allen, & Gray; Allen et al. 1993). The idea that body ideals of black women may differ based on their social class affiliations demonstrates a need to move beyond race-centered explanations that draw a direct link between body ideals and physical activity behaviors.

### Body Ideals in Athletic Communities

Women in this study may hold beauty ideals that are influenced by race/ethnicity and social class. Their ideas about beauty are likely also influenced by their former experiences as members of elite sport training groups. For athletes, studies show that

body image or body satisfaction is based on performance, physical efficacy, and idealization of the performing body (Stephan and Bilard, 2003). Therefore, kinesiologists ought to investigate ways in which body ideals that reflect an emphasis on performance maximization may have lasting effects on former athletes.

Mosewich and colleagues (2009) conducted a study to explore women track and field athletes' meanings of muscularity. They found that, among the women in the study, perceptions of muscularity varied – some women perceived a leaner body to be considered “too muscular” while some women required a greater amount of musculature before they would identify someone as “too muscular.” Another theme that emerged out of their interviews with high school and collegiate track and field athletes was a blurred line between appearance and performance. The study participants acknowledged a relationship between muscularity and strength, strength and performance, and therefore, muscularity and performance. However, most of the women indicated that once they left the track, they were no longer as proud or happy with the musculature that allowed them to compete well. They expressed this conscious negotiation and suggested that in order to compete well, appearance had to take a back seat to performance-related muscularity (Mosewich, Bangool, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2009).

In an ethnographic study of a women's Division I soccer team, George (2005) also found that female athletes conceive of their bodies in complicated ways. Women were concerned with building bodies that were strong and powerful during competition but were simultaneously concerned about maintaining a toned but not too muscular, slim and fat free body that that would be more accepted off the field. This negotiation

influenced how women trained and how they evaluated their appearance. These ideals about bodies will likely also influence how women engage in post-competitive physical activity if they do so with a purpose of developing a body that meets social standards of attractiveness.

### Traditional vs. Contemporary Body Ideals

It has been established that body ideals may be influenced by race/ethnicity, social class and athletic environments. Because standards and popular images of the ideal female body continue to change over time, generation affiliation may also have an effect on beauty ideals. In the late 1970s, the goals of fitness classes were to lose weight and achieve the look of the dance exercise instructor, “white, slim, and attractive” (Lenskyj, 1986). In the 1980s, a more muscular, but still slim body became the new ideal. In 1986, Lenskyj wrote, “A degree of thinness and muscularity which, twenty years ago, was incompatible with femininity or heterosexual appeal is now an accepted standard among most middle class women” (Lenskyj, 1986, p. 137). In 1994, Margaret Duncan described the feminine ideal [body] as similar to those of fashion models Cindy Crawford, Kate Moss, and Naomi Campbell (Duncan, 1994). In other words, the dominant idea of the beautiful body was tall, slim, and non-muscular. Her study involved an evaluation of the images presented in *Shape* which promoted many messages that Duncan concluded were disempowering to women – one was the idea that, in order to become more attractive, a woman must become thinner.

Recently, researchers have suggested that the muscular body of the female athlete has become a new standard of beauty for all Americans (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). As

an example, Eric Bailey pointed to a Nike campaign featuring a “woman’s rounded backside in short shorts” (Bailey, 2008, p. 1). In response to that ad, a blogger expressed an appreciation for the Nike’s promotion of a message that it is okay for women to be muscular. Additionally, Bailey displayed results from a 2006 poll of 1700 American readers of *Fitness Magazine*. The poll question was, “Which of these celebrities has the most ideal body?” The winning response was Halle Berry (25%), followed by Jennifer Lopez (18%), Angelina Jolie (15%), Jennifer Aniston (9%), Jessica Simpson (4%) and Jennifer Garner (3%). These results suggested an appreciation for a more curvy and fit body that is quite different from those of Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell mentioned in the 1994 piece by Duncan.

Participants in this study have been influenced by multiple and sometimes conflicting, messages about beauty. Since many people engage in physical activity with goals of achieving socially-defined standards of beauty, researchers must consider these women’s intersectional perspectives concerning hair and bodies. As mentioned, past research has addressed socially-determined beauty norms for middle-class women, black women, and female athletes. Since members of this study cross these social locations, a womanist perspective will help to seek an understanding of how intersecting identities affect their beauty-related physical activity behaviors.

#### Role Expectations

Social roles are determined based on social location (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). These roles influence individual behavior through culturally-determined expectations of how one should spend available time. Since a lack of time is one of the main reasons given for

a lack of physical activity (Dishman et al., 1985), it is important to explore role expectations that influence physical activity behaviors. This is especially important if role strain leaves one with the perception that there is no available time to be physically active. Literature on black women and physical activity suggests that role strain is, in fact, a significant barrier to physical activity. Following, is an explanation of literature to support this finding. This section also includes expectations of high-level athletes and evidence to suggest that their learned roles might influence post-competitive physical activity. As well, a discussion of the professional expectations of women in Generations X and Y and a discussion of middle-class role expectations that include physical activity are presented. In all cases, role expectations may possibly influence the meaning that physical activity has in the lives of these women.

#### Strong Black Woman: Role Expectations of Black Women

JoAnne Banks-Wallace wrote an article titled “Staggering under the weight of responsibility: the impact of culture on physical activity among African American women” (Banks-Wallace, 2000a). In it, she used interviews with African American women to describe how their family and community roles inhibited them from finding time to devote to physical activity. Collins (2000) characterized this role of the black woman in the United States as “the strong black woman.” Henderson and Ainsworth (2003) described it as an “ethic of care” – a relationship with others in which women sometimes care more about the needs of others than their own needs (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003, p. 315); bell hooks called it the black martyr syndrome (hooks, 1993, p. 88). hooks wrote, “in this racist, sexist society that perpetuates the belief that the primary

role women should play is that of servant, it logically follows that many of us internalize the assumption that our bodies do not need care” (hooks, 1993, p. 88). She went on to say that care of the self begins with a capacity to tenderly and lovingly care for the body and that black women often neglect our bodies because we do not, first, care for ourselves.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) suggested that this internalized belief in one’s role as the strong black woman is a result of historical portrayals of African-American women as mammies and matriarchs. Janette Taylor (1999) suggested that these controlling images serve the purpose of colonizing African American women and may continue to serve as oppressive mechanisms for African American women’s health. Through teaching black girls and women that they are primarily responsible for the success and failure of those around them, these messages serve to deny women the opportunity to spend time on themselves in pursuits like physical activity. This sentiment was articulated by a woman who was recruited for an exercise intervention for black women at risk for noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus--“We don’t make time for ourselves. We feel guilty because we have so many responsibilities on us—our job, our families, our hobbies, our church work, or community work, whatever else we may be doing...neither of the jobs get respect as they should...we should exercise but we don’t, we feel guilty, and all that kind of stuff” (Carter-Nolan, Adams-Campbell, & Williams, 1996, p. 559).

While womanists rely on the notion of self-definition, actual achievement of self-definition is complicated because externally-defined cultural definitions are internalized and experienced as real (Braun-Williams, 1999). “I’m so tired of that stuff [asking black women to be strong]. What are you going to do – just lay down and die? We have to do

what's necessary to survive. It's just a part of living. But most of us are empty wells that never really get replenished. Most of us are dead inside. We are walking around dead."

This quote was offered by a black woman in response to questions about her inactivity (Avery, 1990, p. 6). Obviously, this woman recognized her role as a strong black woman but may have, at times, wished to reject that role.

### Winners! Athlete Roles and Expectations

#### TAR HEEL PRIDE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TAR HEEL *A CHAMPIONS'S CREED*

1. It means that you will be a WINNER.
2. It means that you will have PRIDE in yourself, your team, and your school.
3. It means that you will be a disciplined individual and team member.
4. It means that you will be one of the Elite people in your school and community.
5. It means that you will work harder than anyone else in the conference and will like it because you know it produces WINNING.
6. It means that you know that WINNING is important and that those people who say that sports are strictly for fun are wrong. You must have fun playing, however, if you are here primarily to have fun instead of to work, then—you will LOSE. LOSING IS NO FUN.
7. It means that you are involved with a family who puts Winning at the top of the list in importance. We do not list sportsmanship, participation, character building, and winning in some type of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 order. We say it can all be categorized under Winning. If we participate and work hard and show good sportsmanship we will WIN and we will build character. If we should on occasion lose, we will do so like LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. We are POSITIVE THINKERS. We love to WIN and we HATE TO LOSE. (THIS IS OUR PHILOSOPHY).
8. It means that you understand that the will to prepare to win is more important than just the will to win.
9. It means that you will be an unselfish individual who puts a team win ahead of individual glory, however, at the same time trying to break and set individual records. This is the way OF A CHAMPION.

10. It means that you will realize that in our little, elite family group that we will have LOYALTY AND LOVE AND COMPANIONSHIP. We live by the motto that we do not want excuses – we want results.

11. It means that you are a better individual for having been a part of our ATHLETICS' FAMILY.

The preceding poem (Craddock, 2009) was shared with current members of a Division I track and field team, former team members, and team supporters. This “Champion’s Creed” expressed the importance of competitiveness in the role of an elite collegiate athlete. It also expressed that winning is the most important goal of collegiate athletics participation; praise, recognition, reward, and respect are all based on winning. Therefore, it is understandable that student-athletes dedicate tremendous amounts of time toward the pursuit of winning (Blinde, 1986).

Most important in relation to the current study is that, for high-level collegiate athletes, physical activity is framed within a context of competition and winning. As such, while training, there are few opportunities for athletes to participate in leisure-time activity that is unrelated to sport training. This is especially the case in the sport of track and field and its culture of comparison<sup>4</sup> (Mosewich et al., 2009). For high-level athletes, extrinsic factors like status and winning help to develop a sense of self and become important aspects of the athlete’s identity (Baille, 1993; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). As stated by Baille, "Years of external evaluation and internal reinforcements associated with sport participation help to form an identity in which

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<sup>4</sup> To quote a collegiate track and field athlete in Mosewich’s study, “You have to compare standards. Even from year to year you compare standards; you compare results; you compare records. You compare. Everything has to be compared” (Mosewich et al., 2009, p. 107).

physical competition is central for the athlete's sense of self, but such an identity may also be harmful in its consequences after retirement from the sports environment” (Baille, 1993, p. 410). In other words, this competitive identity may make it difficult for the retired athlete to accept the worth of non-competitive health-related physical activity.

#### Working Women: Role Expectations for Women of Generations X and Y

Results show that 50% of Millennials and 48% of Gen Xers meet recommended physical activity levels, demonstrating that these generations are the most active of all generation groups (New Strategist Publications, 2009). While each of these groups is defined differently -- members of Generation X consist of people born between 1965 and 1976 and members of Generation Y/ “The Millennials” were born between 1977 and 1994-- the two share many characteristics. Those that may have an effect on physical activity participation include access to technology, ideas about work, and exposure to traditionally-male domains such as sport and some professions.

Studies that treat black women as a homogenous group have shown work responsibilities to present a significant barrier to physical activity (Ainsworth et al., 2003; Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Eyer et al., 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Malpede, et al., 2007; Sharpe et al., 2008). Evidence in the next section will suggest that, as a result of Title IX, professional role expectations of women who are members of Generations X and Y might influence the amount of time women perceive as being available for physical activity. Therefore, it is important to recognize the influence that generation affiliation, as well as race and gender, play in the possible activity behaviors of women.

Educations is one factor that greatly influences people's attitudes and values, wants and needs; Generation X is the first generation of girls and women to be educated under the requirements of Title IX (New Strategist Publications, 2009). This fact is important in physical activity and sports research for a number of reasons, including that Title IX removed many structural barriers that had long-prevented many girls and women from participating in sports. Since the influence of sport participation on physical activity is discussed elsewhere in this paper, here I will focus on another important reason that Title IX has impacted physical activity of women; its tremendous effect on the professional lives of women in the United States.

Due to structural and ideological shifts that have occurred since the implementation of Title IX, women have made great strides in higher education. In fact, women in Generations X and Y are better educated than their male counterparts (New Strategist Publications, 2009). As a result, there are more female college graduates, more female corporate CEOs and more successful female business owners than ever before in U.S. history. Additionally, most Generation X and Y couples are dual earners and 38% of mothers in this generation are single (New Strategist Publications, 2009). These facts suggest that women in Generations X and Y place significant effort in the development of their careers because of the real possibility that their efforts will be rewarded with promotions and professional recognition. Further, cultural norms suggest that professional accomplishment should be a priority for these women. In other words, one role of a Generation X or Y woman is that of upwardly-mobile professional. In the case of mothers who are single, role expectations involve professional obligations as well as

responsibilities involved with being a lone caretaker. In both cases, these roles may conflict with achievement of physical activity participation.

#### Active Woman: Role Expectations of the Middle Class

Individuals in this study will be influenced by cultural understandings resulting from their various social locations as females, black Americans, athletes, and Generation Xers and Millennials. Their role expectations are also likely influenced by their locations as members of the middle class. Between one-fourth and one-half of today's African American families are middle-class in terms of income, occupation, or education (Attewell, Lavin, Thurston, & Levey, 2006). Based on these criteria, the educated women in this study are members of the middle class along with 37 million other blacks who have bachelors, graduate, and professional degrees. Across all genders and races, higher social class is correlated with increased levels of physical activity (Whitt-Glover et al., 2007). This finding suggests that middle class values include getting a good education and good jobs (Attewell et al., 2006) as well as being physically active. Further, mainstream marketing is directed at members of the middle class, a social group with a significant amount of purchasing power. Therefore, role expectations may be formed through the promotion of certain products to this audience. The fitness industry is a billion-dollar industry and makes money by selling fitness. Nike is one of the companies that sells fitness and, since middle class women are part of Nike's target audience (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), their promotions likely influence women in this study.

Women in this study are influenced by a myriad of role expectations. I have chosen to focus on the roles of "strong black woman," "winner athlete," "working

woman,” and “active woman” to demonstrate how role expectations may encourage or inhibit physical activity. A womanist investigation of these roles is important given that role expectations of these categories sometimes conflict. In short, it is important that we acknowledge the complexity that informs these women’s behaviors.

### Physical Activity Images

Culture is transmitted by symbols and, thus, images influence behavior by visually and verbally promoting social expectations (Bailey, 2008). As discussed below, positive images representative of women in this study are largely missing from popular messages about physical activity. Further, messages emanating from the gym environment might also affect their intent to participate in post-competitive activity. Therefore, it is important to consider the influence that external physical activity images have on the behaviors of women in this study.

### Missing in Action: Former Athletes and Black Physical Activity Role Models

High-level athletes tend to focus all of their physical efforts on developing bodies for the purpose of competing. This dedication prevents them from exploring various non-sport-specific activities and also, possibly prevents them from considering health and fitness benefits that might be gained from physical activity (Brewer, van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Theberg, 2007). As an example, Theberge studied the meaning of “health” for high-level athletes. She concluded that, “It’s not about health; it’s about performance” (Theberg, 2007, p. 176). In the athletes’ opinions, health was not measured by biomarkers; it was measured only by an ability to compete. This meant that athletes were sometimes willing to sacrifice their health (as defined in terms of medical

ailments) in order to compete. When transitioning into post-competitive lives, then, athletes may not be prepared to pursue physical activity for health-related reasons. They may also not be prepared to promote such a message.

Stephan and Bilard (2003) also presented evidence to explain why images of retired athletes are missing from popular fitness messages. In fact, they suggested that one characteristic of athletes who face difficult transitions is the tendency to neglect personal fitness or methods to control weight. Related to this, the first realization that "I am not an elite athlete anymore" is often difficult to grasp and may be a source of shame. This shame is a possible catalyst to a greater refusal to participate in physical activity for health (Stephan & Bilard, 2003) and contributes to the scarcity of popular images of the physically-active former athlete.

In addition to being influenced by images of former athletes, women in this study might also be affected by the lack of popular images of physically active black people. Black women in other studies (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003) indicated that their activity was negatively influenced by a lack of exposure to images of physically active people who look like them. In Harley's study (2009), African American women reported using Oprah, Billy Blanks, and Donna Richardson as physical activity role models in the absences of local black role models (Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009). As Bailey (2008) pointed out, it is unusual to see African American female bodies on any fitness magazine or book cover. He called this a "blatant neglect of the African American market" (Bailey, 2008, p. 71) and suggested that the European American mainstream feels justified in this neglect because they feel that we (African Americans) don't care

about our health and fitness. When describing the few books that did feature African American bodies, Bailey offered *Training for speed, agility, and quickness; Functional training for sports;* and *Muscle mechanics* (Bailey, 2008). These magazines were all training-focused and did not offer an image of moderate physical activity that is achievable by a majority of black women.

Dworkin and Wachs (2009) presented evidence of this paucity of images of black women when they noted, between 1998 and 2006, only three of 66 covers of women's fitness magazines featured active black women. Of these, two of the women were actresses, Vanessa Williams and Traci Bingham; the third was Oprah. When they looked at 25 years of covers from *Women's Sports and Fitness Magazine*, they found three covers featuring black women; all three were currently competing, world-class athletes. They concluded that this lack of imagery was "disturbing" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 54). These images have a real affect on the black female audience, possibly reinforcing the idea that leisure-time physical activity is better suited for other groups.

### The Gym

The gym environment and the comfort one feels in the gym have an influence on whether or not one will frequent the gym. As a space filled with cultural symbols, the gym presents a potential problem when those symbols reflect dominant cultural understandings while not including symbols and artifacts that are comfortable and familiar to members of non-dominant social groups. Music, class offerings, instructors, and positioning of equipment are all important factors in this debate. Of particular relevance to the current group are class offerings and rules over the use of equipment that

may not resemble aspects of the familiar, high-level training environment. For reasons of safety, many gyms do not allow the power lifts that were central to the strength training of sprinters, hurdlers and jumpers. Thus, a gym environment that does not include or allow activities familiar to athletes, combined with former athletes' ignorance of other possible physical activity options, might deter participation among members of this group.

Images influence behavior by providing visual examples social expectations. Physical activity-focused magazines and gyms are involved in the process of showing who is already physically active and thus, who should adopt physical activity. Unfortunately, main-stream magazines do not present images of physically active athletes or black women. Additionally, the gym environment may promote activities that are unfamiliar to this population. A womanist approach to these issues will help to acknowledge ways in which women receive and interpret messages from the merging social environments that are directly involved in promoting messages about physical activity.

#### Summary: Womanism as a Framework for Understanding Physical Activity

##### Engagements

It is problematic to compare differences between race and gender groups because, as Dill and Zambrana write, "the result of analyzing inequalities and treating them as if independent of one another is that experiences of whole groups are ignored, misunderstood, or erased, especially those of women of color" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009,

p. 1). This practice may result in a neglect to acknowledge diversity when, for analytical purposes, people are classified with a single term such as “black” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Given that existing research and interventions on the physical activity of black women have not resulted in significant increases in the numbers of women who are physically active, it is time that kinesiologists take a new approach to the study of physical activity with special attention paid to intersecting influences of race, gender, social class, ability, sexuality, age, etc. Following research studies from scholars in related fields of nursing, leisure studies, and physical education, kinesiologists should consider applying a womanist approach to the study of physical activity in black women.

This chapter has included literature which shows that black women who are former Division I track and field athletes are simultaneously influenced by numerous and sometimes conflicting cultural beauty ideals, role expectations, and physical activity images. A womanist approach is ideal in trying to understand the complexities of these women’s lives, their simultaneous membership in various social groups, and how constant navigation of the social rules of each group may potentially influence their physical activity engagements.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of the current study was to offer a deeply contextualized explanation of factors that influence physical activity in a group not previously represented in the physical activity literature. Exploratory methodology is particularly useful in studies seeking to explain situations in which little scientific knowledge exists about the group, process, or situation under study (Stebbins, 2001). In this inquiry, exploration was justified by a dearth of qualitative and quantitative research that featured the perspectives of former elite athletes and black, adult women. Therefore, an exploratory study using focus groups was used to investigate the question “What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes describe as influencing post-competitive physical activity?” Further, this study was undergirded with a womanist epistemology<sup>5</sup> and sought to more deeply contextualize the physical activity experiences and choices of these women through explanations of their various intersecting social experiences and understandings. Consequently, the explanations about black women and physical activity that resulted from this study expand established theories produced in Kinesiology where behaviors have typically been attributed to singular, compartmentalized identifying characteristics such as race or gender.

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<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive description of Womanism, see “Womanism as a framework for understanding physical activity engagements” in Chapter 2

The method of data collection for this study was focus group interviews. Focus group interviews allowed the researcher to identify factors grounded in actual experiences as told by study participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Smithson, 2008). Additionally, focus group conversations produced data and insight that would have been less accessible through individual interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Morgan, 1988; Smithson, 2008). For instance, the interaction between focus group members resulted in discussions of topics that may not have surfaced during a one-on-one interview between two people. Further, participants were collectively able to elaborate on topics and questions that were most important to them.

These groups consisted of familiar acquaintances and peers. While authors have suggested that focus group participants may disclose more information when conversing with strangers (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) and that existing groups have established lines of communication that create challenges to the process of analysis (Krueger, 1994, 1998), peers in this study collectively remembered and expressed perspectives based on shared past experiences, events, and discussions (Krueger, 1994). Given that this research required participants to remember and re-tell past experiences, the peer group focus group was appropriate for this study. The focus group method fit particularly well with womanism because it allowed for collaborative meaning-making (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) and, periodically, supportive consciousness-raising in which participants became aware that their personal challenges had also been experienced by other members of the group (Henderson, 1995).

## Participants

In this exploratory methodology, sampling was driven not necessarily by attempts to be representative of some social body or its heterogeneities but especially and explicitly by theoretical concerns (Davies, 2006). In this study, participant characteristics reflected the researcher's interest in expanding explanations about physical activity in populations of adult black females and former athletes. In all, seventeen women participated in four focus groups. The recruitment information for this study invited participants who were 25-45 year-old and were willing to travel to Durham, Charlotte, or Atlanta. The actual age range of participants was 25-41 and all attended universities and, at the time of the study, lived in the Southeastern United States. Recruitment information also invited women who were "U.S. black or African-American"; in actuality, five (29%) participants self-identified as African-American, one (6%) self-identified as Black-American, one self-identified as Black and Hispanic (6%), and nine (53%) self-identified as Black. One person did not indicate how she identified in terms of racial/ethnic heritage. This sample of women was extremely well-educated; two (12%) had doctoral-level degrees, five (29%) held master's degrees, nine (53%) held bachelor's degrees, and one (6%) person had some college. Throughout the focus group, participants also indicated their various relationship statuses. See Table 1 for complete demographic information.

Table 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION							
*from demographic questionnaire				** from focus group conversations			
NAME*	Education*	Race/Eth HERITAGE (SELF-DESCRIBED)*	AGE*	OCCUPATION*	SEC*	RELATIONSHIP STATUS**	CHILDREN**
GROUP 1							
SOPHIA	Doctoral	Black	29	Physical Therapist	Middle	Partnered	0
THUNDER	Bachelor's	Black	26	Commercial Real Estate	Middle	Partnered	0
RYAN	Bachelor's	Black	26	Track Coach	Middle	Partnered	0
FLASH	Master's	N/I	28	Sales Support w/ Shoe Company	Middle	N/I	0
GROUP 2							
ISIS	Doctorate	African-American	29	Attorney	Middle	N/I	0
RHONDA	Master's	African-American	28	Sports Management	Middle	N/I	0
INGRED	Bachelor's	Black-American	29	Public Health	Middle	Married	2
CHRIS	Some College	African-American	28	Sports Production	Middle	Partnered	1
GROUP 3							
KEISHA	Bachelor's	African-American	41	Teacher K-4	Middle	Married	1
SUMMER	Bachelor's	Black	29	Exceptional Children's Facilitator	Middle	Partnered	0
ELAINE	Bachelor's	Black	38	Educator	Middle	Married	2
TINA	Bachelor's	African-American	30	N/I	Middle	N/I	1
JACKIE	Master's	Black	33	Recruiting Mgr.	Middle	Married	2
GROUP 4							
MCKENZIE	Bachelor's	Black / Hispanic	27	Homemaker	Middle	N/I	1
Eva	Master's	Black	27	Sales	Lower	N/I	0
KAMI	Master's	Black	29	Educator	Lower	Partnered	0
JANESSA	Bachelor's	Black	25	Human Resources	Lower	Partnered	0

All participants trained for and competed in the sprint, hurdles, or jump events in track and field. As well, none had competed within the last two years. Within these criteria, however, there was variation with regards to participants' years in the sport and the date of their last competition. Participants also were also varied with regards to post-competitive physical activity involvement -- a group characteristic that resulted in explanations of influences on participation as well as non-participation. These results can be found in Appendix A.

The choice to involve only sprinters, hurdlers and jumpers was based on the fact that their sport-related physical activity differed greatly from moderate-intensity, health-related physical activity programs associated with greater adherence rates in adulthood (Waddington, 2004). Training for the sprints, hurdles, and jumps is supra-maximal -- stressing the anaerobic and aerobic systems required during competition—and associated with muscle fatigue and pain (Galloway, 2007, p. 29). Sub-maximal, moderate activities that are less likely to result in injury are associated with greater compliance rates in adults (King, Martin, & Castro, 2006). For many people, therefore, “Track is a vigorous sport that is hardly the lifetime activity one can continue throughout middle age and later in life” (Chepyator-Thomson, Russell, & Culp, 2007, p. 114). The focus on this group of former athletes challenged the widely accepted view that, through sport participation, athletes develop physical activity patterns that continue over the lifespan (Coakley, 2008; Gill & Williams, 2008).

Women in the 25-45 age-group (born 1965-1984) are underrepresented in the literature concerning black women and physical activity. A majority of studies focus on

adolescent or older adult activity (Eyler et al., 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003) or conflate data from women of all ages (Adams-Campbell et al., 2000; Airhihenbuwa et al., 1995; Eyler et al., 2003; Malpede et al., 2007; Murrock & Madigan, 2008; Nies et al., 1999; Sharma, Sargent, & Stacy, 2005; Sharpe et al., 2008; Tortolero, Masse, Fulton, & Torres, 1999; Young et al., 2002). The specific focus on the 25-45 age-group adds depth to the literature.

These participants represent a group that is understudied in the physical activity literature. Therefore the factors that influence physical activity behaviors of black women who were Division I track and field athletes may remain mis-represented or misunderstood. Further, the group of participants represented here have not previously been studied intersectionally through the use of qualitative methodologies. Therefore, this project offered the opportunity to uncover new information regarding the factors that influence physical activity in women who simultaneously occupy a number of different social categories (eg. Black, female, middle-/lower SES, mother, athlete, employee, partner, friend, etc.). Further, this study added insight into how their intersecting social identities individually and collectively influenced physical activity behaviors.

## Procedures

### Recruitment of Participants

Recruitment of participants began once the research method, interview guide and process of analysis had been pilot tested and revised (APPENDIX B). All initial correspondence occurred via email. The recruitment process began with an email sent to

contacts known through the researcher's many years as an athlete and coach of elite collegiate track and field athletes. This initial email (APPENDIX C) served as an announcement of the study as well as an invitation to participate for those people who met the criteria for inclusion. Since this study involved peer-group focus groups, this initial email also invited potential participants to recruit eligible peers, friends, and acquaintances to join focus groups with them. The initial email was sent to fourteen individuals; ten met the criteria for participation in the study and seven were coaches, collegiate sport administrators, or track and field fans—some who met the criteria were also coaches, administrators and fans. Seven of the ten eligible women agreed to participate. The initial group of fourteen email recipients forwarded the announcement directly and/or provided me with names of twenty additional eligible participants. I then sent them an invitation email (APPENDIX D) and twelve agreed to participate in the study. The final tally of participants was seventeen; three groups of four participants and one group of five. My original plan was to collect schedules of confirmed attendees and plan a meeting time that fit with their schedules. I followed this procedure for two groups. In the remaining two groups, participants were friends and organized their own schedules before informing me of the meeting time. In all cases, I made direct contact with the participants and communicated directly with each woman regarding meeting times and participation confirmations.

When all women responded and a meeting time had been established, I/the principal investigator emailed participants with information regarding focus group times (APPENDIX E) and informed consent (APPENDIX F). Upon arrival at the meeting,

participants were asked to sign the informed consent document that was presented to them. They were also asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (APPENDIX G). The initial recruitment process began on January 7 and was completed on March 1. The first two focus groups occurred in Atlanta on January 23, the third in Durham on February 7, and the fourth in Charlotte on March 5. Two days before each focus group, each participant was called and reminded of the time and location of the meeting. At this time, each person was asked to confirm her intent to attend (Morgan, 1995). Only one person confirmed an intent to attend but did not participate. I attribute this excellent participation rate to the promise of peer interaction as well as having a topic about which participants were genuinely invested in understanding.

#### Focus Group Procedures

Both a moderator and an assistant moderator coordinated focus group activities. The moderator led the focus groups while encouraging participants to share their wisdom and expertise. The moderator attempted to minimize prejudices or personal biases to influence responses (Vaughn et al., 1996). While the moderator directed the discussion and kept the conversation on topic, the assistant moderator supervised and managed equipment, managed participant arrival and registration, organized refreshments, monitored environmental conditions and took notes during the focused conversation (Krueger, 1998b; Vaughn et al., 1996). Due to travel and schedule restrictions, three different assistant moderators were utilized.

Focus groups proceeded according to a pre-planned focus group interview guide (APPENDIX H ). The central question in the group conversations was “What has

influenced your post-competitive physical activity?” The moderator/ researcher demonstrated a flexible facilitation technique so that participants had a voice in shaping the conversation according to their personal perspectives— the goal was for them to do most of the talking and emphasize factors that were important to them. When responses related to the main question, they were asked to elaborate. However, when necessary, the researcher steered the conversation to focus on questions contained in the focus group guide. As the first of four member-checks, the researcher asked each woman to reflect on the conversation and briefly describe the physical activity influence that has most affected her. The researcher also verbally offered a 2-3 minute summary of main ideas at the conclusion of each group meeting. Participants had the opportunity to agree with the summary or suggest revisions—no major revisions were suggested (member check #2). In closing, the groups were asked if anything significant was left out of the conversation (member check #3). These steps were taken to ensure that the researcher adequately understood the expressions of the group members (Krueger, 1998a). Member-check number four occurred after data had been transcribed, and preliminary categories of analysis had been created.

Participants agreed to have all focus group interviews audio-taped. They were given the option to stop taping at any time, however none exercised this option. Each participant took part in one focus group. Participants were not compensated but light refreshments were served. Following recommendations of pilot study participants, all focus groups took place in homes of group members. All locations were private,

comfortable, and easily-accessible to participants. Each focus group interview lasted between sixty and ninety minutes.

Immediately following the focus group, the moderator audio-recorded field notes and held a debriefing session with the assistant moderator. These sessions focused on information regarding the meeting environment and any logistical changes that should have been implemented before the next focus group meeting. One week after each focus group, thank you letters (APPENDIX I) were emailed. These letters also asked that participants participate in one future member-check which occurred after codes and preliminary themes were developed. In this member check (number 4), participants were asked to verify that analyses accurately reflected their experiences (APPENDIX J). Three participants responded to this member check and all agreed with the preliminary assertions.

### Analytic Strategy

#### Theoretical Framing

Participants in this study were underrepresented in the physical activity literature. Therefore, in order to uncover new explanations of physical activity involvement based on their lives, tools for analyzing data allowed space for the revelation of novel and nuanced explanations, descriptions, and themes. Towards this goal, the researcher employed a descriptive and somewhat interpretive analysis undergirded with a womanist epistemology to analyze participant responses to the question “What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive

physical activity?” The nature of the analysis was consistent with exploratory methodologies and ensured that hypotheses were grounded in the data generated during interactions with this unique group of women. The analysis involved a description of participants’ direct expressions as well as interpretations of what their statements may have represented. When appropriate, the researcher made connections between the women’s words and larger social issues. Approaching this analysis from the perspective of a womanist epistemology, importantly, allowed diverse and unfamiliar, neglected, or previously misrepresented perspectives to emerge (Banks-Wallace, 2000b); use of this analytical lens offered a new framing of ideas in kinesiology where race, gender, and social class had typically been presented as independent variables without important, socially-determined relevance. Further, this approach helps to avoid presenting experiences and perspectives of select black women as universally applicable to all black women.

#### Process of Analysis

The development of theory based on exploration involves a constant process of looking for new questions and making new connections (Stebbins, 2001). In this study, the analytical process was conducted with the goal of unearthing new questions concerning the physical activity behaviors of black women who are post-competitive track and field athletes and making newly informed theoretical assertions concerning their behaviors and the various influences on those behaviors. During the focus groups, a digital audio recorder captured verbal data. Following each focus group, the researcher audio-recorded verbal memo notes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). These notes included

initial impressions and session highlights as well as notes about statements or ideas that seemed to contrast with those from other focus groups. Within 24 hours of each focus group, the researcher transcribed audio tapes verbatim.

Each transcript was read and re-read for evidence of recurring words, concepts, or key phrases used by participants to describe influences on post-competitive physical activity. In particular, focus was given to words, key phrases and concepts that were mentioned frequently, extensively, intensely (determined by change in voice or obvious non-verbal signs of excitement) or specifically (in great detail). These words, phrases, and concepts were converted into codes and, where appropriate, codes were used to label key statements from the transcripts. In keeping with the purpose of exploratory research, codes and categories were developed and applied to the data once the researcher became familiar with the data. For purposes of verification, transcripts, codes, and coding strategies were shared and discussed with the chairs of this dissertation committee.

After codes had been established, memos were used to record ideas and hunches about possible themes and connections between chunks of coded information. In particular, idea memos were used to summarize emerging ideas, record lingering questions, and to document ways that individual comments and conversations reflected coherent or divergent concepts.

With the help of memos, coded data were organized into categories (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). At this point, a four page summary of preliminary categories was emailed to participants and they were asked to provide feedback about needed clarifications or additions. The summary was emailed to all 17 participants. They were

asked to respond if the categories neglected to represent their perspectives. Only three participants responded and all agreed with the summary. One week after the summary was emailed to participants, interpretation of data proceeded as originally planned. The final step in the process of analysis involved organizing categories into themes which were grounded in the data.

The group narrative produced in focus groups was interpreted using descriptive analyses. Therefore, all developed themes and theories were directly traceable to the taped and transcribed data as well as the interview guide. Given this methodological approach, the researcher did not begin with the goal of comparing experiences of “sufficiently-active” individuals against those of “insufficiently active” participants. Rather, the researcher distilled a set of arguments about factors that influence physical activity behaviors based on perspectives and experiences expressed by these women in response to the researcher/moderator’s questions. This set of factors was represented through the use of direct quotes that best highlighted meaningful trends and themes. A more detailed description of the process of analysis can be found in Appendix K.

#### Trustworthiness of Study

Member checks, or invitations for participant feedback, occurred four times throughout the data generation and analysis process—three times at the conclusion of each focus group and once more after codes and preliminary themes had been developed. This study also involved negative case analyses -- outlying quotes were not ignored. Rather, while minority views were not presented as central themes, they were

acknowledged as differing views and offered important examples of inner-group diversity (Banks-Wallace, 2000b; Krueger, 1998a). Further, actual participant quotes were used in the write-up along with rich, thick descriptions meant to provide a robust picture of the participants' thoughts and perceptions. Finally, as a dissertation, the data (transcripts) and analysis (codes; memos; theories) underwent external audits from committee chairs.

Sampling decisions in grounded theory- related research should be purposeful and made with a goal of theoretical saturation in mind (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). The sample choices in this study, therefore, reflected a goal of finding people who shared a number of specific characteristics and possessed specialized knowledge that was helpful in answering the question, "What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?" The goal of this focus group research was to gain a deeper understanding about participants' experiences and feelings on the research topic. For that reason, it was not expected that these sampling choices would result in generalizable data. However, since the participants were presented not only as black women, but as former athletes, adult women, black adults, family members, friends, etc, readers may find that resulting theories are transferable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and applicable to other situations.

#### Summary: Methods and Methodology

This dissertation, an exploratory study using focus groups, was the first in a line of future studies designed to gain an understanding of what black women who were Division I track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive activity. All of

the choices in this proposed research were made with the goal of placing these women's lives, rather than previous research findings and generalized theories, at the center of this social inquiry. Therefore, these women were not reduced to "black," "female," or "black female" but their perspectives were received in acknowledgement of the various social locations they occupy. Further, any expressed perspectives were presented in non-essentialist terms in recognition of the diversity that exists within groups of black women. By sharing these voices, this research produced new knowledge about the ways we imagine black women as well as the ways people make choices about physical activity involvement. As a result, this method of studying, evaluating, and discussing physical activity in a select group of black women advanced more deeply contextualized analyses of physical activity involvement.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this project was to offer a deeply contextualized explanation of factors that influence post-competitive physical activity involvement among participants who are black, women, 25-45, and former Division I sprinters, hurdlers, or jumpers. In this chapter, I present three categories of experience that each illuminate a significant influencing factor or set of related factors around physical activity. These categories emerged from my analysis of four focus group interviews with a total of 17 participants. In what follows, I share participant responses around the most illuminating topics and in the context of their origin. Based on my reading of these data, the categories that emerged as factors that influence post-competitive physical activity in these women are Track and Field Familiarities, Friend and Family Networks, and Self-Presentation Concerns.

#### Track and Field Familiarities

Participants each spent a minimum of seven years sprinting, hurdling, and jumping in the sport of track and field. Keisha, the most seasoned athlete, competed for 19 years. The focus group conversations suggested that participants' experiences in the track and field arena influence their post-competitive activity. Specifically, their preferences, behaviors and activities continue to resemble those that were evident in the sport of track and field and, thus, are familiar to them. In this section, I will describe these preferences, behaviors, and activities which include vigorous physical activities,

competitive motivations, training partners, performance-focused activity environments, and recovery from burn-out. Given participants' extended engagement with the sport of track and field and the lingering effects this experience has on their current behaviors, these characteristics and behaviors represent an influence of "track and field familiarities" on post-competitive physical activity.

Vigorous Activities: Let's run some wind sprints; I don't want to jog (Keisha)

During the focus group conversations, participants described their post-competitive physical activities in great detail. When asked directly, many defined physical activity similarly to Elaine who said, "Getting your heart rate up where you feel like you're doing a little more than you would normally do." When they shared stories, however, many participants revealed that their own activities more closely resemble vigorous track and field training routines. They seem to gravitate toward these activities because the motions and sensations are familiar to them. For example, Keisha followed Elaine's definition of physical activity with a perspective that resembled comments made throughout the focus group conversations:

When I think physical activity, I immediately think intense. I don't think wanting to walk or just break a sweat. I don't think...get my heart rate up, you know, playing around on a field or something. I think run, the word training. I think intense. Intensity.

To these women, leisurely, moderate physical activity is not productive. Ryan, for instance, mentioned that physical activity should result in being "out of your comfort zone," and Flash followed up with, "Yeah. Cause I've gone rock-climbing before but I

don't necessarily consider that physical activity because it didn't cause me to break a sweat."

Ingred mentioned doing a 10-minute TV fitness routine. Rhonda responded with, "And even though it's something, I feel like it's not enough to be something so I don't even attempt. I'm like, what's that gonna do?" Throughout the focus groups, it became apparent that, while some participants choose to engage in moderate activities, more share Rhonda's perspective and prefer vigorous physical activity. As well, her experience of choosing to "do nothing" rather than participating in moderate activity was an often-cited reason for not being more active.

Jackie explained her desire to participate only in vigorous activities as "I need to feel like I did something." She went on to describe an experience in which she turned a leisurely outing with her friend into a training session:

I have a friend, our sons play Pop-Warner football and we would work out around the track. I would walk with her as a warm-up and after a while she would keep on walking and I would do intervals.

Keisha expressed an understanding of Jackie's comment by nodding "yes" and saying, "You start putting in some type of training." She and others went on to share their similar experiences. In the same conversation, in fact, Tina described how she modifies group exercise outings to fit her high-intensity needs, "I get a lot out of Zumba class because I'm dancing the dances and I'm doing them hard. And the other women, they're just [made a loose, fluid, dancing gesture] but I'm not, I'm sweating everywhere."

Many participants even expect and embrace a certain level of challenge and pain that accompanies vigorous physical activity and training (Galloway, 2007). In fact, Thunder encouraged me to pass the following message along in my writing and teaching, “I think one thing, for people who don’t usually work out, they need to know it’s gonna hurt.” In another focus group, Jackie mentioned that she embraces situations in which she can experience what she calls the “mind over matter thing.” Summer agreed and explained how she satisfies her need for mind over matter physical activity experiences:

There’s this spin class at 7 o’clock and I’m telling you, it’s beast. And when you go in there you have to have a tiny prayer. When I’m finished, if I don’t get that intense, I lose it; I don’t want to be involved in it; I don’t want to do it. I have to be able to fight to the end. You have to struggle to get somewhere. And that’s what exercise is. It’s a challenge. And it shouldn’t be about calories and burning weight. It should be about, man I can do it. I can get there, I can do it!

Given that many participants’ post-competitive physical activity behaviors differ from their stated definitions of physical activity, it is evident that they have been exposed to competing messages regarding adequate physical activity. While their definitions represent an understanding of popular public health messages--that physical activity should be moderate-- their behaviors more closely reflect an understanding, familiarity, and belief in messages likely transmitted in the competitive track and field arena – that physical activity should be high intensity, supra-maximal and “full-throttle.” Keisha explained this:

Oh I haven’t worked out in three or four months and a couple of your girlfriends or whoever will say, “Let’s go work out.” When you go out there, I go out there and I want to just run. You want to run some wind

sprints? Let's run some wind sprints. I don't want to jog. So mine comes from years of being around track and constantly seeing where people in that arena are. And constantly training and training hard. There's no gradually going to this.

The kinesiology literature addresses the influence of exertional perceptions and preferences on exercise adherence (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007). In general, there is a higher adherence rate for low-intensity or moderate-intensity physical activity than there is for high-intensity programs. For this reason, the American College of Sports Medicine and other public health agencies recommend that healthy adults exercise within a moderately-intense range (American College of Sports Medicine, 2006). Most participants in this study prefer to exceed the moderate intensity level, findings that conflict with results showing that women prefer moderate intensity physical activity over strenuous activity (King et al, 1992). These results do, however, reflect their experiences as athletes; as Coakley (1983) suggested, athlete retirees seek physical opportunities that match their training and competitions.

#### Competitive Motivations: It's practice, not exercise (Jackie)

Sports are defined as competitive physical activities<sup>6</sup> (Coakley, 2007). An athletes' success in sport therefore, is determined by measuring her skill in relation to others (Coakley, 2008). Efforts of coaches and athletes in the elite sports arena are focused on improving the skill of athletes and preparing them for success during competition (Adler & Adler, 1991). As well, the rewards athletes receive – medals,

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<sup>6</sup> From the complete definition, "Sports are institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards" (Coakley, 2007, p. 6). This is the definition often used to describe sports in the United States-- The definition may vary according to the society in which sport occurs.

letters, jackets, respect of fans and peers, trips to championships, etc.—serve as motivation for training (Adler & Adler, 1991). Participants in this study expressed an intention to remain physically active throughout their post-competitive lives. Given their familiarity with track and field in which competitiveness is the primary goal of physical activity, however, several struggle to find physical activity satisfying for its own sake. For them, competitive opportunities are more effective physical activity motivational tools than simple plans for lifelong health and longevity. For example, when I asked each participant to provide one sentence describing the factor that has been most influential to her physical activity, Isis said, “Unfortunately, just being fit for life isn’t enough for me...I just have to have a goal and I think that will help my activity.” She indicated that a lack of competitive opportunities has contributed to her inactivity.

Other participants shared a similar perspective and, therefore, train and prepare for competitive events in order to meet their activity goals. Jackie explained how triathlon training helped her to re-commit to a physical activity routine:

My daughter was born in May and I did my first triathlon in October after she was born. I was training five days a week. It was insane but it was like, I’ve got to prepare for this race. And it took all the ‘I don’t feel like doing it’ out of my mind. I couldn’t skip any of my workouts because this is what I had to do. So it was fun. That’s what makes it fun. ‘Cause still working out for the sake of working out is not necessarily fun.

For these women, thinking of their physical activity as practice for a competition increases their will to be active. Rhonda explained how her activity revolves around road races:

I'm not doing anything now, currently nothing. But I do want to train for something in March --to do a race in March. 'Cause I know if I sign up for a race then I'll be dedicated and I'll actually start working out. 'Cause that's the best type of goal I can set for myself. Basically investing some money in something like that. And I'll want to work out because I don't want to look like a fool when I run the race.

Throughout the conversations, several women spoke about competitive goals as the general purpose for their physical activity. Kami's comment illustrates this perspective:

For me, it feeds my craving for competition--like I still haven't been weaned from that. The challenge that I got from competing and training, just playing sports satisfies that for me. Doing that physical activity makes me able to still jump high and hit hard and be able to play two hours of volleyball without passing out on the court.

Kami was actually the only person who spoke about craving competition— the others seemed to crave health and wellness through physical activity. The competitions offer enough incentive for them to commit to regular physical activity routines while goals of health and wellness, alone, do not. In this way, competition is beneficial as a motivational tool but is limiting to participants who are physically active sporadically because their competitions are intermittent.

In addition to the participants who have embraced competitiveness as a characteristic of their post-competitive physical activity. Others however, tried but failed in this tactic. Isis explained:

I'd try to trick myself and think I'm running track. So I'd go through the strength conditioning and then I'd go on the track and I'm like, OK, well my body needs a track meet. I didn't understand it so it got frustrating because I had nothing to look forward to... I've been doing stuff

competitive for so long it's hard to just do it for fun. And that's why I'd like to do classes because it would be just for fun.

Instead of seeking competitive opportunities, then, Isis and others constantly search for physical activities that are 'just for fun.' The experiences and stories of these women suggest a constant negotiation between training beliefs and beliefs about physical activity as fun. In other words, they want to engage in physical activity just for fun but continue to be influenced by familiar motivations and beliefs that physical activity efforts should connect to competitions. Ryan works in an athletic department at a university and shared how she negotiates this conflict:

I still really like the weight room but I don't know how to lift non-competitively. Like when I go in there I want to be back where I was. I don't want to start with the bar or assisted squats. I want to put on plates and go because that's what I did in the weight room. So that's why I do circuit, bodyweight stuff and I don't even have the option to do more.

As demonstrated by Ryan's comment, one strategy used by participants who choose non-competitive activities is to avoid settings that resemble track and field training facilities—this extra effort is needed to offset the physical activity-as-practice feelings they have internalized. For many, tracks are “off limits” for this reason. Repeatedly, participants commented, “I hate tracks,” “I don't do tracks,” and “I won't run again.” Thunder who frequents a public gym and described physical activity in her life as “super important” provided context for these expressions, “I can't do a track because it feels too much like I need to be running fast and being timed and I shouldn't walk because it's a track.” Thunder and Ryan represent participants who choose not to use

their physical activity as practice for competitive events. Their comments however, suggest a purposeful and conscious suppression of lingering, familiar, desires to compete.

Overall, participant comments demonstrate the strong influence that years of training and engaging in physical activity for the purpose of competing well continues to have on these post-competitive athletes. Some participants continue to conceptualize their own physical activity as practice for competitions while others seek ways to engage in physical activity in the absence of competitive ends. In both cases, it is clear that participants have been exposed to competing messages regarding the purpose of physical activity –public health messages saying that physical activity should be fun and intrinsically rewarding, and track and field messages saying that physical activity is practice for competition.

When I asked one group to explain where the need to compete originates, they mentioned that they had never participated in physical activity “just for fun.” Their activity had always been tied to competitions (goals, races, games), or, as Keisha said, “something at the end of the rainbow.” Through track and field training, participants had grown to value outcome goals associated with physical activity and not the process of physical activity itself. As Jackie put it, they had become familiar with “practice” but not “exercise.” Gill, Gross, and Huddleston (1983) concluded that competition continues to be a strong motivator for physical activity participation in former athletes. Participant expressions here support their results.

“Training” Partners: “I need to be working out with someone.” (Janessa)

The team dynamic is quite strong and important in track and field, especially on the elite collegiate level. One aspect of this dynamic is the existence of training partners, athletes who train together and compete in similar events. They are often also of similar talent levels and offer consistent competitive challenges to one another. For these reasons, training partners are highly valued in the track and field arena, as they are in other elite athletic environments (Etnier, 2009). Further, the constant reliance on training partners, along with coaches and other support staff, leave post-competitive athletes with thoughts that partnership is an essential element of their physical activity programs. These women seek to include this familiar element of training in their post-competitive activity routines.

Comments by participants in these focus groups illustrate this viewpoint and suggest their continued desire to have activity partners as they engage in post-competitive physical activity. Rhonda expressed a popular perspective of the group, “When I was running with someone, I know I had someone holding me accountable and someone who would do it with me. It was a lot easier to work out.” Janessa also expressed why she would like to have an activity partner:

I think if I had someone to work out with, it would definitely help me. ‘Cause sometimes I go and I’m like, am I doing this right? I just need to get back into it. I need to be working out with someone.

Participants described how their track and field experience, based in part on team membership, encouraged them to rely on others during training and physical activity.

Janessa who is not currently motivated to work out alone, reflected on her collegiate track and field experience, “What helped me get to the weight room in college was the fact that it was a team thing and I didn’t feel it.” In another group, Rhonda shared a similar memory, “Even though you didn’t want to go to practice, everyone else was like, at least we’ll go and die together. So I think if there was at least that now, I would probably keep it up.”

Just as training partners in track are similar in terms of talent and event specialties, participants continue to seek post-competitive activity partners who have comparable knowledge about physical activity and similar goals for participation. Sophia, one of the few participants who avoid high-intensity activity, explains why she prefers her current activity partner, “I have someone, and we’re on the same level. She has actually gotten to be able to run three miles, she runs slow, and she walks up the mountain.”

Sophia’s partner was never an athlete. Other participants, however, prefer to pair with ex-athletes who share their understandings for adequate physical activity, goals for participation, and abilities to offer encouragement. Janessa explained how finding an ex-athlete partner would help her to meet her physical activity goals, “If I can get around the people that I used to be around...the former athletes. I need to be around people that kind of feel where I’m coming from in order to get myself back to where I was.” In support of Janessa’s perspective, McKenzie described her frustrating experience with a non-athlete friend:

I tried to workout with one of my non-athletic friends and it pissed me off. It pissed me off; like we almost weren't friends anymore. I'm running, I'm running and she's jogging. And she's talking – what are you talking about? Why aren't you breathing? She's talking, she's not focused...and then at the end of the workout, the last four hundred meters, I'm ready to go. It's let's go and she's like, what are you doing? So there I am racing myself looking like an idiot. And I've got a dog, I've got a pit bull, his name is Popi and he's the best—the closest thing to an ex-athlete that I could get. He would race me at the end; he knew when to push me. Like, if I start slacking off he's like come on, you're dropping your pace. But he was the best to have. You can't work out with non-athletes.

Like Janessa and McKenzie, other participants described their preferences for activity partners who understand track and field training or are at least willing and able to participate in vigorous activity. They also prefer partners who share their activity goals. Kami trains for competitive volleyball and at the time of the focus group had been looking for an adequate work out partner. She explained:

It's hard for me to find people to work out with. 'Cause if I'm in the gym and I see women that are going harder than me it's because they're training for a show or they're bodybuilding and they look gross. And I always get these people who say, 'aw let's work out together' and they don't even know how to curl!

In her focus group, Eva expressed similar difficulties finding adequate activity partners. Kami offered the following invitation to her, “You for example, if you want to work out together, I would love to because you have that work ethic and you know what it's like to go hard in the gym.” Their conversation offered a contextualization of their physical activity choices, desires, and behaviors that suggested a continued value for “training partners” and a desire to include them in their post-competitive activities. Further, they

prefer to have activity partners who are not only supportive, but also share their understanding of physical activity and track and field training.

#### Performance-Focused Activity Environment

Many Division I track and field teams are dual programs in which female and male athletes share facilities, training programs, and coaches. As described by participants, female and male athletes trained together under these circumstances and both groups were narrowly focused on preparing for competitions. In other words, women were evaluated based on their athletic performance, not their beauty or sex appeal. Given their commitment to performance, women athletes also trained with free weights as a part of the strength-enhancing routine. Upon leaving the collegiate track and field environment, however, participants experienced different physical activity settings in which women are expected to be “cute”, men feel free to “holla” and women are discouraged from invading the male space/ free-weight area in the gym. Given their familiarity with the dual-team arena of track and field, this experience was described by participants as confusing, uncomfortable and influential with regards to post-competitive physical activity.

Performance-Focused Activity Environment: It’s a show. It’s not like a workout. I want to go workout (Janessa)

Several women spoke of having post-collegiate experiences in physical activity settings that are “like a club” and where they feel pressured to be “cute” while being physically active. Within a conversation about popular gyms in the City A area, Janessa explained:

I hate going to the gym because it's not a gym to me, it's like a fashion show. You have to come in your Nike. I'm used to having a holy tee-shirt and I still go like that, when I do go. And I don't feel comfortable. 'Cause it's like, you have girls in there working out in make-up. It's a show. It's not like a workout. I want to go work out.

In another focus group, Sophia said something similar:

That's why I don't like gyms because everyone tries to holla at you—well not everyone—but a lot of guys try to holla at you. And you look bad if you're really trying to work out and you can't be cute. And now the gyms seem to be like a club.

Ryan followed Sophia's comment with, "And you must go to..." and their remaining two focus group members chimed in with "LA Fitness," confirming that they, too, had experienced the situation described by Sophia. For many, this club atmosphere or pressure to be cute is enough to discourage participants from frequenting public gyms. Sophia, for instance, limits her activity to a local park because "I can't see anyone out there trying to be cute. The people who are normally there, they're out there just working out leisurely. No one is trying to holla at you; no one cares." McKenzie also prefers to avoid the public gym and, whenever possible, lifts weights at her former university. Others in her group expressed that they would appreciate having that option. She went on to explain how she copes with the uncomfortable club environment when she does, in fact, visit the public gym:

I won't lift weights without an iPod because once I start lifting, guys see and they come over and want to help. And if I have my iPod on I can ignore you. Even though I hear you, I can still ignore you. If I don't have an iPod, I feel like I'm setting myself up for failure. You know what,

sometimes my iPod has been dead but I still put it on. It has nothing to do with music in the weight room; it's so I can be left alone so I can do what I need to do.

Just as participants expressed nostalgia for the familiar collegiate training environment where they were evaluated on performance and not their cuteness or sex appeal, they also miss the familiar collegiate environment in which they could lift free weights without feeling they were intruding upon a male domain. Like Keisha, several shared what they commonly experience in public gyms, "When I go to the gym and want to use free weights, the guys look at you like you are crazy." To avoid these crazy stares, some participants avoid the free-weight area. Jackie explained how these stares influence her physical activity:

Well I know certain times. I know between 5 and 7 o'clock there are men there doing the set. Not all the time, but I also know the times when you're going to see more of them and I tend to avoid those times.

Like Jackie, some participants are willing to adjust their schedules to avoid males who treat them like imposters in the free-weight area. Other women, however, refuse to adjust their plans. Summer represents this perspective, "I have this complex that I think I'm as good as everybody. I'll just get over there and put my butt in somebody's face and I don't even think about it."

These women remember the track and field training environment in which they were able to focus on activity without concerns of being cute or without wondering if females should lift free weights. They constantly seek similar spaces in which to continue to be active. In the cases when they have not been able to do so, they have been

innovative and resilient about developing strategies that allow them to tolerate those uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations so that they can carry on as athletes focused on their physical activity.

Track and Field Burnout: “Whew, I need a break” (Chris)

Burnout occurs when stress becomes so high and fun declines so much that athletes no longer feel that playing their sport is worth their effort (Coakley, 2007, p. 97). Several participants were familiar with burnout and experienced it while they were competing. During the focus groups, they suggested that their burnout continues to be a factor in their post-competitive physical activity. Repeatedly, this influence manifested as extended breaks away from physical activity. In other cases, breaks from activity were needed in order to recover from injuries suffered during their competitive careers.

The overwhelming majority of women in this study spoke of taking breaks away from physical activity once they stopped competing in track and field. Chris explained her feelings after being a life-long athlete and finally taking a break from it all:

In my head I was thinking, the whole time I ran at University, when I was finished, I was like, I need a break. I’ve been doing this since I was four years old. Basketball, track, soccer, gymnastics....every single sport, I played it. Baseball. So I’m like whew, I need a break. And it’s been years and I’m still on my break.

These women also described having to take breaks to regain their physical health after suffering injuries in track and field. Thunder described a popular experience, “I think why I stopped, I was burned out. I was hurt, I had suffered injuries. I didn’t do any type of physical activity for at least six months.” Ryan explained how she currently

makes decisions based on injuries that caused her to be “on ibuprofen all day every day” when she was competing:

I loved the weight room when I was in there. I was just so beat up at the end of my competitive career; I just needed to not be in there for a while. I was worried about having arthritis by the time I'm 30 and issues that I don't want to have so I just needed to stop.

Kami explained another common experience in which these former athletes participate in physical activity as a rehabilitative practice to help manage chronic injuries suffered during their competitive careers:

Had I known I would feel the way I did after running, being a jumper for so long, I don't think I would have done it. Because I can't even walk down the stairs without holding on to a rail. Or when I'm looking for a place to live, I'm going to be on the first floor or my master bedroom has to be downstairs. You saw me getting out of my car today? What was I doing? Holding on to my door to get out because my knees are that bad. When I work my legs, I usually work my hams and my quads because they support my knees. I hope and pray that I'll be able to play with my kids. Because now, at 29, I can do tons of things but there are tons of things that really, really, hurt and little things that most people can do that I can't do. So I guess, again, subconsciously, most of the stuff that I do is more of maintenance.

Researchers in the sport psychology specialization of kinesiology have described athlete burnout as an individual's inadequate coping reaction to stress (Eklund & Cresswell, 2007). In 1992, however, Jay Coakley explained athlete burnout as a social problem influenced by the culture of high-performance sport. He suggested that athletes in the elite training environment become disempowered through a constant focus on performance development and an

inadequate focus on overall social development. According to Coakley, athletes respond to this dis-empowerment by developing resentment for sports facilitators (coaches; parents for youth athletes) and seeking ways to escape the traps of their participation. Results here support the second half of Coakley's argument-- that post-competitively, these former athletes seek to find freedom from being overly-committed to sport, injured, and in constant pain. Since they conceptualize physical activity within their memories of track and field training, their extended breaks away from physical activity represent their desires to escape from those restrictions.

#### Summary: Track and Field Familiarities

When asked directly and through conversation to define physical activity, participants provided several different explanations that reflected their familiarities with the arena of track and field. Many of their post-competitive physical activity behaviors reflect the values, perspectives, and preferences they developed during their experiences as collegiate elite track and field athletes. In some cases, participants seek vigorous activities, train for competitions, prefer ex-athlete training partners, and seek environments where they may focus on performance rather than being cute or "appropriately" feminine. In other cases, they constantly attempt to participate in unfamiliar behaviors by recovering from burnout and seeking activities that are just for fun. In both instances, extended engagement in the track and field arena has influenced their post-competitive physical activity.

## Social Networks

Social networks are defined as “a collection of relationships that connect people” (Johnson, 2000, p. 207). Social networks impose constraints that limit options and provide resources that enable individuals to act in certain ways (Johnson, 2000). Participants in this study spoke of their various social networks and described how their relationships with friends, family members, and fellow professionals influence their physical activity. They also described ways that their physical activity is, in some ways, tied to their social network affiliations. Specifically, it appears that physical activity is used as a tool to build relationships between the participants and others in their social networks. As well, members of their social networks provide resources and expectations for participants’ physical activity involvement. These characteristics and behaviors represent the influence that “social networks” have on post-competitive physical activity.

### Social Networks: It’s social acceptance; it’s not just the exercising (Summer)

Findings here illustrate that post-competitive physical activity participation is influenced by and reflects participants’ inter-personal relationships. Summer explains the importance of relationship-building to her physical activity:

I feel like a lot of it is social. It’s social acceptance. It’s not just the exercising; it’s the networking, the social connections and peer relationships you meet along the way that make you want to come back for more. It’s just that sense of belonging.

Like Summer, numerous women described physical activity as a social activity, something they do in order to spend quality time with friends. Sophia explained how her physical activity cycles have all depended on friends:

When I came to City B, my best friend and I were doing those leisurely walks. She was actually gaining weight so her husband fired me and bought her a personal trainer. So we stopped working out together and I went a long time without working out because I didn't have anybody to work out with. And now I have a co-worker who goes to Stone Mountain so we'll go together. So I think it depends on who I have to work out with me because I am not going to do it by myself.

Sophia described her physical activity outings with friends as “just a way to talk.”

Others also suggested that physical activity serves as a way to hang out with friends. Elaine's comment is representative, “Me and my old roommate went to aerobics but it wasn't something I was just motivated to do; I just went.” Ryan even used her physical activity as a friendly competition with her best friend:

My best friend just bought P90X<sup>7</sup>. I told her that if she's doing 90 days of that, I'll do 90 days of my circuit and we'll see—we'll track weight loss or inches or whatever her goal is. That's my motivation now.

Rhonda shared how she transitioned from being inactive for five years to training for a half marathon because friends asked her to join them:

A friend called and she said a group of folks were gonna train for a half marathon. And I said, “I can't do that; I can't run.” But for whatever reason they were like “Come on, come on, let's do it.” And we were all in three different places. And we all trained. And every workout I was just trying, and I finished it and I felt great.

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<sup>7</sup> “P90X is an extreme home fitness training system that contains 12 sweat-inducing, muscle-pumping workout DVDs, designed to transform your body from regular to ripped in just 90 days.” (Beach Body, 2010)

Just as active friends invite participants to be active, inactive friends have a similar influence. Kami, who has maintained an active lifestyle throughout most of her post-competitive life, explained a time when she was inactive, “There have been times when I couldn’t. Like I’ve met somebody and they were lazy so it rubbed off on me for a couple of months.” Ryan who described physical activity as “very important” in her life also shared that her friendships were involved in her stint of inactivity, “I just stopped everything. I loved my job and was hanging out with my friends and I was making more money. And there was just nothing that drove me to work out.”

Janessa and Rhonda shared that their track and field training was valuable because it was fun to share that experience with teammates and friends. Sophia shared similar memories of her youth track and field experience, “Running track for so many years in high school and when I was a little girl, it was fun-- my best friends were on the team.” For these women, physical activity had been an arena in which friendships were developed and nurtured. These findings support research by Gill et al. (1983) that being a member of a team is a strong motivator for exercise participation among girls. Apparently, friendship-building through activity continues to be a strong motivator for physical activity participation among these post-competitive adults.

Social Networks: In our household, everybody’s active; it’s just a way of life

One question on the participant questionnaire was, “What role does physical activity play in your life?” Keisha responded by suggesting that physical activity is an aspect of her family values. Her answer of “It is very important to our family for a healthy life” was also similar to several other written responses. In the conversations,

Keisha explained how being a part of an active family influences her own physical activity:

For me, it's a fortunate situation that I married another person that was in the track world. We keep each other motivated. If I have a month or week or day when I don't feel like doing something, he is doing it. A lot of times we do train together or we work out together or we do a lot together but that motivation is important.

Later, she also said:

It's what I've always lived around and been around. From second grade to the collegiate world and still now in the household where everybody's active, so it's just a way of life. That's what we've always surrounded ourselves with. So that's been the most influential--just lived it; in it; around it.

In another focus group, I asked participants if their families influenced their activity. Eva responded by describing how the activity of her family positively influences her:

My dad's about to turn 50 this year and he works out. He has a little beer gut he's trying to get rid of but he's actually just realized that he needs to be more physically active too. So that's just a part of our life. We just motivate each other.

In addition to being surrounded by family members who are active, participants are also directly involved in the process of developing a value of physical activity within their social networks. In response to the questionnaire item regarding the purpose of physical activity, for example, Elaine wrote, "I believe it is important, so I instill it into my children's lives with different activities for them." During the focused conversation,

Elaine explained how she accomplished this goal and how it influenced her own physical activity:

My kids are into sports and stuff so I coached their basketball team last year. And I ran the sprints, wind sprints with them. And it was fun because it was something I wanted them to do and I wanted to get them into it. I kind of want them to see, I don't want them to sit home and just play Wii all day long. I want them to realize these are good activities, get into them. So we did volleyball. I learned volleyball while Daughter learned and that was fun to me. I learned it while she was learning and I was doing the physical activities that I normally didn't do but I was still doing them because it was fun to be with them at that time.

Comments made in the conversations indicated that other parents felt similarly. As a closing question in Tina's group, I asked, "What's the one thing that influences your post-competitive physical activity?" After listening to responses from her focus group members, she responded:

For me it's setting an example for Daughter because I don't want her to be an obese child sitting here watching TV, on the computer. I want her to be active. By being so active I want to expose her to as many things as I can.

#### Summary: Social Networks

Numerous activities are used to develop inter-personal relationships between members of social networks. Findings here suggest that, in some cases, physical activity engagement is a much a function of social interaction as it is about physical conditioning. In a 2009 study by Harley and colleagues (Harley, Heaney, et al., 2009), researchers found that, in their sample of active African American women, participants used physical

activity as a way to spend time together. Results here are similar. Participants use physical activity as a relationship-building activity in their various social networks.

### Self-Presentation Concerns

Inclusion criteria for this study required that all participants were black, female, former track and field sprinters, hurdlers, or jumpers, and in the 24-45 age group. Throughout the focus group conversations, they also revealed that they are mothers, partners, professionals, and role models. As they embody these identities and roles, they want to present themselves as capable, attractive, and prepared. In some cases, participants engage in physical activity because it helps them achieve bodies or attitudes that are well-accepted and appreciated by others. In other cases, participants avoid physical activity because it would result in hairstyles that interfere with the images they wish to portray or because it is not necessary to achieve their goal body aesthetic. Overall, findings here suggest that participants are aware that their presentation of self influences how others evaluate their attractiveness and abilities and thus, their level of social acceptance. Physical activity experiences relating to these categories suggest that “self-presentation concerns” influence post-competitive physical activity.

### Body Capital

Physical appearance is often used to judge one’s intelligence, economic status, work ethic, morality, health, and attractiveness (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Kim & Willis, 2007; Murray, 2005). This is especially true for women given that valuations of self-worth depend heavily on their physical attractiveness (Collins, 2000). Under

this system, certain body aesthetics are considered to be valuable, tradable assets (Frew & McGillivray, 2005). The “worth” of these aesthetics is culturally determined and inconsistent across social groups -- authors have used the term “physical capital” to describe this idea that certain “looks” are valued culturally and thus afford benefits to the owner (Frew & McGillivray, 2005). Findings here suggest that participants do view their bodies as capital (Body Capital) and may or may not engage in physical activity as a method for developing a look that affords them social benefits.

“Track” Body: “When you’re walking around and you run track and it looks like you run track, you get good compliments” (Thunder)

When participants were competitive athletes, their training resulted in what several described as “track bodies.” During the focus groups, they mentioned muscular quads, butts, abs, guns, and calves as being characteristic of this track body. “Tight” and “ripped” were also used to describe the track body. While training for track and field, participants grew accustomed to the look and feel of these bodies. As McKenzie said, “Most track athletes have been doing it long before you got to college. So you’re used to walking, just walking from the parking lot to the store on a ripped body.” Her comment was in the context of no longer having her former “ripped” body and injuries that came as a result of her decreased strength. She said, “I had all kinds of knee issues that first year...that’s what drove me to start working out again.”

Following her last competition, Thunder took a six-month break from being physically active. Then, like McKenzie, she adopted a routine designed to regain her track body—she wanted to rebuild the musculature she had lost. She explained:

After I got skinny, I didn't look the way I wanted to look. So that's kind of what motivated me to get back out there and work out. 'Cause when you're walking around and you run track and it looks like you run track, you get good compliments. So that's motivated me to get back and get back in shape—physically how I look.

Her focus group members were all in agreement with her statement. One of them, Ryan, described the pressure she feels to look like she did when she ran track and how her physical activity is influenced by these feelings:

I found out that my boyfriend and I are going to St. Thomas. There are too many pictures out there of me in my [track] uniform that was basically a swimsuit that I can't take pictures in a swimsuit right now. So I started working out because of that.

These comments by Ryan, McKenzie and Thunder illustrate the nostalgia that some women in this study have with regards to their track bodies. Not only did they express a desire to return to a body that was comfortable and familiar, they also spoke of their goals to re-present themselves as track and field athletes. As Stephan and Bilard (2003) wrote, elite athletes' ideas about body satisfaction are based on an idealization of the performing body; comments by these women support their findings. Comments here also demonstrate participants' desires to receive the social benefits (compliments) that result from looking like track athletes.

#### “Thick” Body: I need to get back in my jeans

Another group of women fondly remember their track bodies but do not participate in physical activity with goals of regaining their track bodies. These participants have accepted the post-competitive changes to their bodies which they describe as “thick.”

This means they are more curvaceous than they were when they were competing but they desire to remain toned with flat stomachs. Janessa, offered an example:

I was like hella skinny in college but now I have a butt and I'm proud-- I love my butt. My thing is my stomach. I knew I would gain weight but I didn't know where and it's in my mid-section. That kills me because, all them medicine ball drills, where are they now? I could eat anything and still have those abs. But that's the thing that makes me self-conscious-- I didn't have to suck my stomach in before and now I feel myself pulling my shirt down and I'm uncomfortable with that.

Eva made a comment that is also representative. She said, "I've always been a thick girl. I just always try to maintain. I guess I've embraced it now. That's it, that's how it's going to be so if it's not sloppy...I'm just trying to control" These women structure their physical activity routines to help achieve these goals of remaining toned. They are not, however, preoccupied with achieving a certain weight. Eva explained:

I don't even have a scale. I don't step on a scale. I don't care how much I weigh. I just want to make sure I can fit my clothes still and that's kind of what I put it on. If I got to sit here and start buying all these bigger clothes and I can't fit what's in my closet, then we have a problem. I'm trying to maintain and I don't care how much I weigh as long as I look good in my clothes.

In Eva's group, McKenzie added support for this perspective:

I'm cyclic. I'll work out hard three months, and it takes about four months for me to get back to where I feel I'm uncomfortable again. And then it'll just get so out of hand where I can't fit jeans and bras and I'm like OK. And then I'll go back again. So that's my regular---that's what I consider consistent but it's inconsistent. I'm consistently inconsistent.

Comments here suggest that participants are happy with thick bodies and use physical activity to enhance/maintain their muscle tone and flat stomachs. These comments do not reflect a concern with achieving a particular weight. Rather, comments like these, made across the focus groups, reflect what researchers have identified as “flexible beauty standards” in the African-American community; standards which demonstrate a value for diverse body sizes (Gillespie, 1993; Kumanyika et al., 1993). These women all use physical activity as a factor in achieving this look and suggest that this look affords them social rewards, namely compliments from women and men.

Gendered Body: “As a female there’s this thing that I have to meet...” (Ingred)

Some women in this study also expressed an awareness of gendered expectations for their physical appearance. They also shared that their physical activity practices are, in part, influenced by these expectations. Ingred, for instance, described wanting to “be physically interesting” to her husband who once asked her, “Why is it so flat in the back?” As a result, she made plans to join the cardio-sculpting class in her worksite fitness program. She explained, “As a female there’s this thing that I have to meet and even though I don’t have any issues about my weight, there’s still an expectation that I stay toned.” In another group, Kami explained her experience with gendered expectations about her body’s appearance:

I’ve never had an issue with myself. But when I date men, like the guy that I date right now, for him to know that I work out as hard as I do, it kind of bugs him because I’m already muscular. He says, “If you just maintain that Kami, OK, that’s cool. But we don’t need you getting any bigger.” So it’s an issue for other people. I love my body and I like the way it looks. But I do have insecurities.

Kami explained how these expectations influence her physical activity:

When I'm with my significant other, he loves my body but I know that he doesn't want me to get any bigger. And that's a possibility that if I don't slow down, then yeah, I'm going to get bigger.

McKenzie who identifies ethnically as half Puerto Rican and half Black explained her experience as a Latin dancer, a sport in which women are judged based on their femininity:

After I graduated, I was like OK I can soften up a little bit for dancing. But then when I softened up, I softened up everywhere. And so now those dresses that used to be so flattering on me, they're not so flattering when you've kind of got a little line in your back where your bra is 'cause you're folding up under. So then I'm like, I can't soften up. It's just, I had to switch teams 'cause the people I would dance with, they didn't get it; they just wanted me to be small. Basically they wanted me to stop eating, stop working out and show up so I could dance. So I just switched to another team where the girls were a little thicker. Now I'm OK. I don't really, I'll do arms but I'll only do bench press.

These stories by Kami, McKenzie, and Ingrid suggest that participants receive messages regarding gendered expectations for their bodies' appearances. Their comments also suggest that they consider these expectations and design their physical activity routines as a way to gain social acceptance from partners, family members and dance judges.

Healthy Body: "Physical activity? Whatever! I'm healthy. I eat right." (Keisha)

An additional group of participants were neither concerned with representing themselves as athletes/athletic nor were they influenced to be physically active as a method of maintaining a certain amount of muscle tone. By contrast, these women were

mainly concerned with looking “healthy.” Since women who expressed this perspective did not require physical activity in order to achieve this healthy look, and since they perceived physical activity as a body-altering activity, they did not feel the need to engage in physical activity. Keisha explained:

I think for a lot of women that have worked out and trained, during those college years it was just...you want your jeans to fit a little different. You want some guns and your arms look cute in the summertime when you put on a bathing suit. And now I’m like, whatever! I’m healthy. I eat right.

Elaine said something similar when explaining her inactivity, “I figure, if I’m not somewhere looking too unhealthy and flabby, I might be OK for a bit.”

In another focus group, I asked women to explain factors that, on a daily basis, influence their physical activity choices. In response, Ingrid said:

Just wanting to be in shape for my kids and then just still be physically interesting to my husband. It’s not really for me I don’t think. I don’t feel the need to work out; I’m not trying to lose weight.

Rhonda described using this same logic during the five year break from physical activity she took after competing. When she received invitations to join jogging groups, she declined. With us, she reflected on her thoughts during those times, “It’s no point. I’m not fat. I’m not overweight. I don’t want to look a certain way so what for? I just didn’t see the point.” Rhonda was clear that aesthetic goals are not tied to her motivations to be physically active. She said, “I do like the way my clothes fit me when I’m working out” but clarified that her goal for physical activity is to prepare for endurance races, not to achieve a certain body aesthetic. Jackie made a very similar comment.

When explaining why physical activity is a part of her regular daily routine, Thunder said, “With me, it’s the physical thing first, that I want to look good.” Across the groups, others echoed her perspective. For example, McKenzie said, “The reason I’m working out anyway is just so that I look good.” Through their stories, participants illustrate that they each want to improve or maintain their body capital by having bodies that send positive messages and afford them social acceptance and social privileges. This look of this body varies from individual to individual in this study sample. As well, the role that physical activity plays in achieving the desired look also varies. Overall, findings show participants’ awareness that social acceptance is in part, based on the appearance of their bodies and in different ways, they use physical activity as a means to gain social benefits.

### The Politics of Hair

Hair is a common topic of conversation in communities of black females in the U.S. In fact, bell hooks calls it our “obsession” (hooks, 2005, p. 63). As an example, Keisha made an observance based on a conversation she had upon arrival at her focus group:

Our first conversation when we came in here was, “did you get your hair cut again?” I mean, just in general, we look at each other when we first see each other and it’s like, “did you let your hair grow long?” or “ooh, it looks healthy.”

Hair and physical activity, is a topic that has recently gained attention in the popular media and public health/kinesiology literature (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1995; Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Malpede et al., 2007). The

first three focus groups raised the topic of hair and physical activity without my prompting. Based on those discussions, I asked the fourth group to provide their input on the subject. When I said, “Every other group has mentioned hair...” Eva said, “I was going to mention that. I know exactly where’s she’s going.” Though the fourth group reached the end of their focus group conversation without discussing hair as an influence on physical activity, like other groups, they agreed that it is actually an issue deserving of attention. This consistency across groups represents agreement with the literature that hair is an influential physical activity concern for black female communities (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1995; Brown, 2009; Harley, Odoms-Young, et al., 2009; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003; Malpede et al., 2007).

The Politics of Hair: “We don’t want to sweat our hair out” (Eva)

Keisha is a former Division I coach of track and field and added perspective regarding males’ influence on the prominence of expressed preferences relating to black women’s hair, especially in the competitive track and field environment:

Coaching at University, I heard more of those guys harder on those young girls in that arena saying, “I am tired of your hair looking like the wind blowing in it.” And it was all the time, “Why don’t you go somewhere and comb your head?”

She then explained how similar comments from her husband affect her current decisions about physical activity:

So it’s like, do you want me to work out? Do you want me to have a flat stomach? Do you want me to have quads? Do you want me to have a booty? Or do you want me to have nice hair constantly?

Like Keisha, other women feel the need to choose between being physically active and maintaining neat hairstyles. Eva concluded that black women with perms “don’t want to sweat our hair out” by describing a decision she made for a recent event:

CIAA, I’ve never actually been. This year was my first year trying to go. So I was like, OK, I want to make sure I look cute; it’s supposed to be a big thing in City A. So I got my perm, got my hair done and I was like, oh yeah, I won’t be going to the gym this week.

These stories suggest that women must negotiate between having neat hairstyles and engaging in physical activity; some women do not feel they can accomplish both a neat hairstyle and regular physical activity. Other participants, however, have developed techniques that allow them to manage both. The most effective method seems to be choosing hair styles that hold up under sweaty conditions. Flash explained, “I was thinking about getting my hair pressed recently but if I do I won’t be able to work out. So that’s why I haven’t gotten it straightened.” As she got more involved with triathlon training, Jackie actually cut her hair into a short, natural style. She explained, “Part of the reason I cut it all off was I knew I’ll be working out. I honestly don’t like having to do hair.” Summer also shared a common technique:

I’m natural and so if I gotta go somewhere, my hair’s like whick and as soon as moisture hits, whick. And so now I have certain remedies. I’ll cornrow it out and wear it crinkly but if I didn’t have those techniques, Honey, I don’t know if I would be working out as much.

Several participants shared that their hairstyle decisions are related to concerns of maintaining a professional appearance at work. Janessa mentioned that her challenges with physical activity/ hair have changed since her days as a college student:

I feel that I have more to think about now. I have to think about being presentable at work. And so if I work out the night before and I sweat, I sweat a lot, and that's the first place I sweat is in my hair. So if I wrap it, it's going to look horrible.

Some women wear natural hairstyles to remedy this situation, Jackie explained her physical activity/ work situation after having adopted a natural hair-do:

I could work out in the mornings now and don't have to worry about my hair. I don't have to do my hair. I could get in there, swim, go home, condition and go. Done. And it's so much easier 'cause you still have to look nice.

These conversations take the issue of hair and physical activity choices beyond what is currently available in the kinesiology literature. These comments certainly reflect what is known—that hair is a significant issue in the decisions black women make about their physical activity. These comments also, however, reflect the social considerations and implications that inform their decisions. As demonstrated, these hair issues are not simply vanity-related; they exist within concerns of self-presentation and concerns about how others will evaluate their attractiveness and professionalism. These findings connect the study of physical activity to other works by black feminist and womanists who have expressed the social and political relevance of black women's hair (Bailey, 2008; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1993).

### Attitude Manipulations/ Negotiations

As an opening question to the focus groups, I asked participants to describe what physical activity means to them. Many responded similarly to Tina who said, “I think about stress relief.” Specifically, several spoke of using physical activity to relieve stress from work. Isis gave one example:

At different points I thought I would start working out again. But it wasn't until I went back to school and I needed some sort of stress reliever. And I would do it, actually it wasn't every day and it wasn't every week. It was after that test. And once I got the hang of school, the running and working out stopped. And then once I came into my profession I started working out again. And then it would stop.

Rather than simply speaking of stress-relief from a personal health standpoint, however, most of these women spoke about using physical activity to release tension so that they could better interact with others in their lives. Jackie offered an example of how physical activity helps her recover from the stress of being a wife and mother so that she can better meet the demands of these roles:

It's all about me just getting away. I have two [children] and they're young. They're three, she's almost three and I have an almost seven year-old. And there's always something, people wanting something from you. What are we going to eat? I don't know! You know? So that is literally the only time when I'm doing something for me. Literally the only time in my life when I'm absolutely doing something for me that's OK. I just spend as much time I can, which is why I like swimming so much. It's just silence; it's no music, no people, just you in your lane, and you're by yourself.

Jackie was actually the only mother who expressed using physical activity as a temporary escape from the hectic pace of her family life but, like her, several participants described

using physical activity to enhance their moods. Eva who wrote that physical activity plays a “major” role in her life said, “I literally feel sick if I don’t at least try to do something. I’m irritable when I’m not working out.” In her group, McKenzie said, “And when I look at those cycles when I’m not working out I tend to have the most problems... I’m a bitch.” Summer said that she feels like a zombie when she goes a week without being physically active and Tina followed with:

What I notice about myself is, when I work out, I’m happier. I notice a change when I work out. If I don’t work out I’m like a monster. I don’t know if it’s because I have so much energy that I need to release but I’m happy when I work out.

Like Jackie, Eva, and Tina, others use physical activity as an emotional release so they may effectively move about the rest of their lives. By balancing the stress in their lives with physical activity, they feel they have more successful interactions with others as a result. Summer described:

For me, the stress at work makes me want to work out. I have those days where I’m thinking I’m gonna hit the gym for about two hours. Seriously, I’m getting on the phone or I’m dealing with crises or something, I’m going to hit the gym for about two hours. That increases the will for me to workout because I’m just so stressed and I know I have to get myself up and get back in the office the next day.

Black American women are often stereotyped as being super-women care-givers of others (Collins, 2000). They are also often stereotyped as being angry and sassy (Millner, Burt-Murray, & Miller, 2004). Participants have discovered that, for them, the two stereotypical roles are related and, in their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities, they

sometimes experience stress. As a result of using physical activity to cope with this stress, their moods are more favorable and their attitudes are more attractive to others. Thus, they are effectively able to fulfill their multiple roles.

#### Summary: Self-Presentation Concerns

Considerations of body, hair, and attitude presentations influence these women's post-competitive physical activity. In many cases these considerations are new and different from when participants were collegiate athletes. For instance, participants' concerns about hair are now connected to thoughts about being professional and presentable at work; considerations that were not part of their lives as student-athletes. As an example, Eva who now modifies her work out schedule according to hairstyle needs said, "The crazy thing is, when I was running, I didn't care." These stories also demonstrate that their body, hair, and attitude concerns are based, in part, on gaining social acceptance and securing social benefits. As athletes, their elite performances resulted in social benefits. As adults, they must behave and perform in ways that reflect their roles as athletes, partners, and professionals. Their physical activity behaviors, in part, represent projects in achieving these performances.

#### Summary: Findings

Participants in this study display many levels of post-competitive physical activity involvement. They also describe several factors that influence their various physical activity decisions. Their experiences in the track and field arena continue to influence their physical activity as participants seek activities and settings that resemble the

familiar track and field training environment. Social networks influence activity-- participants use physical activity as a social activity as well as participating as a relationship-building activity. Finally, self-presentation concerns influence physical activity in this select group of women; they make decisions about physical activity behaviors and routines based on goals of representing themselves well and gaining social acceptance of those in their various social groups.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This study was designed to identify and explain factors that influence physical activity in a group of black, women, former Division I elite track and field sprinters, hurdlers, and jumpers in the 25-45 age group. Several researchers have studied facilitators and barriers to black women's physical activity (Adams-Campbell et al., 2000; Banks-Wallace, 2000; Eyler et al., 1998; Harley, Buckworth, et al., 2009). The perspectives of black women who are former Division I elite track and field athletes, however, have not been represented in the literature. In fact, one research team lead by Amy Harley, specifically restricted women who "had participated in varsity-level college or professional athletics" from their study of active African American women (Harley, Katz, et al., 2009, p. 675). I contacted Dr. Harley to gain clarification about why her team excluded former athletes from their study. She responded with the following:

I have to apologize that I probably don't have much insight for you beyond the following: Participating in sports at the varsity college or professional level is somewhat akin to being an elite athlete rather than an average woman trying to get some exercise. There are likely physical and mental differences due to the intense training as well as coaches and teammates for social network functions and an infrastructure for access and set schedule for regular practices. Many (most?) average women do not have these things in place to facilitate their PA regimens.

Dr. Harley's response indicates that black women who are former elite athletes have been excluded from physical activity research regarding black women. Her response also demonstrates an assumption that athletic participation facilitates being active later in life. Dr. Harley's response was unique given that she acknowledged the importance that involvement in elite athletics likely has on the physical activity behaviors of adult black women. Most other inquiries in this area have treated race and gender as independent variables, essentializing constructions of black women in the process.

The current study adds to the literature by sharing the perspectives of black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes. This fills a void in the physical activity research in that it focuses, in part, on the influence that participation in elite athletics has on post-competitive physical activity. This study is also unique in that a womanist/ intersectionality approach was utilized in order to acknowledge ways that race, gender, athletic involvement, and other social/cultural constructs influence participants' physical activity behaviors. By acknowledging that participants are not only black and women but also former athletes, partners, workers, and parents, I have attempted to express how multiple factors, originating from different life circumstances, combine to influence physical activity in this unique group. As a result of this approach to the study of physical activity, three categories of factors that contribute to post-competitive physical activity behaviors were identified—track and field familiarities, social networks, and self-presentation concerns. In what follows, I move from the identification and description of these factors to a discussion of themes-- my interpretation of those factors. In doing so, I suggest that these three categories of findings are not only related to one-

another but they are also related to social dynamics broader than physical activity. As well, I suggest possible implications these findings may have in the field of kinesiology. My conceptualization and interpretation of these findings and description of themes are informed by my extensive study in this area, professional experience, and academic background<sup>8</sup>. In what follows, I describe these themes as The Mis-Education of the Athlete, Contours of Adult Lives, and Factors of Difference.

### The Mis-Education of the Athlete

As a former athlete, when I go through my spurts of being dedicated and being off, during my off-times which are a lot longer than my on- times, I feel really guilty because I'm a former athlete and I should know better.  
(Ingred)

In 1933, Carter G. Woodson wrote a novel titled *The mis-education of the Negro*. In that novel, he criticized the American education system for presenting history that neglected the presence and contributions of the Negro in American history. He also critiqued a mis-representation of Negroes when they did appear in the history books and suggested that the greatest injustice was that inaccurate messages would be internalized by Negroes and passed on by them to others. Findings here suggest that, as elite athletes, some participants may have experienced a similar mis-education with regards to health-related physical activity.

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<sup>8</sup> See Mason (2002) and Charmaz and Henwood (2008) for more detailed descriptions of making arguments from qualitative data.

These participants are committed to a lifetime of physical activity. They understand physical activity as a healthy behavior and even suggest a commitment to passing this value along to others in their social networks. As evidenced by Ingrid's comment, some feel personally responsible and ashamed for not being active enough, especially given their status as former Division I track and field athletes. Based on the focus group conversations for this study, however, these elite collegiate athletes were, in some ways, mis-educated with regards to sustainable, post-competitive, health-related physical activity. The difficulties many experience with maintaining the physical activity levels they desire, therefore, are not merely personal failures but also failures of their elite athletics training to prepare them for post-competitive, health-related physical activity. Specifically, it appears that elite athletics training provided lessons for these women that compete with and override other knowledge they hold regarding recommendations for adult physical activity.

In their investigation of physical activity facilitators, Zielinski and colleagues (2006) mentioned that training for athletics does not resemble physical activity for health or leisure. They determined that the intensity of training differs from the intensity of most physical activity programs; the focus of competition in training is not regularly found in physical fitness for life programs; and sport-specific skills are not necessarily those needed for lifelong physical activity. In what follows, I present findings that support their assertions. Further, these data suggests that athletes were mis-educated and taught to believe in the benefits of training activities without adequate education on the benefits of regular, moderate physical activity.

As elite collegiate athletes, participants were involved in highly-specialized training. As a result, they were encouraged to only participate in physical activities that would result in a positive training effect. In the case of sprinters, jumpers, and hurdlers, these activities included supra-maximal running, power lifting, and plyometric training (Carr, 1991). Each of these activities is associated with a high rate of injury (King et al., 2006) and, as Chepyator-Thomson et al. (2007) suggested, are too vigorous for most adults to continue over the lifespan. Relatedly, participants were discouraged from participating in activities that are potentially sustainable over the lifespan. Ryan's quote offers an example:

Track was really rigid so you didn't go ice skating because you didn't want to twist your ankle. You didn't go rock climbing because you didn't want to be exhausted for practice. I swam for a while when I stopped running just 'cause swimming is exhausting so Coach always told us to stay out the water; don't come to the track with dead legs.

Others mentioned never having been taught to play tennis or even how to follow along in a dance aerobics class. As elite athletes, women were expected to spend great amounts of time and energy developing skills necessary to compete in track and field but they did not receive the same encouragement relating to activities that are potentially sustainable for life.

Many participants expressed that their first attempts at post-competitive physical activity involved vigorous running and weight-lifting, activities that constituted their track and field training programs. Though many expressed being burned out from track, these were activities thought to be most accessible because they were familiar to them.

They also believed vigorous running was a more beneficial activity than other physical activity options. As a result of this limited education, post-competitively many attempted to continue running and lifting weights just as they did when training. Sophia gave an example:

When I finally did go back to working out I tried to run 150s and that didn't go to well. So then I started walking and that went a little better when I was walking with my best friend but that was gossip walking-- like I don't know if we were really burning calories. But that was just a way to talk and it was really leisurely. So when I started gaining weight, I guess I started trying to run again but I hate it; I hate it with a passion.

Like Sophia, many of these participants did not/do not enjoy running. As a result of their highly-specialized training, however, some had limited transferable physical activity skills and were unprepared to participate in alternative activities. As a result, several women are infrequent participants—participating just long enough to achieve short-term results-- but are not frequently or consistently active because they do not enjoy running. For this same reason, others like Sophia, are relatively inactive.

Several participants spoke of using competition as motivation for post-competitive physical activity. For so long, their physical activity was track and field training, designed specifically to result in elite performance during competition. In their sports environment, non-competitive physical activity was rarely introduced through formal, official conversations by coaches or other authority figures. Athletes, therefore, were not taught to value health-related physical activity. Rather, they were taught to value physical activity/training for its performance and competitive benefits. In this setting, rewards for physical activity came in the form of trophies, medals, and social

recognition (Adler & Adler, 1991); health markers were not celebrated. Research by Theberge (2007) suggests that this type of elite training environment and reward system creates a culture of risk in which athletes grow to define “health” as an ability to compete. Under these circumstances, athletes—as well as coaches, administrators, and sports-medicine personnel—do not necessarily value or promote physical activity for its potential to lower risk for disease. The education involved in the culture of risk, served as mis-education for athletes who should have been taught to engage in physical activity for reasons that transcend competitive reward.

#### Summary and Relevance for Kinesiology: The Mis-Education of the Athlete

Comments by some participants in this study suggest that they continue to be influenced by the elite athletics culture and have not internalized a value for health-related physical activity, especially for young adults. As a result, some have postponed their plans for regularly engaging in physical activity. Sophia’s comment is representative “I’m thinking cholesterol and stuff. I’m thinking, all the things that now you need to be concerned with going into thirty. I’m thinking, well I ran for eighteen years; I have a year to work on it.” Findings here illuminate areas that kinesiologists should consider. In particular, results show that participation in sport does not necessarily result in preparation for lifetime physical activity. In fact, results here suggest that many messages promoted in the athletic environment produce the opposite effect, in some cases overriding health-related messages received from outside of the athletics environment. Kinesiologists should further study the impact of sport participation on lifetime physical

activity and should work to educate coaches about building value for health-related physical activity in the elite athletics environment.

Findings here also illuminate the importance of studying and promoting global benefits of physical activity. As a goal, the message of health does not seem to resonate with the majority of these participants. As well, they seem disconnected from messages regarding the benefits of moderate physical activities. Several participants mentioned that they feel “special” because they are/were athletes. Perhaps this means they have internalized a belief that public health messages, developed for “average” people do not apply to them as former elite sportswomen. Perhaps more messages should be developed – with the same health-related goals in mind-- that better represent this target audience and their perceptions of themselves as elite sportswomen.

#### Contours of Adult Lives

It [training] was such a big priority in college. And you get out and the next step is now you've got to find a job. So your priorities change. I didn't have free time, and now I have free time. Then you start finding other things to do to fill your time up. You're used to having everything slotted. You have to go to school; you have to go to meets; you have to go to the dining hall. Everything was scheduled. And you were accountable because your roommates or your coach would call you; your parents still cared. Then afterwards, you were like, go do your thing for your health? I have grown selfish of my time as far as working out and I wanted to explore other things. (Chris)

Current literature regarding physical activity and black women is heavily focused on adolescent girls or women over the age of 45. Given that physical activity adherence rates vary across age categories (King et al., 1992), there is a need to further investigate

experiences of adult women, including those in the 25-45 age group. This study is one step in that direction and comments throughout these focus groups indicate that participants' experiences with physical activity are influenced by their circumstances and responsibilities at various stages of life. Here, I've described these circumstances as "contours of adult lives".

As elite collegiate track and field athletes, participants were required to dedicate substantial amounts of time to their sport. As Keisha said, "When you think back to being an athlete in college, your every move revolved around practice." Post-collegiately, several women describe feeling a sense of freedom from the confines of training and choose to use their free time in pursuits other than physical activity. Ingrid's comment describes this well:

I think what influences black women maybe to not do physical activity is just that they get on with their life...that their life can begin. You're so used to competing and stuff and now you just make other priorities, other things you wanted to do that you didn't have the free time to do. Now you have the chance, the time to just do other things with your life.

This example shows that, for some, physical activity is viewed as a competing priority. Because physical activity was not balanced with other aspects of life when they were training, these women do not understand it as an activity that can be a small component of life – they only know it as a something that necessarily replaces fun, fulfilling, or otherwise important activities. Within their adult lives, some women are not willing to continue making these significant sacrifices in order to be physically active. Several participants mentioned that physical activity is, simply, not a priority during this

life stage. Ryan said, “Working out has gone from top priority to somewhere on the list, sometimes...my job is my first priority and then my personal life and enjoying myself and having that freedom and doing fun stuff.”

Ever-changing family dynamics also influence how, when, and if participants adopt and continue with physical activities. Several group members mentioned that their physical activities changed concurrently with changes in their family lives. Specifically, seven women in the study were mothers who each spoke about making changes in their physical activity according to their children. McKenzie explained how she changed her behavior after giving birth:

I didn't have any of these issues until after I had my baby. That's the first time I became really inactive. Before I had her I was playing soccer on Tuesdays, softball on Thursdays, running three days a week training for a marathon, volunteering with the kids; I was always doing something active. Now, it's too many factors that have to come into play in order to be able to get it done.

Many participants described cyclical patterns of physical activity. The purpose of these cycles varied, some according to competition schedules and others according to weight-loss goals. Several participants in this study also mentioned that their cyclical patterns of physical activity reflect their life circumstances including changes in jobs, school, and family. Keisha gave an example. Her child is now a teenager-- she was more active when he was younger and will be more active when he is older. In this current life stage, however, her physical activity is inconsistent:

Mine is strictly based off Son's schedule. If he has a lot going on and I can't fit it in, I just don't. But if we get up in the morning and I have time

to do it before we go out the door, I will. But if I don't, we leave. For now and probably the next few years until he hits high school, if we get out of school and he has a lot of stuff to get done, I'm just going with him. But if there's a day when he doesn't have so much, then I'll go and get something in.

Flash also gave an example of how their physical activity changed along with life stages:

When I first graduated in June, I had an internship with a company that had a track. I worked out in the gym for a month or two; I worked out that whole summer. Then I moved to City C which is where I did that job and just got busy and everything. So I think working took from my not being able to work out. So I didn't work out for almost a year. I was playing basketball here and there—I was an intern so I couldn't afford a gym membership so I played basketball in the company's basketball league. And then I went to grad school and I tried to start working out again. Then I got another job again and I got busy again and I stopped working out for months at a time. So for me the on and off has definitely been work related. And now I'm working out again but it's still only two times a week because of work, I'm too tired to try to go and try to do it every day or four or five times a week.

These women demonstrate pattern of cycling on and off of physical activity depending on the changing circumstances of their lives. Certain life stages appear to be more accommodating to physical activity and, as a result, participants' levels of physical activity involvement fluctuate.

There are numerous analyses suggesting that black women are overwhelmed by family and community responsibilities which prevent them from self-serving activities including physical activity (Ainsworth et al., 2003; Banks-Wallace, 2000a; Eyler et al., 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001; Malpede et al., 2007; Sharpe et al., 2008). One quote in particular struck me as powerful and descriptive of this perspective. I shared it

with participants and asked them to respond to it. In *Sisters of the Yam, Black Women and Self Recovery*, bell hooks wrote, “Black women’s neglect of our bodies is representative of the general lack of care for ourselves (hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: black women an self-recovery*, 1993, p. 66).” I read the quote to participants, provided context to the quote, and asked for their reactions. Comments of several participants illustrate something different from hooks’ analysis—yes, they lead busy lives but they are not too overwhelmed with family or community responsibilities to be physically active. Further, they do not identify inactivity as demonstrative of a lack of self-care. In fact, they may neglect to be physically active in favor of caring for themselves in other ways. Chris’s statement explained this well, “I think I could make time [for physical activity]. There’s no like, oh my child or work or anything. I think I could make time, I just haven’t.”

Sophia shares a similar perspective:

For me, peace of mind is probably number one. And because working out is just something I hate doing, it doesn’t give me peace of mind. So I’ll crochet, I’ll read a book, I’ll do stuff for friends, I’ll drink wine. I will do whatever makes me happy and everything else that doesn’t make me happy really goes to the back burner.

#### Summary and Relevance for Kinesiology: Contours of Adult Lives

As post-collegiate adult members of the world, participants find themselves in new roles with new responsibilities and new choices. These include their changing roles as family members, friends, and workers. Importantly, this also includes new roles as non-collegiate athletes for whom physical activity was once a forced priority that resulted in missed opportunities for fun, friends, and other rewarding experiences. These findings

can help kinesiologists interested in providing physical activity recommendations for former athletes. They have a unique perspective regarding the commitment required for physical activity recommendations. They may not truly understand and believe that physical activity can occupy thirty minutes of their lives each day. Their experiences as elite athletes taught them that physical activity and physical conditioning required a commitment of several hours each day and, necessarily requires sacrificing other important experiences. For these participants who are unwilling to maintain post-competitive physical activity, lifestyle physical activity may resonate more with their personal goals. More research is needed concerning the benefits of constant, moderate and low-intensity activities. Also, based on the stories of the most active of these participants, pre-planning of activity seems to be quite important for fitting activity into their lives. This requires cooperation from family members and flexible work circumstances. In all, these findings demonstrate the importance of recognizing life stages (past and present) in the decisions women make regarding their physical activity. While each woman faces different circumstances in adulthood, it is clear that these contours of their lives influence post-competitive physical activity.

#### Factors of Difference

As one of my interview questions, I asked participants, “Are there examples in your own experiences of challenges to your physical activity that were based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, family, values, or general social constraints?” In response, several women spoke of gendered expectations that influence their physical

activity. For example, Jackie and Keisha said they avoid the free-weight area at their gyms because the men “look at you like you are crazy.” Thunder, however, said, “I’m completely comfortable in the gym at whatever time. I’ll do squats in front of a bunch of guys. I don’t care, I’m focused.” Kami said her grandmother and partner think she is too muscular and, therefore, not feminine enough. Flash, however said, “We want to look like we did when we were running” and, therefore, designs her workouts to build muscle. Keisha said “As a female I can’t just put on my shoes and go run out in my neighborhood” because it is not safe. Rhonda also said, “A young lady should not be out by herself in the morning” but followed up with “I made myself go get running mace. So I slid it on my wrist with my finger on the trigger and I would just go run.” These comments indicate that women share experiences and feel similar expectations based on their social positions as females. These comments also, however, demonstrate that participants make individual decisions within these shared circumstances. Similar evidence can be found with respect to participants’ positions as former athletes, and mothers. In what follows, I provide more evidence that factors of difference create diversity within this group of black women which explain, in part, their different physical activity engagements.

One social reality for women in this study is that they experience life as “black women”. In other words, they feel certain expectations are placed upon them as a function of their race and gender. Across the focus groups, it became clear that this “black woman experience” is varied and diverse. Several participants, for instance, discussed how their concerns about hairstyles and body shape, which both influence

physical activity, are unique to them as black women. Eva's comment was representative of participants who feel black women all share the same hair/physical activity concerns:

Black women, you never catch a lot of--you always see these white women in the gym getting it in, working out hard. I mean they be going hard, they got the trainers but you never see the black women in there. And that's because we don't want to sweat our hair out.

Sophia's comment demonstrates that she feels other black women would share her ideas about body shape:

I think black women, from what I've seen, we care about ourselves more than any other race. 'Cause we will spend five hours in the beauty shop getting our hair done; we will get our nails done; we will have the outfit laid out. So we care about our looks-- we tend to work out for weight purposes. But if you're at the weight that you want, and especially since black men... in general, we can be a little heavier than white people for what's considered nice-looking or a nice shape. So black women tend to work out for weight purposes.

These ideas were not however, universal in the focus groups. Throughout the study sample, women had various hair concerns and body preferences. They also demonstrated diverse reactions to social expectations. For instance, Summer said:

My hair is natural but I feel like I can't wear it like that because of my job. So I press it just because I couldn't go to work like that. Just being around business professional white men, I can't.

Ryan empathized with Summer's perspective but described how she does wear her natural hair to work and is accepted as a professional. She said, "I do it every day, every day. This is the hair I come with every day." The exchange between Ryan and Summer

was one example that women in this study operate under a shared sense of expectations—they each, however, react to them differently. These types of differences manifest, in part, through their different physical activity behaviors.

Diverse perspectives regarding body preferences were also evident. Sophia, for instance, suggested “black people” accept or privilege a large body size. Other participants in this study, however, held different ideas regarding “acceptable” black bodies, at times, even being clear that they work hard to prevent themselves from gaining weight, are unhappy at heavier weights, and are concerned with being fat. While flexible beauty standards have been documented in the African American community, women in this study, all black women, suggest that this idea may not necessarily be pervasive within all Black American communities. As a result, motivations for physical activity may be diverse as well.

In addition to the diversity that became evident among members of the focus groups, participants were also outspoken about the fact that they have a different social reality than black women who were never athletes. In doing so, they suggested that the label “black woman” offers an incomplete description of their existence. With regards to physical activity in adulthood, several comments by participants suggested that they operate under a different set of expectations than black women who were not athletes.

Keisha demonstrated this with her comment:

If you are an older black female and you work out they ask, “Oh, you work out?” ‘Cause most black women don’t. So even after college when we hit our twenties and thirties and forties, we continue to work out as former athletes. But I know what I used to look like when everybody used to say this, that, and the other. Well, if you were never that athlete, or if

you were never in that setting to always be told that, you don't feel like you need to work out.

In this way, Keisha separates her experience as a former athlete from those of other black women. Several other comments reflect this perspective as well.

Just as participants suggested that their experiences as athletes provide them with a different social reality than black women who were not athletes, they are also clear that they are similar, in many ways, to other athletes who are not black women. Chris's comment demonstrates a perspective likely held by other former elite athletes:

I've been to class and I'm spinning and I'll judge and I'll be like, how is she beating me? And I will not stop if she doesn't stop. One time I made myself sick. Cause I'm an athlete and they kept saying that. And I was doing lunges on the first day back. So I'm doing it and I'm looking at the girl working out with us and I'm like, no way she should be able to do this stuff and I can't. It's just the fact that I'm an athlete. It doesn't matter that it's been ten years. I was an athlete at a D-I school. You feel like you're supposed to be able to do certain things. I physically got sick after I went home. I couldn't move my leg. I couldn't walk. I pushed myself that hard because I could not let those girls...I'm an athlete. I used to be an athlete.

When sharing this quote, Chris was describing an experience that was likely shared by other athletes as they move about post-competitive activity spaces. This statement represents an influence that elite athletics had on her post-competitive behaviors, an influence that was not rooted in either her race or gender. These comments, along with others made throughout the focus groups illuminate the importance of acknowledging the athlete experiences of these women rather than expecting that "black woman" is a complete and accurate description of their backgrounds and histories.

### Summary and Relevance for Kinesiology: Factors of Difference

Findings here should inform practices in kinesiology. Data show that, within this group of participants who all self-identify as black, women, 25-45, and former Division I elite track and field sprinters, jumpers, and hurdlers, there is great diversity. One woman identified as Hispanic; some identified as middle class, others of lower class; most identified themselves as heterosexual through their comments about their partners; many spoke about their children, thus identifying as mothers; and several spoke of their roles as sisters, daughters, friends, and professionals. By identifying as members of these cultural groups and social categories, these women offer insight to the origins of their attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms (Johnson, 2000). Given the complicated ways that the various categories of identity intersect within each individual, kinesiologists should no longer choose to identify study samples, results, and/or culturally-sensitive interventions with narrow, singular characteristics. Rather, they should recognize that, even when several individuals share a similar background, their behaviors result from the complicated interaction of multiple attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms which result from their simultaneous and unique group memberships.

### Summary and Conclusions

In 1998, John Burt said, “In an elevated society, all the citizens of that society – independent of race, sex, age, or sexual orientation – ought to have a chance to avoid preventable diseases and premature death (Burt, 1998). Kinesiologists have the ability to contribute to this dream of an elevated society through the study and promotion of health-

related physical activity. This qualitative study was designed to add depth to the research/literature regarding black women and physical activity as a project in reaching this goal. In *Race, class, and gender*, editors Andersen and Collins write, “We begin this book by asking, who has been excluded from what is known, and how might we see the world differently if we were to acknowledge and value the experiences and thoughts of those who have been excluded?” (Andersen & Collins, 2001, p. 13). By including participants in this study who had previously been excluded from what is known in the physical activity literature --17 black women who are, 25-45, and former Division I elite track and field sprinters, jumpers, or hurdlers — I identified information regarding the factors that influence physical activity in a newly-contextualized way. Based on data collected through focus groups, track and field familiarities, active networks, and self-presentation concerns are categories of factors that influence post-competitive physical activity in these participants.

Post-competitively, participants displayed behaviors and participated in activities that were familiar based on their extended engagements in the track and field arena. These include vigorous activities, competitive motivations, training partners, performance-focused activity environments, and recovery from burnout. These results, importantly, showed that elite sport influences has lingering influences on adult physical activity. In addition, post-competitive physical activity is influenced by social networks because participants used physical activity to build inter-personal relationships between themselves and friends, family members, and fellow professionals. In this way, physical activity was not only a physical exercise but an exercise in socialization. Finally, self-

presentation concerns were factors involved in physical activity for this group of women. They each were influenced by various social expectations regarding the appearance of their bodies, hair, and attitudes. In efforts to gain social acceptance and social benefits, physical activity may have served to as a project in achieving accepted and valued appearances.

The unique approach to the study of these women, a womanist/ intersectionality approach, also resulted in themes that influence physical activity-- the mis-education of the athlete, contours of adult lives, and factors of difference. These athletes were knowledgeable about training and public health recommendations regarding physical activity. However, as a result of many messages that relate to training but not health-related physical activity, and an unclear understanding of the benefits of each, these athletes suggested that they were mis-educated with regard to sustainable, health-related physical activity. Contours of adult lives, or life stages also importantly influence participants' physical activity involvement. They all suggested a desire to remain physically active throughout their lives but ever-changing life circumstances have precipitated changes in physical activity involvement. Importantly, physical activity as a priority seemed to fluctuate based on other possible priorities including work, family, and fun. Finally, these results demonstrate that factors of difference influenced post-competitive physical activity in this group. While they all shared many identities, cultural understandings, and backgrounds, they were each individuals who had been shaped uniquely by multiple, intersecting identities, cultural understandings, and backgrounds. These factors of difference account for the diversity seen in this group.

This study is important for the field of kinesiology. By investigating physical activity involvement in a group of former elite collegiate athletes, evidence now exists to suggest that participation in athletics does influence adults' physical activity. Further, this influence is not as automatic nor strictly positive as is commonly reported. Also, this study adds context to physical activity studies involving black women. Results show the need to consider the (in)accuracy of labeling participants based on their race and/or gender alone, and as well as the social and cultural implications of essentializing black women while excluding them from all other groups.

In conclusion, this study was an attempt to better understand what black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity. As an exploratory study, it was also designed to find more questions regarding this subject. Both goals were accomplished and, results will hopefully serve to move more people to activity.

### Future Directions and Limitations

#### Research

This study offers evidence that, by presenting race and gender as independent variables, past research involving black women's physical activity has resulted in a partial view the heterogeneity that exists within the category "black woman." As well, research has failed to illuminate ways that simultaneous affiliation in multiple social groups influences activity. Given the diversity of experience and behaviors that appeared in this sample, it is important to continue applying a womanist/intersectionality

perspective to the study of black women and physical activity. This will greatly enhance what we know about the lives of black women and results are valuable in making physical activity a part of their lives and their circumstances. Results here also identify the need to continue asking questions about physical activity within a deep contextualization of women's lives.

Participants identified numerous ways that their participation in elite collegiate track and field continues to influence their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with regards to physical activity. Given these results, further qualitative and quantitative study should be conducted to assess the impact that sport participation has on the post-competitive, health-related physical activity behaviors of retired and retiring athletes. Within this category, burnout should receive special attention. Every participant in this study took an extended break away from physical activity upon their exit from competitive track and field. This suggests the need for further study concerning burnout as a social construct and the possible effects of burnout on post-competitive physical activity.

Results here demonstrate the importance that physical activity histories, social networks, and self-presentation concerns have on the physical activities of participants. While these results should not be generalized to other populations, there is room to investigate each category further, in larger and more diverse samples.

Given the specific characteristics of participants in this study, in particular their status as former Division I elite track and field athletes, however, as well as the limited sample size of 17, results should be interpreted as hypotheses in need of further inquiry. Unlike previous studies involving black women, it is not expected that these categories

and themes of influences will occur similarly within all groups of black women. In fact, there was diversity even within this group. The intersectional approach to the study and reporting of results, however, suggests a possibility of transferability– that others reading the results may find this study applicable to their situations (Krueger, 1998a).

Peer group focus groups were used as the method of collecting data. This method resulted in an atmosphere that was relaxed and familiar. Some experts caution against using familiar acquaintances in research groups given that they may share symbols and rely on their collective memories rather than thoroughly explaining details for the moderator and audience. As well, this caution is necessary given that people may be more likely to be open and honest with strangers they are unlikely to see again (Morgan, 1996). The peer groups worked well in this situation, however. I would recommend peer focus groups in other settings with people who shared a similar situation. I would also recommend peer group discussions as a preliminary to physical activity interventions.

Assistant moderators were included in the data-generation and preliminary analysis process. Due to conflicts in schedules and locations of focus groups, three different assistant moderators were used to staff the four groups. Each moderator was qualified and invested in the process; however, use of one moderator may have enhanced preliminary data analysis. One assistant moderator attended the first two focus groups. Had she been able to attend the last two focus groups, she would have been able to make comparisons or interpretations based on her collective experience. This may have resulted in a slightly different perspective on later groups than those provided by the assistant moderators who were informed by my notes alone. For these reasons, it is possible that

the input of the assistant moderator would have been more effective had one person assisted with all four focus groups.

Recruitment of participants for this study began with a group of the researcher's acquaintances. While the snowball technique resulted in the participation of women representing several different collegiate teams and friendship groups, the initial recruitment sample was quite narrow. Also, all of the participants attended college and continue to live in the Southeastern United States. It is possible, then, that black women who trained and/or live in other regions of the United States would illuminate experiences and understandings not shared by these women.

All of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 42. Given their suggestions of the importance of family responsibilities, professional obligations, and care of dependent children, it is possible that participants in different stages of life would provide different evidence. Finally, each participant was limited to one focus group and the focus groups were limited to 90 minutes. I see this as a limitation because it was clear that some participants wanted to continue the conversations and had more experiences to share and more evidence to offer.

#### Future Directions: Interventions

All women in this study indicate that they plan to be physically active throughout their lives. Their explanations of factors that influence their participation or non-participation, then, offer insight to factors kinesiologists could address through interventions designed to increase physical activity in groups of black women were Division I track and field athletes. See chart for potential intervention strategies.

Objective	Evidence of Need	Possible Method	Target Audience
Build value for non-competitive, health-related physical activity	Participants don't value health-related benefits of physical activity and are not motivated by potential benefits to health  <b>Theme: The Mis-education of the Athlete; Factors of Difference</b>	<b>People: Educators who promote non-competitive benefits (examples: stress, social benefits of body and attitude).</b> <b>Places: Physical activity spaces unrelated to training</b> <b>Things: Low, moderate, vigorous, fun physical activities</b>	Transitioning and former athletes who were exposed to competition-centered physical activity environments for extended time periods
Build skill for multiple sustainable lifetime physical activities	Specialized training limited options to participate in non-sport specific activities  <b>Theme: The Mis-education of the Athlete; Factors of Difference</b>	<b>People: Educators/counselors (not coaches) who can teach these skills</b> <b>Places: Physical activity spaces unrelated to training</b> <b>Things: Cross-training/ fun exercises during the off-season ;Instructional camps and play dates</b>	Competitive athletes; Former athletes without transferable physical activity skills
Increase commitment of participants by featuring social aspect of physical activity and developing positive physical activity partnerships	For many, physical activity is not a priority over family, friend, professional relationships; participants seek training partners and are influenced by network affiliates  <b>Theme: Contours of Adult Lives</b>	<b>People: Invite peer groups/ family members/ teams of co-workers to participate</b> <b>Places: Various</b> <b>Things: Include group talk sessions designed to introduce participants and strengthen inter-personal relationships during activity</b>	Former athletes
Re-introduce effective periodized physical activity	Participants cycle from extremes of activity involvement (everyday, vigorous-- months of nothing).  <b>Theme: The Mis-education of the Athlete; Contours of Adult Lives; Factors of Difference</b>	<b>People: Instructors, personal trainers, educators who design specific, periodized programs</b> <b>Places: Various, including familiar training locations as well as non-traditional locations</b> <b>Things: Develop and promote cyclical activity programs that include short periods of vigorous or frequent activity staggered with programs and plans for health-benefiting, lifestyle activities</b>	Former athletes

Decrease “power” of hair concerns	For several participants, participation is limited because of concerns over hair and acceptance of certain hairstyles  <b>Theme: Contours of Adult Lives; Factors of Difference</b>	<b>People: Professionals who model natural hairstyles as fashionable and professionally acceptable; Hairstylists who educate participants on hair care techniques</b> <b>Places: “Mainstream” locations; places of business; physical activity settings</b> <b>Things: Media outlets to promote these images</b>	Women with naturally kinky, artificially-straightened hair
Design physical activity programs that are personally relevant to participants	There is great diversity within this sample; Participants display multiple forms of physical activity involvement. As well, they are influenced by various factors.  <b>Theme: Contours of Adult Lives; Factors of Difference</b>	<b>People: Educators; counselors; Include group talk sessions with other individuals</b> <b>Places: Various familiar, relaxed environments</b> <b>Things: Discussions centered around physical activity</b>	Anyone; Everyone
<b>Increase awareness of body-size/ health connection</b>	<b>Some participants relate physical activity motivations to their body sizes (“thick” or “not fat”)</b>	<b>People: Educators to promote benefits of physical activity in absence of weight changes; People to facilitate discussions related to cultural understandings of weight w/ relation to physical activity motivations</b> <b>Places: Various</b> <b>Things: Physical activity programs, group-talk sessions</b>	Anyone; Everyone

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APPENDIX A TRACK AND FIELD HISTORY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INFORMATION

	Yrs In T&F	T&F EVENTS	LAST COMP	Moderate PA? How often? What type?	Vigorous P.A.? How often? What type?	What constitutes adequate P.A.?	What role does P.A. play in your life?
Isis	8	400	2003	5/ wk; Stairs, Stretching/Abs	3/wk; Jogging	Moderate; 30min/day; 3day/wk	Stress reliever; helps w/ health and weight
Rhonda	11	400; 100h; LJ; TJ	2003	5/wk; Dancing, Skating	None	Vigorous; 3 day/wk	Minor role; would like to be more active
Ingred	7	400	2004	3/wk; Stairs, Walking	3/wk; Elliptical, Tdmill	Every day; raises HR	Semi-important role
Chris	15	100, 200, 400	2004	2/ wk; Basketball	1/wk; jogging	Sweating; Vigorous	Minor
Sophia	13	LJ; TJ	2002	1/wk; Walking, Hiking	None	Increases HR; 3-4 days/wk	Minimal
Thunder	9	100h	2005	3/wk; Jogging	2/wk;weights/ pwr lifts	30 min/day; Good sweat; >160 HR	Huge role for health and physical
Ryan	12	100; 200; 100h; TJ	2007	3/wk; circuit training	None	Raises HR; Oxygen debt for extended amt. of time	Very important
Flash	8	100; 200; 400; LJ	2004	None	2-3/wk; run, wgths,football	Increase HR; 2-3 days/wk	Stay healthy
Keisha	19	400	1995	5/wk; walking, running, playing sports, weights	None	Increases HR; Breaking a sweat	Very important to family for a healthy life
Summer	9	200; 100h; LJ; HJ	2002	1/wk; walking, hiking cleaning, yoga	3/wk; running, spinning, aerobics, circuit training	Increases HR; Gets blood flowing; perspiration a must	Stress reliever; energy booster; networking; good challenge
Elaine	7	200; 400	1993	Weekdays; Walking @ work; Taking stairs	None	Increase HR w/o causing strain on the body; Able to do it consistently	Important to instill in children's lives
Tina	12	100h; 400h	2002	2-3/wk; walking, Wii	3/wk; weights, Zumba, Stair Master	Increases HR; Causes sweat	Stress relief
Jackie	7	100h; 400h	1997	1-2/wk; elliptical, cross-training, weights	2/wk; Spinning, Swimming	3-5 days/wk; Depends on level of fitness; aerobic and strength training	Big role for husband and her; Compete in triathlons and 5ks
McKenzie	12	100h; 400h; LJ; TJ	2006	Daily/ Walking, childcare	4/wk; Running, Jogging, Weights, Pilates, Yoga	5 days/wk; 1-2 hrs/day	An everyday role
Eva	15	100; 200	2004	3-4/wk; tdmill, elliptical, light weights, abs	1-2/wk; Aerobics class; Weights	30 min-1hr. of exercise/day; cardio, abs, or aerobics	Major; Have to continue working out
Kami	8	TJ	2003	4-5/wk; volleybl; weights	4-5/wk; weights	30 min/day; moderate activity; 4 days/wk	Priority; Other things scheduled around PA
Janessa	14	100; 200; 400	2006	1/wk; walking, Wii	None	30 minutes of cardio; 3x/wk	Want to but lifestyle won't allow; Not motivated; 4x/mo only; helps to feel better about myself

## APPENDIX B

### Pilot Study

#### Overview of study

One focus group consisting of four familiar acquaintances was used to gain a deep understanding of what black women who were collegiate track and field athletes identify as influencing their post-competitive physical activity behaviors. This pilot study was designed to test the effectiveness of the questions, question delivery method, and focus group interview design in yielding rich qualitative information about the factors that influence participants' physical activity behaviors.

#### Procedures

##### Recruitment Procedures

A convenience sample of adult black women who are former collegiate track and field athletes was invited to participate in a focus group. The women are personal acquaintances of the researcher. An email invitation included an announcement of the pilot study, the purpose of the study, criteria for participants' inclusion, requirements of participation, an invitation to participate, and an invitation for them to invite a peer or acquaintance who meets criteria for inclusion in the study. After receiving confirmation from enough women to form a group (four), I asked participants to email their schedules to me and I planned a group discussion time that fit with their availability. Once a time had been established, the researcher emailed information regarding focus group time and

location, informed consent, and a request for demographic information. One week before the focus group, I sent an email reminder to all scheduled participants. Two days before the focus group, I called each participant to remind her of the time and location of the focus group; I also asked each to confirm her intent to attend.

### Focus Group Procedures

The group interview was recorded by audio and video tape. Participants were offered the option of stopping the tapes at any time, however none exercise this option. Both a moderator and an assistant moderator were present during the focus group activities. The moderator directed the 90- minute focus group according to an interview guide (attached) and the assistant moderator was in charge of equipment and participant management. At the conclusion of the focus group interview, participants were asked to provide feedback on the focus group and quality of the interview questions. They were also asked to give suggestions on how to make future focus groups more useful in answering the research question.

### Evaluation

The focus group interview questions were evaluated according to the following criteria: Did the questions elicit continuous conversation? Were participants talking about the topic of physical activity influences, or were they distracted easily or off-topic? Was the information produced relevant to the study? Did questions need to be revised (Krueger R. A., 1998, p. 46)?

Focus group data were transcribed and analyzed for explanations of factors that influence these women's physical activity behaviors. Special attention was paid to the whether the data analysis design worked as planned and how it could be improved. For the pilot study, the data-reduction process followed these steps: 1. Audio tape from the focus group was transcribed verbatim 2. One copy of the transcript was printed. 3. While referencing the video tape, transcripts were labeled with information about who made each comment, participants' non-verbal agreement or disagreement (head nodding) with comments, or expressions of excitement or withdrawal associated with comments. 4. Line by line, transcripts were read for evidence of words, key phrases and concepts that related to physical activity influences. 5. These words, phrases, and concepts were converted into codes and, where appropriate, codes were used to label key statements from the transcripts. 6. With help of memo-writing, the codes were organized into preliminary categories (Krueger R. A., 1998).

Following administration and evaluation of the focus group interviews and data analysis procedures, interview guides were changed in the following ways:

1. The use of video was deemed unnecessary and removed from the procedures; it was difficult to position the video in a way that captured expressions of all focus groups. As well, the video data failed to capture important information not captured by the audio recording.
2. Several interview questions were determined to be inappropriate given that they lead participants toward describing circumstances surrounding their activity without also prompting them to describe circumstances surrounding inactivity.

These questions were edited to be less leading and to encourage participants to describe the spectrum of their physical activity experiences.

3. One additional question was added to the focus group interview guide. After reviewing the transcripts, the researcher realized that participants needed more prompting to think broadly about the influences on their physical activity behaviors. The following question was added to address this void: “Are there examples in your own experiences of challenges based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, family, values, or general social constraints?”
4. The demographic information captured by the original questionnaire did not provide descriptive information needed to provide context to participants’ statements. As a result, the following questions were added to the final demographic questionnaire: "How do you identify in terms of socio-economic class? Low, Middle, High” and “What were your main track and field events in college?”
5. Overall, participants interpreted questions as intended and adequately identified factors that influence post-competitive physical activity. Therefore, most of the original questions were included in the final focus group interview guide. As well, the process of data analysis was found to be effective at reducing data to categories that reflect physical activity influences. Therefore, the original plan of analysis was followed during the final process of analysis.

## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE (PILOT)

### Introduction (Spoken by moderator/ researcher)

Please fill out the demographic questionnaire and return it before leaving today. Don't worry, your names will not be attached to any material. By the way, your names will not appear on any publications or presentations about this study either. I am, however, running video and audio recorders but please don't concentrate on those. They're simply in place to make sure that I don't miss anything and, again, your names will not be connected to what you say on tape nor will the tapes be seen or heard by anyone outside of my dissertation committee.

Thank you all for participating in this pilot study. Today, I'd like for us to have a conversation that will result in a better understanding of the physical activity behaviors of women like you and me; black women between 25 and 45 who are former collegiate track and field athletes. I've invited you to participate so that you may provide me with information that will help to refine my techniques for conducting my dissertation study titled "What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?" We need more information that comes directly from women like you all so that we may develop programs that are based on real experiences, needs, and, wants. This pilot study will help me to develop that information.

To begin, we're going to have a conversation about things you feel have influenced your post-competitive physical activity behaviors, whatever they may be. After the focused

conversation, I'll ask for your feedback on the quality of the interview questions and any suggestions you have about the organization of the meeting or ways to make future focus groups more useful in answering the research question. At this point, do any of you have any questions? OK. Let's begin...

### Focus Group Questions

Here, I have a list of questions but I hope that, once we get started, you all will answer these through a flowing conversation. As we talk, I want you to maintain the same level of formality or informality that you use when speaking with your friends rather than worrying about me as a researcher. I truly do want to understand your real perspective so, get comfortable, relax, and speak honestly. Also, remember to this should be a focused conversation between you all; speak to and with each other and not only to me.

### Pre-Discussion Activity

Participants will be asked to write answers to the following questions on an index card. The purpose is to have them quietly reflect on their physical activity behaviors in preparation for the focused group discussion.

- Quickly jot down an answer to the question—"What role does physical activity play in your life?"
- Moderate activity causes a slight increase in heart-rate or breathing --examples are walking or light gardening. Vigorous activities are running, aerobics or anything that causes large increases in breathing or heart rate.

- Do you participate in moderate activity? If yes, how often? List a few of your moderate activities.
- Do you participate in vigorous activity? If yes, how often? List a few of your vigorous activities.
- What do you think constitutes adequate physical activity?

### Icebreaker

The purpose of the icebreaker activity is to involve all group members in the conversation and to introduce the topic of discussion.

- We're going to have a focused conversation about the influences on your physical activity behaviors. It's important, then, that we understand what physical activity means to each of us. For this question and the rest, you are the experts. Your opinions and understandings are important, so please speak from your own experience and your own perspective.
  - When you hear the phrase "physical activity" what comes to mind?

### General Questions

These questions are designed to encourage conversation that will lead to the answering of specific questions (listed below)

- Think about your current physical activity habits.
  - How did they develop?
  - What influenced them?

- Think back over the past several years.
  - Have your physical activity habits changed over the years?
  - Tell us about them.
- If you're not regularly active, let's talk about things that take priority over physical activity.
- In general, why are you active or inactive?

### Specific Questions

These questions are based on the physical activity literature. They are designed to gain an understanding of whether the participants agree or disagree with published findings.

These questions will be asked in the event that answers do not emerge from general questions (above).

- People in your age group are more active than people in other age groups.
  - Why do you think this is?
  - What influences people in your age group to be active?
  - How do these influences affect the 25-45 age group differently than younger or older groups?
- Middle class women are more active than women in the lower SES.
  - Do you think your social class status affects your physical activity choices?
  - How?

- Some people say that black women prefer avoid exercise because they don't want to lose weight/ don't want to compromise their "thickness".
  - What do you think about this assertion?
- Chris Rock's documentary *Good Hair* has received lots of attention and has generated conversation around black women's hair.
  - Do you believe that "hair" (style or maintenance) affects your physical activity?
  - How/ why or why not?
- Parents put their kids in sports for a number of different reasons. One thought is that kids and young adults who play sports learn about physical activity, grow to enjoy it, and are influenced to continue with healthy physical activities over the lifespan.
  - What do you think about this line of thinking?
  - How did your track and field participation influence your current activities?
- Take a minute to think about where you've been physically active.
  - When were you most comfortable? Least comfortable?
  - Can you think of reasons why you were so comfortable or uncomfortable in those spaces?
- Over and over, research has shown that social support or lack thereof significantly influences peoples' activities.
  - Do you have a physical activity support system in place?

- If so, what is it/ who are they?
- If not, what kind of support would be helpful to you?
- Someone (bell hooks) said that black women’s neglect of their bodies is a representative of a general lack of care for themselves. She and others suggest that black women are overwhelmed with family and community responsibilities and aren’t left with time or energy to focus on themselves.
  - Would you agree or disagree that your family and community responsibilities prevent you from participating in physical activity?
  - Please explain.

#### Closing Questions/ Member Checks

These questions are designed to help summarize the focus group conversation.

- At the conclusion of this study, I want to answer the question, “What do black women who are former Division I track and field athletes describe as influencing their post-competitive physical activity?”
  - Based on what was discussed here today, what one point seemed most important for answering that question?
- Wow! The time really went by quickly.
  - Have we missed anything?
  - Is there anything we should have talked about but didn’t have time to cover?

- Right now, I'm going to share what I think were the major themes to come out of our conversation today.
  - Do these match your thoughts?
  - If not, how should I modify these?

#### Probing Questions

- When participants seem to change perspective—“Earlier you said...and now you've indicated that...These seem to be different from each other. Help me understand how you feel about this issue.” (Krueger, 1998, p. 47)
- When participants offer vague comments—“Tell me more,” “Could you give me an example?” “Please explain, I'm not sure what you mean.” (Krueger, 1998, p. 47)

#### Conclusion

Thank you all for participating. I appreciate your honesty and openness and I look forward to sharing our conversation with my dissertation committee. Now, as I mentioned in the very beginning of our meeting, this pilot study was designed to gain information about how to best conduct a future study meant to gain a better understanding of physical activity influences in a group of black women who are former athletes. At this point, I ask that you provide some feedback on the focus group.

My goal for the next study is to gather information that truly represents the perspectives of focus group members. I want to know about outside factors that influence people to be

physically active or inactive. Based on that, please tell me how effective you think the questions and group format were in meeting that goal.

#### Questions to Solicit Feedback

- Did the questions sound conversational?
- Which questions seemed most/least relevant to your understanding of the topic?
- Did you feel free to express yourself fully and completely?
- Did each of you have enough time to share your thoughts on the subject?
- Has this been a good experience for you?
- Was the pre-meeting correspondence adequate?
- Do you have any suggestions regarding meeting locations?

## Announcement of Pilot Study and Letter of Recruitment

Date

Dear

If you've been watching or listening to the news reports, I'm sure you understand that our nation is in the midst of a major health crisis. Many of the chronic diseases that affect us, members of our families and members of our communities, can be decreased if more people would include regular physical activity in their daily routines. My doctoral research involves an attempt to gain a better understanding about the factors that influence physical activity. Hopefully, I can use the information later to create programs that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding.

I will be studying women like me, black American women who were elite collegiate track and field jumpers, sprinters, and hurdlers. I want to find out whether they are physically active at levels recommended by major health agencies, and if so, what influences them to be active, or if not, what influences that? There is information in journals that specifically addresses physical activity behaviors of black women but, thus far, there is little research on former elite athletes. Right now, I am looking for women to participate in a pilot study that will provide information to help me to best answer these questions.

In order to participate, women must meet the following criteria: be U.S. black/ African American; be a former athlete on the high school or college level; be 25-45 years old; and be able to meet me in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta, GA at a time and place that will be decided once the focus group is formed.

In a group setting, lasting no more than 90 minutes, women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity habits. Following the conversation, participants will be asked to give their feedback on the focus group questions and the overall research process. All conversations will be recorded by audio and video tape so that I don't miss anything during the conversations but, at any time, you have the option to withdraw from the interview. Ideally, the group will involve friends and acquaintances so, in addition to the valuable information that will result from the meeting, this will serve as a good opportunity to visit with friends. Also, refreshments will be provided.

If you would like to participate in this pilot study or are aware of women who are qualified to participate, please respond to me at the email address or telephone number below and include the potential participant's name and phone number or email address. I will happily contact your referrals personally or, if you would prefer, feel free to forward this letter to them directly.

Thank you very much in advance for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

(336) 512-1840

[dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu)

### Invitation Letter to Referral (Pilot Study)

Date

Dear

My name is DeAnne Brooks and I'm a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I received your name from \_\_\_\_\_. My doctoral research involves an attempt to gain a better understanding about the social factors that influence physical activity. Hopefully, I can use the information later to create programs that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding.

I will be studying women like myself, black American women who were elite collegiate track and field jumpers, sprinters, and hurdlers. I want to find out whether they are physically active at levels recommended by major health agencies, and if so, what influences them to be active, or if not, what influences that? There is information in journals that specifically addresses physical activity in black women but, thus far, there is little research on former elite athletes. Right now, I am looking for women to participate in a pilot research study that will provide information to help me to best answer these questions.

In order to join this pilot study, women must meet the following criteria: be U.S. black/ African American; be a former athlete on the high school or college level; be 25-45 years old; and be able to meet me in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta, GA at a time and place that will be decided once the focus group is formed. \_\_\_\_\_ indicated that you might fit these criteria and I personally invite you to participate.

In a group setting, lasting no more than 90 minutes, women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity habits. Following the conversation, participants will be asked to give their feedback on the focus group questions and the overall research process. All conversations will be recorded by audio and video tape so that I don't miss anything during the conversations but, at any time, you have the option to withdraw from the interview. Ideally, the group will involve friends and acquaintances so, in addition to the valuable information that will result from the meeting, this will serve as a good opportunity to visit with friends. Also, refreshments will be provided.

If you would like to participate in this pilot study or are aware of women who are qualified to participate, please respond to me at the email address or telephone number below and include the potential participant's name and phone number or email address. I will happily contact your referrals personally or, if you would prefer, feel free to forward this letter to them directly. In advance, thank you very much for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

(336) 512-1840

[dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu)

### Participation Confirmation (Pilot Study)

Date

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus groups during the pilot study for my doctoral research. After receiving responses from you and other women regarding meeting times and places that work best with your schedules, we have decided to meet on December 5 at 10:00 AM at 728 Dailey Street in Burlington. Also, in preparation for the meeting, please read and sign the attached informed consent document and demographic questionnaire. Feel free to ask for clarification about anything in those documents. Please bring a completed copy of the documents with you to our meeting. Thanks again for agreeing to participate. I look forward to meeting with the group.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

(336) 512-1840

dlbrooks@uncg.edu

## Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Pilot Study: What do black women who were college or high school track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?

Project Director: DeAnne Brooks (William Karper, Principal Investigator, Dissertation Committee Co-Chair)

Participant's Name:

What is the study about?

This is a pilot study to help determine the best methods and procedures to use in a dissertation research project designed to gain an understanding of factors that influence physical activity behaviors in a group of black women who are former athletes.

Why are you asking me?

This study includes U.S. black/ African American women who are former sprinters, hurdlers or jumpers in collegiate track and field. Additionally, participants have not competed for at least two years, are currently 25-45 years old, and are able to meet in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta, GA. By studying women who fit these criteria and are, therefore, similar to participants in the dissertation study, the researcher will gain experience and advice about potential research questions, research environment, and research procedures. This feedback will help to inform changes that will enhance the effectiveness of the dissertation.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

Participants in this study will take part in one focus group interview lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. The focus group will consist of four to six women who are, preferably, friends or acquaintances. The group interview will be held in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta GA at a time and location convenient to group members.

Women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity. While the researcher (DeAnne Brooks) will be present, it is important that participants speak freely about their experiences, beliefs, and opinions. As a way to ensure that the researcher's conclusions accurately represent participants' intentions, the researcher will periodically share summaries of main ideas and preliminary analyses with group members and ask for feedback. All participants will be encouraged but not required to respond to these summaries.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Focus group conversations will be recorded on audio and video tape. However, you have the option to withdraw from the interview or ask that the tapes be stopped at any time.

Because your voice and face will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears or sees the tapes, your confidentiality for things you say on tape cannot be totally guaranteed although the researcher will limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have

any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by DeAnne Brooks who may be contacted at (336) 512-1840 or [dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu).

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

Potential benefits of participation in this study include having the opportunity to visit with friends and former teammates; sharing your physical activity stories with others who may be able to relate to your experiences; and, gaining information that will help you and members of your community. You might also gain personal satisfaction from contributing to a new knowledge base in Kinesiology.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The research that will follow this pilot study may provide a better understanding of the special circumstances that black women who are former athletes face when making decisions about the healthy behavior of physical activity. There are multiple factors that go into one's behavior and, if I can better understand those influences, I might later be able to create programs that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding for this group. Overall, this research will be conducted in a way meant to accurately represent the experiences and perspectives of black women based on their own understandings. Hopefully, then, other women will be able to relate to the findings in a way that will positively influence their own physical activity behaviors and, by extension, the health of our society.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There will be no payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Only people directly involved in this research will have access to the interview tapes, videos and transcripts (myself and my dissertation committee of four professors).

No tapes, videos, transcripts, or names will be shared with anyone who is not a member of your focus group. Pseudonyms will be used in all published reports and presentations.

All audio/video tapes and transcripts will be held in a locked file cabinet for at least three years in the office of one of my faculty-mentors. Any saved electronic data will be password protected. After three years, printed transcripts will be shredded, audio and video tapes will be dismantled, and electronic data will be deleted. Since this study does involve some electronic correspondence, please be aware that absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which have been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered.

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by DeAnne Brooks.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Demographic Questionnaire (Pilot Study)

Please complete this demographic survey. It should take approximately 5 minutes to finish. The questions are designed to gain a better understanding of who you are (your name will not be attached to any of your responses in the focus group). Please answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions, feel free to ask the researcher to clarify.

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Current Occupation (if you are working) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Level of Education (check all completed)
  - College/ University Courses-- No Degree
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - Doctoral Degree
4. How many years did you compete in sports at each level?
  - Youth (elementary/ middle school) \_\_\_\_\_
  - High school \_\_\_\_\_
  - College \_\_\_\_\_
  - Post-collegiate \_\_\_\_\_
5. When was your last sports competition (month and year)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Follow-up letter (Pilot Study)

Date

Dear

Thank you for participating in the focus groups for the pilot study for my dissertation.

You and the other women were a joy to work with and I appreciate your efforts to take the topic seriously. I'm confident that, together, we produced knowledge that will help to provide understandings for issues about which we all should be aware.

I am in the process of reading over and writing about our group discussion. As I proceed through this process, I will send notes out to each of you. I ask that you read the notes and let me know if and when my findings do not match your understanding of the conversations. This process will help to make sure that I accurately represent our conversations and your individual thoughts for people who read about this work. Your responses will also provide valuable information needed to improve the design of my dissertation project.

Thank you. I will be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

(336) 512-1840

dlbrooks@uncg.edu

## APPENDIX C

## Announcement of Study and Letter of Recruitment

Date

Dear

If you've been watching or listening to the news reports, I'm sure you understand that our nation is in the midst of a major health crisis. Many of the chronic diseases that affect us, members of our families and members of our communities, can be decreased if more people would include regular physical activity in their daily routines. My doctoral research involves an attempt to gain a better understanding about the factors that influence physical activity. Hopefully, I can use the information later to create programs that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding.

I am studying women like myself, black American women who were elite collegiate track and field jumpers, sprinters, and hurdlers. I want to find out whether they are physically active at levels recommended by major health agencies, and if so, what influences them to be active, or if not, what influences that? There is information in journals that specifically addresses physical activity and inactivity of black women but, thus far, there is little research on former elite athletes. Women who decide to be a part of this study, then, will help to provide new information for exercise professionals.

I am contacting you because I need your help in recruiting participants for this study. In order to participate, women must meet the following criteria: be a U.S. black/ African American; be a former sprinter, hurdler or jumper for a Division I university or college; had earned an athletic scholarship or participated in the NCAA National Track and Field Championships; have not competed on the collegiate or professional level for at least two years; be 25-45 years old; and be able to meet me in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta, GA at an agreed upon time and place. Women of all activity or inactivity levels are invited to participate.

In a group setting, lasting no more than 90 minutes, women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity habits. All conversations will be tape-recorded so that I don't miss anything during the conversations but, at any time, participants have the option to withdraw from the interviews or ask that the tape be stopped while they speak. Privacy will be protected and strict confidentiality will be maintained; outside of fellow focus group members, only I and my dissertation committee (four professors) will have access to the interview audio tapes and transcripts; I will not share any of this information or names with anyone as per federal government policy governing the conduct of

research. Further, real names will not be used in published reports or during presentations when actual data are cited.

Ideally, the focus groups will involve friends and acquaintances so, in addition to the valuable information that will result from the meeting, this will serve as a good opportunity to visit with friends. Additionally, refreshments will be provided for all attendees. If you are interested in being a part of these very important conversations or are aware of women who are qualified to participate, please respond to me at the email address or telephone number below and include the potential participant's name and phone number or email address. I will happily contact your referrals personally; if you would prefer, also feel free to forward this letter to them directly.

Thank you very much in advance for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
(336) 512-1840  
[dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu)

## APPENDIX D

## Invitation Letter to Referral

Date

Dear

My name is DeAnne Brooks and I'm a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I received your name from \_\_\_\_\_. I am now beginning my final doctoral research project to explore the influences on physical activity behaviors among black women who are former Division I college track and field athletes. I hope this research will provide a better understanding of the special circumstances that black women who are former athletes face when making decisions about the healthy behavior of engaging in physical activity. To do this, I am asking U.S. black/African-American women who were sprinters, hurdlers or jumpers to participate in the study. Participating women will have not competed in track and field for at least two years, are now 25-45 years old, and while competing, were on a partial or full athletics scholarship or participated in the NCAA National Track and Field Championships. \_\_\_\_\_ indicated that you might fit this description.

Participation will include focus group interviews with multiple black women who formerly, were elite sprinters, hurdlers or jumpers for Division I universities and colleges. In a group setting lasting no more than 90 minutes, women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity. Ideally, the groups will involve friends and acquaintances so, in addition to the valuable information that will result from the meeting, this will serve as a good opportunity to visit with friends. All conversations will be tape-recorded so that I don't miss anything during the conversations but, at any time, you have the option to withdraw from the interviews or ask that the tape be stopped while you say something.

My goal is to include women who do not regularly participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity as well as regularly active women. If I can learn to understand those things that influence exercise behavior, I will be able to create programs later that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding for black women who are former athletes.

I personally invite you to participate in this study. Your privacy will be protected and strict confidentiality will be maintained. Outside of your fellow focus group members, only I and my dissertation committee (four professors) will have access to the interview tapes and transcripts; I will not share any of this information or your names with anyone as per federal government policy governing the conduct of research. Further, real names will not be used in published reports or during presentations when individual data are cited.

If you are interested in being a part of these very important conversations, please contact me at the email address or phone number below. Also, I am interested in inviting more women to join the study, preferably women who are friends or acquaintances. If you are aware of additional women who are qualified to participate, please send their names and phone numbers or email addresses to me and I will happily contact them personally. If you would prefer, feel free to forward this letter of invitation to them directly. Thank you.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

(336) 512-1840

[dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu)

## APPENDIX E

## Participation Confirmation

Date

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus groups during the study entitled: “What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?” After receiving responses from you and other women regarding meeting times and places that work best with your schedules, we have decided to meet on DATE at TIME at LOCATION. Also, in preparation for the meeting, please read the enclosed informed consent document and keep a copy for your records. When we meet, I will provide a copy for you to sign and return to me. Feel free to ask for clarification about anything in that document.

Thanks again for agreeing to participate. I look forward to meeting with the group.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

(336) 512-1840

[dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu)

## APPENDIX F

## Informed Consent

## UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

*CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM*

Project Title: What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?

Project Director: DeAnne Brooks, doctoral candidate, Department of Kinesiology, UNCG

Participant's Name:

What is the study about?

This is a research project with the purpose of understanding factors that influence physical activity behaviors in a group of black women who are former high-level track and field athletes.

Why are you asking me?

This study includes U.S. black/ African American women who are former sprinters, hurdlers or jumpers in NCAA Division I track and field. All participants earned some portion of an athletic scholarship or competed in the NCAA National Track and Field Championships. Additionally, participants have not competed on the collegiate level for at least two years, are currently 25-45 years old, and able to meet in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, or Atlanta, GA.

By studying women who fit these criteria, this research will add depth to existing understandings of physical activity behavior. By including the perspectives of adult black women and former elite athletes, this study will help to add balance to physical activity literature in which these perspectives are largely unavailable. Further, it is important to highlight these characteristics in a study group so that we may understand how multiple social experiences influence physical activity behavior.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

Participants in this study will take part in one focus group interview lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. The focus groups will consist of four to eight women who are, preferably, friends or acquaintances. Group interviews will be held in Durham, NC, Charlotte, NC, and Atlanta GA at a time and location convenient to group members. Women will come together to discuss influences on their physical activity. While the researcher (DeAnne Brooks) and an assistant who will take notes will be present, it is important that participants speak freely to each other about their experiences, beliefs, and opinions. As a way to ensure that the researcher's conclusions accurately represent participants' intentions, the researcher will periodically email summaries of main ideas and preliminary analyses to group members for feedback. All participants will be encouraged but not required to respond to these summaries.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Focus group conversations will be recorded on audio tape. However, you have the option to ask that the tapes be stopped at any time. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tapes, your confidentiality for things you say on

tape cannot be totally guaranteed although the researcher will strictly limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by DeAnne Brooks who may be contacted at (336) 512-1840 or [dlbrooks@uncg.edu](mailto:dlbrooks@uncg.edu).

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

Potential benefits of participation in this study include having the opportunity to visit with friends and former teammates; sharing your physical activity stories with others who may be able to relate to your experiences; and, gaining information that will help you and members of your community. You might also gain personal satisfaction from contributing to a new knowledge base in Kinesiology.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

This research may provide a better understanding of the special circumstances that black women who are former athletes face when making decisions about the healthy behavior of physical activity. There are multiple factors that go into one's behavior and, if I can better understand those influences, I might later be able to create programs that minimize barriers while maximizing those things that make physical activity accessible, enjoyable,

and rewarding for this group. Overall, this research will be conducted in a way meant to accurately represent the experiences and perspectives of black women based on their own understandings. Hopefully, then, other women will be able to relate to the findings in a way that will positively influence their own physical activity behaviors and by extension, the health of our society.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There will be no payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Only three people will have access to the interview tapes and transcripts (I and the two professors who are the co-chairs of my doctoral committee). No tapes, transcripts, or names will be shared with anyone who is not a member of your focus group. Pseudonyms will be used in all published reports and presentations. All audio tapes and transcripts will be held in a locked file cabinet for at least three years in the office of one of the professors mentioned above. Any saved electronic data will be password protected. After three years, printed transcripts will be shredded, audio tapes will be destroyed, and electronic data will be deleted. Since this study does involve some electronic correspondence, please be aware that absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished with anything related to this study so no one will be able to see what you have been doing. Also, my recording

assistant will sign a confidentiality agreement.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which have been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read it, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and openly, willingly consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered.

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by DeAnne Brooks.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

## Demographic Questionnaire

*Please complete this demographic survey. It should take approximately 5 minutes to finish. The questions are designed to gain a better understanding of who you are (your name will not be attached to any of your responses in the focus group). Please answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions, feel free to ask the researcher to clarify.*

1. Please write how you self-identify in terms of racial-ethnic heritage

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your current occupation (if you are working)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Level of Education (check all completed)

College/ University Courses

Master's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Doctoral Degree

5. How do you self-identify in terms of socio-economic class?

Lower

Middle

Upper

6. How many years did you compete in track and field at each level?

Youth (elementary/ middle school) \_\_\_\_\_

High school \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Post-collegiate \_\_\_\_\_

7. What were your main track and field events in college?

100m

200m

400m

100mh

400mh

LJ

TJ

HJ

When was your last track and field competition (month and year)?

---

### Warm-Up Activity

*The purpose of the following questions is to have you quietly reflect on your physical activity behaviors in preparation for the focused group discussion.*

Quickly jot down an answer to the question—“What role does physical activity play in your life?”

*Moderate activity causes a slight increase in heart-rate or breathing --examples are walking or light gardening. Vigorous activities are running, aerobics or anything that causes large increases in breathing or heart rate.*

Do you participate in moderate activity?

If yes, how often? (days/week and time/day)

Please list a few of your moderate activities.

Do you participate in vigorous activity?

If yes, how often? (days/week and time/day)

Please list a few of your vigorous activities.

In your opinion, what constitutes adequate physical activity?

APPENDIX H  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction (To be spoken by moderator/ researcher)

Please fill out the demographic questionnaire and return it before leaving today. Don't worry, your names will not be attached to any material. I am running audio recorders but please don't concentrate on those. They're simply in place to make sure that I don't miss anything. Again, your real names will not be connected to what you say on tape nor will the tapes be heard by anyone outside of my dissertation committee.

Thank you all for participating in this study. Today, I'd like for us to have a conversation that will result in a better understanding of the physical activity behaviors of women like you and me; black women between 25 and 45 who are former collegiate track and field athletes. I've invited you to participate so that you may provide me with information that will help to answer the question "What do black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes identify as influencing post-competitive physical activity?" We need more information that comes directly from women like you all so that we may develop programs that are based on real experiences, needs, and, wants. This study will help me to develop that information.

To begin, we're going to have a conversation about things you feel have influenced your post-competitive physical activity behaviors, whatever are, are not, or have been. At this point, do any of you have any questions? OK. Let's begin...

### Focus Group Questions

Here, I have a list of questions but I hope that once we get started, you all will answer these through a flowing conversation. As we talk I want you to maintain the same level of formality or informality that you use when speaking with your friends rather than worrying about me as a researcher. I truly do want to understand your real perspective so, get comfortable, relax, and speak honestly. Also, ideally this will be a focused conversation between you all; speak to and with each other and not only to me.

### Icebreaker

*The purpose of the icebreaker activity is to involve all group members in the conversation and to introduce the topic of discussion.*

We're going to have a focused conversation about the influences on your physical activity behaviors. It's important, then, that we understand what physical activity means to each of us. For this question and the rest, you are the experts. Your opinions and understandings are important, so please speak from your own experience and your own perspective.

- When you hear the phrase “physical activity” what comes to mind?

### General Questions

*These questions are designed to encourage conversation that will lead to the answering of specific questions (listed below).*

- Think back over years since your last collegiate track meet and your physical activity habits during that time. Think about a range...whether you've trained for a marathon or haven't run a step since that last meet.
  - Have your physical activity habits changed over the years?
  - Why did you make these changes?
  - Are you comfortable with these changes?
- Think about your current physical activity habits (again, ranging from consistent activity to minimal activity).
  - On a daily basis, what informs your choices?
  - Can you think of anything in your past that continues to influence your present choices?
  - What are your daily priorities?
- Are there examples in your own experiences of challenges based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, family, values, or general social constraints?

#### Specific Questions

*These questions are based on the physical activity literature. They are designed to gain an understanding of whether the participants agree or disagree with published findings. These questions will be asked in the event that answers do not emerge from general questions (above).*

- Tell me what affect age or generational affiliation has on physical activity.
  - What influences people in your age group to be active/inactive?

- How do these influences affect the 25-45 age group differently than younger or older groups?
- Can you give examples of ways that your social class status affects your physical activity, if at all?
- In what ways do body concerns affect your physical activity, if at all?
- Do you believe that “hair” (style or maintenance) affects your physical activity?
  - How/ why or why not?
- How did your track and field participation influence your current activities, if at all?
- Where do you/have you normally participated in physical activities.
  - When were you most comfortable? Least comfortable?
  - Can you think of reasons why you were so comfortable or uncomfortable in those spaces?
- Do you have a physical activity support system in place?
  - If so, what is it/ who are they?
  - If not, what kind of support would be helpful to you?
- bell hooks said that black women’s neglect of their bodies is a representative of a general lack of care for themselves. She and others suggest that black women are overwhelmed with family and community responsibilities and aren’t left with time or energy to focus on themselves.
  - Would you agree or disagree that your family and community responsibilities prevent you from participating in physical activity?

- Please explain.

### Closing Questions/ Member Checks

These questions are designed to help summarize the focus group conversation.

- At the conclusion of this study, I want to answer the question, “What do black women who are former Division I track and field athletes describe as influencing their post-competitive physical activity?”
  - Based on the influential factors discussed here today, which one(s) should be on the top of the list?
- Wow! The time really went by quickly.
  - Have we missed anything?
  - Is there anything we should have talked about but didn’t have time to cover?
- Right now, I’m going to share what I think were the major themes to come out of our conversation today.
  - Do these match your thoughts?
  - If not, how should I modify these?

### Probing Questions

- When participants seem to change perspective—“Earlier you said...and now you’ve indicated that...These seem to be different from each other. Help me understand how you feel about this issue.” (Krueger R. A., 1998, p. 47)

- When participants offer vague comments—“Tell me more,” “Could you give me an example?” “Please explain, I’m not sure what you mean.” (Krueger R. A., 1998, p. 47)

### Conclusion

Thank you all for participating. I appreciate your honesty and openness and I look forward to sharing our conversation with my dissertation committee. My goal for this study is to gather information that truly represents the perspectives of focus group members. Based on that, I will email you summaries of my results. I ask that you take a few minutes to read the summaries and offer feedback on their accuracy. You can expect two emails.

## APPENDIX I

## Follow-up Letter

Date

Dear

Thank you for participating in the focus groups for my dissertation. You and the other women were a joy to work with and I appreciate your efforts to take the topic seriously. I'm confident that, together, we produced knowledge that will help to provide understandings for issues about which we all should be aware.

I am in the process of reading over and writing about our group discussion. As I proceed through this process, I will send notes out to each of you. I ask that you read the notes and let me know if and when my findings do not match your understanding of the conversations. This process will help to make sure that I accurately represent our conversations and your individual thoughts for people who read about this work.

Thank you. I will be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

DeAnne Brooks

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## APPENDIX J

## Member Check Email Announcement

Hi All,

Once again, thank you for taking time out of your schedules to participate in the focus groups for my doctoral study. The first group was on January 23 and the final group was on March 5. Since that time I've been working with the data you all provided, trying get a real sense of what influences your post-competitive physical activity. Attached you will find my preliminary ideas. As I move forward, I'd like your feedback on whether or not I've captured your perspective in these categories. As your schedule permits within the next week, please take a look and let me know if your voice IS NOT included in the bulleted points.

The chart includes the four major "influences" that surfaced during the focus group discussions: activity environment, social network, embodiment (being aware of how you present yourself and the messages you convey based on your self-presentation), and freedom. Each group had a different dynamic and a different conversation so you may not be familiar with all of the points in each category--but you should find your perspective in each category. If you do not, please tell me so that I can correct my oversight. Also, I am still working with the language/terms of some topic areas. If you have any suggestions about better "titles", please share that insight as well.

Thanks for your continued support and participation!

DeAnne

## Member Check 4:

## WHAT DO BLACK WOMEN WHO WERE DIVISION I TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES DESCRIBE AS INFLUENCING POST-COMPETITIVE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

ACTIVITY ENVIRONMENT—Participants explained specific activity environments in which they are comfortable, motivated, and likely to frequent

Sub-Categories: Group vs. Single activity; Indoor vs. Outdoor activity; Intensity of activity; Competitiveness of environment/activity; Seriousness of others in the space

- Liked the gym/weight room because it offers a good atmosphere of others who are working hard
- Frequent the weight room because it's convenient
- Avoid the weight room because of sub-par equipment; "club" atmosphere; cost for things that can be done for free; boring scenery
- Prefer outdoor activities for scenery; flexibility of schedule; no pressure to train/race
- Most avoid/dis-like the track
- Many describe enjoying classes but few (only one) frequent scheduled classes
- Only two people described being content with physical activities that are moderate-low intensity; others are satisfied only with PA that's intense and challenging
- PA is not a fun activity—other activities are fun—PA is only done as a means to an end (body definition; competition)
- Don't want to be competitive but must avoid the urge by working out alone or with non-athletes; others register for leagues/ races in efforts to meet the competitive urges
- They do not see PA as a masculine activity – some even express a dislike of overly-feminine exercisers and called them "gym bunnies"
- Gender issues did present—hesitation lifting free-weights in an all-male space or purposefully occupying an otherwise all-male space; hesitation jogging in the dark b/c issues of female safety
- For years, only participated in tandf training which was not "fun"—were not exposed to "fun" activities
- Fun PA sometimes described as leisure or social and specifically not PA or working out
- Only one expressed a desire to run competitively again—most described never wanting to train/compete in tandf again
- Only one participant mentioned money as a barrier in decisions about PA—but she does invest in races as a PA motivator
- Others indicate that they could afford to pay for PA but don't enjoy the services that one would pay for/ would rather participate in activities that are free
- At-work PA programs were convenient and utilized

SOCIAL NETWORK – Participants explained how their various relationships influenced when, how, and if they are physically active

Sub-category 1: Family (PA w/ family; family schedule; role modeling PA for family);

Sub-category 2: Friends (role modeling PA for friends; importance of time w/ friends; friends as PA partners)

- Participants differently-defined ample social support. Some reported only being PA when others are present; some reported preferring partners but not necessarily needing them; others prefer

## solitary PA

- Characteristics of PA partners are key; some wanted competitive partners; others wanted non-competitive partners; others prefer non-competitive but challenging partners
- Some prefer to participate with their children
- No suggestions of a desired-but-missing system of social support. Even mothers/wives who were responsible for child care suggest that husbands would support them if they asked for PA support
- Favorability defined by work ethic, competitiveness, talent/ability to complete workout
- Most seemed to know others who are PA but maybe don't reside in close proximity to them
- Active people are still active when they have trouble finding partners
- Only mention of activity role models was in relation to childhood access – as adults they are exposed to a variety of options and role models—don't seem limited by role models
- Providing role-modeling – some participate in PA or provide PA information to others as role models
- Not all are members of couples or traditional families
- Participants with families aren't necessarily differently time-starved than those without family responsibilities
- Few described family time as burdensome and most indicated that they could take time away from the family if they desired to do so – they'd just rather spend time with the
- Identified that their value of PA is not common in the black culture

EMBODIMENT (Representation through self-presentation) –Participants explained how their ideas about self-presentation influence how they wish to look and how physical activity may or may not play a part in achievement of that presentation

Sub-category 1: Hair (professional/corporate persona; socially attractive persona; political persona)

Sub-category 2: Body (athlete persona; healthy persona; high self-esteem/ happy-with-my body persona)

- PA needed/ completed for weight-loss purposes
- demonstrated “track body nostalgia” and PA in efforts to build/maintain that body – or a failure of PA to build/maintain that body
- Participants avoid running because they want to avoid sub-elite performances after once being so successful
- happy with their current bodies or parts of their bodies and a lack of need to be PA since they don't want to achieve a different look
- others' suggest they should be PA b/c they don't look like they used to look
- “thickness” is attractive/comfortable but must include an element of muscularity/tone
- When it comes to PA, participants identify as athletes, not female/male
- Hair hinders PA participation
- Sweaty hair has time, social, professional, and economic consequences
- Importance of making compromises to hairstyles in efforts to participate in PA
- Benefits of natural hairstyles for PA
- Larger social considerations involved in hair

FREEDOM—All participants describe their current PA in terms of flexibility and self-control

Sub-Category 1: Break, burn-out, injury from TandF

Sub-Category 2: “Bootcamp” vs. “Stone Mountain” (translation: being coached vs. one your own pace)

Sub-Category 3: Everyday vs. Whenever I feel vs. If I feel like it at all (includes job/rest balance)

Sub-Category 4: PA for health

- Most participants to an extended break from PA following their competitive seasons – some continued for a few months out of habit but eventually took off as well
- The breaks lasted from 6 months to 5 years and were a result of
  - Need to recover from injury
  - Finally free to rest/relax/ not go to practice
  - No value in PA for health
  - No desire to run but no idea what else to do
- Most people took breaks with intentions of returning to PA; others had not intentions to return but later “fell” into PA
- Many are cyclic PA participants – going from 100% (PA 3-5 days/week) to 0% (doing nothing for 3 months)
- Women want to be healthy—in some cases PA is seen as a contributing factor to health; in other cases PA routines and all involved in making them happen are seen as being contradictory to health (stress-producing; injury provoking)
- PA is seen as a stress-relieving activity and may done in times of high stress and not done in times of low stress
- PA is something that results in “feeling good” —while the good feeling is enough to make some commit, it isn’t enough to make others stick with regular routines
- Competing priorities—other things are more interesting/more important/more fun than PA
- Some just say they have to be PA—are consistently active and prioritize it in their lives
- Those who are regularly active mention the importance of scheduling time to be PA
- Some do it sporadically as time comes available
- Some have free time but choose to do other things during that time—common reference to the priority that tandf had during college and the abundant free time that has accompanied their retirement from collegiate sport
- Only one participant suggested that her job is physically laborious and that she feels physically tired after work. Others indicate being tired after work but not because of spent physical labor
- Others prefer to use remaining energy on other after-work activities
- Others do participate in PA after work
- Schedules seem quite important – scheduled PA time following work helps to keep the routine
- PA is seasonal – more common in the warm months
- Rain, too hot, too cold, too dark are all barriers

## APPENDIX K

### From Description of Findings to Analytic Arguments

The process of moving from the data to the analysis was to organize, sort, code, and pattern data into a story or interpretation that responded to the question that guided the study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This process of data analysis began during the first focus group. As participants responded to my questions and interacted with one another, I took note of statements that appeared frequently, as well as those that participants described extensively, intensely, or with great specificity. These statements of experiences and perspectives served as the big ideas around which findings and themes were developed.

After each focus group was completed and transcribed, I read and re-read the transcripts. After gaining a sense of the data, I used short phrases to label, sort, and organize participants' statements according to subject matter. At this item level of analysis, I used short phrases to identify the numerous factors participants described as influencing physical activity. These phrases were shortened into simple, descriptive codes. Examples included "body shape" to identify any statement in which participants mentioned an influence of body shape on their post-competitive physical activity. "Break/burnout/injury" was another example of a code used during this stage of analysis. It was descriptive of any statements that referred to participants taking breaks following competition. Also, since many of those statements also referred to burnout and or injury, I combined the code—I was not sure how the analysis would proceed or how these different subjects would fit together but I did realize that they seemed connected through

participants' statements. I pasted all like-coded items in one Word document, titled "Original Codes". At this stage, some statements had multiple codes and, therefore, appeared on several Word documents. After placing all like-coded items into Word documents, I labeled each statement and sorted documents according to the different ways in which participants spoke about the subjects. For instance, the information labeled "body shape" was sorted according to statements regarding "weight-loss," "track body nostalgia," "happy weight/body," and "other's comments/ expectations." The information coded "break/burnout/ injury" was sorted according to statements regarding "banked PA," "freedom from track," "what now?" and "consistently inconsistent." I also sorted "outliers." comments that did not neatly fit under the other labels. These newly-sorted Word documents were titled, "Reorganized Codes."

The next step in this process of analysis involved further sorting the coded items and comparing them with existing findings in which I compared my preliminary findings with existing literature on black women and physical activity. After reading and re-reading the Reorganized Codes, I created a chart to compare my codes with the facilitators and barriers identified in the existing physical activity literature. This chart also allowed me to summarize participants' statements and perspectives as a step toward discovering patterns. For instance, in the kinesiology literature, researchers write that women of color have a standard of beauty that may discourage some black women from being physically active because they desire curvy figures. My participants provided 13 pages of quotes regarding body size but quotes did not mimic existing findings. In the chart, I noted ways that they described this subject, for instance, "PA needed/completed

for weight-loss purposes” and “demonstrated track body nostalgia and PA in efforts to build/maintain that body”. Break, burnout, injury, was not mentioned in the existing kinesiology literature regarding black women. This was noted on the chart as well as ways participants spoke about this subject. Examples were, “most participants took an extended break from PA following their competitive season” and “most people took breaks with intentions to return to PA; others had no intentions to return but later fell into PA”. This step helped to clarify definitions of each coded category of factors that influence post-competitive physical activity in this group.

After the Original Codes and Reorganized Codes were organized, placed into Word documents, and compared to existing facilitators and barriers in the chart, all of these documents were re-read with a goal of discovering patterns of information. “Patterns consist of groups of items that fit together, express a particular theme, or constitute a predictable and consistent set of behaviors (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 14).” This is where the items were organized and associated with other items to form “findings”. After reading the bulleted descriptions of the reorganized categories, I recorded four patterns of descriptions—participant comments relating to “activity environment”, “social networks”, “embodiment”, and “freedom”. Several of the reorganized codes were combined under each of these four pattern titles. For instance, the body information went under embodiment as well as information from another category, “hair”. The break/burnout/injury information was placed in the freedom category along with “pa defined”, “value physical activity”, “work”, “track and field”, “weather”, and “time in general”.

These patterns were organized into a chart with the pattern title and sub-categories and emailed to participants for a member check. After re-reading these categories and writing notes about the patterns, I decided to rename the categories Physical Activity Histories, Social Networks, Embodiment, and Freedom. After further analysis, I decided that the information contained in the freedom section would fit more neatly in the other categories, then renamed Track and Field Familiarities, Social Networks, and Self-Presentation Concerns to better fit with my definitions of each category.

The rest of the analysis process involved assembling the data into an “overall picture” of the factors that influence post-competitive physical activity of black women who were Division I elite track and field athletes. In other words, I wanted to move beyond organizing and describing what participants identified as influencing their post-competitive physical activity to articulating the “meaning” of those findings (Flick & Foster, 2008). This process of analysis included making arguments and assertions based on a blend of literal and interpretive readings of data with the goals of presenting relationships among the findings, connecting the findings to larger social dynamics, and exploring implications of the findings (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). In order to accomplish this goal, I relied on my most recent area of academic concentration, the social and cultural analysis of sport and exercise. My interpretation was also influenced by readings in feminisms, womanisms, and social justice. Additionally, my understandings and critiques of past studies of black woman and physical activity as well as my various lived experience as a black woman, athlete, and sport and exercise professional informed this level of analysis and development of themes. Taken together,

my academic, professional, and social background informed the interpretation of findings in a way that resulted in themes of the Mis-education of the Athlete, Contours of Adult Lives, and Factors of Difference. Overall, in this final step of analysis, I attempted to express the meaning of physical activity in the lives of participants while presenting hypotheses that would ultimately increase physical activity participation in this group.