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This thesis examines the history of Black women and discusses what it has meant and continues to mean to be a Black female athlete. It challenges stereotypes that have defined Black women since slavery and provides how these stigmas have influenced the lived experiences of Black women. Finally, it proposes future research that will supplement existing literature and enlighten others on the experience of the Black female athlete. The negative treatment of Black female athletes was more prevalent in the opinions of the general public as well as the media. Although, Black female athletes have experienced this kind of treatment, they have made strides to rewrite their own stories as well as reclaim their own personhood through various avenues.

WHERE DO WE FIT IN: THE NARRATIVE OF  
THE BLACK FEMALE ATHLETE

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LABELING THEORY .....	3
III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	9
Stereotypes of Race and Gender in Sport .....	9
Portrayal of Black Women.....	10
The Black Female Athlete Emerges .....	16
IV. OUTLINE OF PROCEDURES .....	25
Methods.....	25
Limitations.....	30
Results.....	31
V. CONCLUSION.....	35
Autoethnographic Contribution .....	40
REFERENCES .....	47
APPENDIX A. RAW DATA .....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Time Period Biographies and Auto Biographies .....	26
Table 2. Race Legacy Descriptors, Treatment Outcomes and Personhood Reclamation .....	27
Table 3. Frequency Table for Race Legacy Descriptors.....	32
Table 4. Frequency Table for Treatment Outcomes .....	33
Table 5. Frequency Table for Personhood Reclamation.....	33
Table 6. Overall Frequency Table .....	34

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

One afternoon, following a tough practice as a freshman collegiate athlete, I was walking with my teammates to the main dining hall in the middle of campus. Alongside the dining hall was a cemented stone wall where all of the “cool kids” congregated. The “cool kids” included the football players, the basketball players, the Black Greeks and those who were trying to be well-known on campus. Since summer was winding down, it was still fairly hot outside. We had already started training for the season and were dressed in t-shirts, spandex shorts and spandex tights. As we approached “The Wall,” as everyone called it, we heard a young Black guy say “here come the Track hos”. Immediately I was offended. But it troubled me more to know specifically why I was being judged in that manner. None of these people knew who I was. I had only gotten to know my roommate and some of the other girls on the team since arriving at the university. I wondered if we had been regular students would he have said “here comes the hos?” and I wondered if we were White would we have been called that at all. Not knowing the specific history of the Black female athlete, I assumed it was because we were Black, female, were wearing spandex and that he secretly wanted to be with one of us.

Although there is a considerable amount of biographical information on *White female athletes* and *Black male athletes*, the history of the Black female athlete is quite fragmented. Ignoring other pieces of their identity, society has insignificantly pulled the experiences of Black female athletes into one of these categories. Therefore, the history of Black sports does not often include history of Black female athletes. In this project, I will explore specific experiences of Black women as athletes. Using labeling theory as a lens, I will carefully comb through the existing literature on Black women and Black female athletes and address the following research questions: Who gets to narrate the story of the Black female athlete? How have Black female athletes today fashioned their own self-narratives? The purpose of this research is to explore racial and gender construction from outside agents (implicit in who gets to narrate the Black female athlete story), discover if there are any channeling of opportunities (implicit in treatment outcomes) and uncover what is the secondary response (implicit in Black female athletes' responses to being stereotyped and treated in differing ways).

## CHAPTER II

### LABELING THEORY

In 1963 Howard Becker introduces labeling theory in his book The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. In developing his theory, Becker had the influences of Frank Tannenbaum (1938), Edwin Lemert (1951), and Kai Erikson (1962) that also used a similar model known as “social reaction approach” and “social interaction approach.” He states that the central fact about deviance is that it is created by society. Social groups invent deviance by creating the rules for infractions that constitute deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as “outsiders” (Becker, 1963). This tells us that the ability to label a person’s behavior as deviant derives from the differences in power certain groups exercise in society. Howard Becker introduces a new perspective of viewing labeling where he focuses on the deviant or the system as the problem. Becker proposes that:

Deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’. The deviant is one whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label (Becker, 1963, p. 9).

His focus is on how the “outsider” is labeled deviant, not because of the act, but because of the reaction that defines them as deviant (Becker, 1963). Deviance is therefore

viewed as relative depending upon who commits it, who sees it and what response is given. According to Becker, the occurrence of labeling depends on three factors. Labeling depends on the time when the act is committed, it depends on who the person is committing the crime as well as who is being victimized. Finally, it depends on what the consequences are for the act committed. The nature of the act and how others respond determine whether or not the act is labeled as deviant.

Since deviance is not based on the behavior itself, but the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond, Becker suggests that there should be a distinction between rule-breaking and deviance (1963). Deviance can be seen as rule breaking behavior that is labeled by people in positions of power. This rule breaking behavior remains constant while the labeling behavior varies. For example, speeding is considered rule breaking behavior, but labeling that behavior as deviant and that individual as a criminal is based on the person in power.

Rules are the reflection of certain social norms held by the majority of a society. When these rules are enforced, they are applied differently to promote certain favorable consequences for those who apply the label allowing them to label rule-breaking behavior as deviant depending on the degree of people's reaction over time (Becker, 1963). Becker uses "outsider" to describe a labeled rule-breaker or deviant that accepts the label attached to them and views them as different from 'mainstream' society. Becker focuses on those in positions of power and authority that make and enforce the rules. Rules are created by a moral entrepreneur, or a person taking initiative to crusade for a rule that

would right a societal evil. Their motive may be to elevate the social status of those members of society below them (1963).

The central questions of labeling theory address how individuals become labeled as deviant, how the act came to be defined as deviant, and what are the consequences for that labeled person? It is important to understand when the use of labels are most likely to increase as well as who is most likely to be stigmatized. The use of labels increases within society when there are tolerance issues and when there is social distance between the labeler and the labeled. Individuals who deviate from the established social norms are most likely to be labeled. Whether they are improving their social status or choosing to ignore the laws of the land, people who exhibit behaviors that seem deviant within society are most likely to be labeled.

Certain groups of people are more likely to be labeled deviant than others. In particular, groups that do not have political power, individuals seen as a threat to power and those of low social status are more likely to be labeled. In Black Feminist Thought (1990), Patricia Hill Collins speaks to particular binaries that affect the way that people in society view one another (i.e. White/Black, Male/Female, and Fact/Opinion). People who are on the opposite ends of these binaries are more likely to be labeled as well.

Labeling theory explains the way that Black women and athletes are viewed by society. In particular, Becker acknowledges that the experience of being caught in the act of “nonconformity” is significant and the reaction that others impart on the individual becomes the main focus. Therefore, regardless of who that individual was before they

were “caught,” they have undergone a new identity that is associated with a label. This is known as their master status. Labeled deviants tend to become ostracized from the community and from participation in more conventional groups. With little options left, this individual may enter other deviant groups to gain support (Orcutt, 1983).

Labels are created through social context, whereas social constructs are based on cultural symbols. Identification with a particular group or deviant attribute can lead to the stigmatizing and isolating of that group and the channeling of opportunities for them as well. Deviance can become the master status or constant label of an individual. When people are perceived as deviant, this can become their dominant characteristic by which they and others define themselves. Labeling theory is simply defined in a textbook, as “the response of others that defines (labels) the behavior as deviant and impacts further deviance” (Stolley, 2005, p. 118). It also contributes to how people see and identify themselves. It can impact the way that others see the person who committed the behavior as well as the labeled person’s behaviors and self-perceptions (Stolley, 2005). A person cannot label themselves as deviant; the labeling has to come from another person. Once labeled as deviant, that label becomes the main identifier of that person. Individuals are then left with the choice to internalize or oppose these labels. Their responses lead to various outcome behaviors.

Labeling theory’s association with stereotyping considers the tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant by cultural norms. Black women and Black female athletes have been labeled as deviant creatures since the

establishment of this nation. This stigma has been persistent in following these women for centuries. Black woman and Black female athletes have been labeled as “masculine,” “hypersexualized,” “lesbian,” “loud and aggressive,” and “uncontrollable” (Collins, 2004).

A deviant is a person whose activities are not in line with the group (Erikson, 1963). If Black women have constantly been taught that they do not fit in with dominant culture, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. With race as an initial factor, Black women have never matched with what White society deems acceptable. As shown in the media, Black female athletes have conformed to the stereotypes that have been attributed to them. An illustration of this is the backlash that Venus and Serena Williams endured after entering into the tennis world. Since their look was different from what society was accustomed to seeing in the sport (White, long-legged, slim, middle class), they received negative reactions and unnecessary criticism. As they continue to succeed in the sport, they are targeted for every incident that substantiates these labels. This is seen in other Black athletes as well.

There are two types of deviance, primary and secondary (Tannenbaum, 1938; Lemert, 1951). Primary deviance refers to personal attributes, characteristics, behaviors, etc. that somehow attract attention from observers who then define, interpret, and channel opportunities for those they define as deviant. The individual in turn “internalizes” labels and responds by altering their behavior as a defense mechanism, accommodation, or an attempt at transcendence, which could be further viewed as deviance. This is known as

secondary deviance. For example, Black skin is considered as primary deviance because it is a characteristic that gives observers the chance to label it as deviance. Individuals who have internalized these labels and show that they are proud, by speaking out against racism are engaging in secondary deviance.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Stereotypes of Race and Gender in Sport**

“Although her skin and full figure were historically symbols of beauty, she was placed in the nonhuman category by racist power holders who, nonetheless, desired her and used her for her sexual entertainment” (Porter, 2001, p.77). Porter explains in this quote that although the Black female body was admired throughout history, it soon became an object of erotic exploitation for the enjoyment of slave owners. These stereotypes about gender and race crafted by dominant society have impacted the experiences of athletes, African American women in particular. Research has shown that White men found Black female athletes’ bodies to be of more interest than their talent. More attention was given to their deemed-masculine bodies than their capacity as exceptional athletes (Cooky et al., 2000; Schultz, 2005). This is illustrated in a 2009 ESPN: *The Magazine* piece entitled *The Selling of Candace Parker*, where the author purposely ignores the contributions of women’s sports but focuses instead on the universal issues implanted in American sports culture. The article begins with:

Candace Parker is beautiful. Breathtaking, really, with flawless skin, endless legs and a C cup she is proud of but never flaunts.....She is also the best at what she does, a record-setter, a rule breaker, a redefiner (Glock, 2009, p.1)

Without knowing who Candace Parker is, one would assume that her occupation was something more risqué. Candace Parker is a WNBA star who plays for the Los Angeles Sparks during the season and competes with the Euroleague's UMMC Ekaterinburg club in Russia during the off-season. In this piece, Candace is objectified and her image is diminished to her sexual assets. This contributes to the argument that Black female athletes are viewed as sexual beings with their talent going unnoticed. After being approached about the references to her body, ESPN: *The Magazine* brushed off the accusations of sexism, acknowledging the intended White male audience of the magazine.

### **Portrayal of Black Women**

During American slavery, women in general were viewed with mistrust, but when compared to Black women, White women were considered nobler. (Bennett and Yarborough, 2000). White women were illustrated as pure and virtuous, while Black women were viewed as deviant. The creation of this racial binary caused Black women to become the inferior race and gender; oppressed by all groups of people, with the inability to oppress any other group (hooks, 1981). Along with the hardship of accepting that they have no power, Black women have been exploited because of it. Black women were not only slaves, but were forced into sexual relationships with their White slave masters. These women were exhausted for the pleasure and profit of their masters (Roberts, 1997). They were reprimanded for fighting back and attempting to defend themselves and were chastised by their masters and their mistresses.

Hartmann expresses that “sport is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive racial force, an avenue of racial progress and an arena of racial harmony” (2002, p. 409). He continues to observe that sports can “deflect attention away from, obscure, or minimize the more general problems of racial inequalities and racism” (2002, p. 409). Since the start of American civilization, Black women have been victims of White male hegemony. This continues to be an issue today amongst Black female athletes. Black women were and are currently at the bottom of the power spectrum (hooks, 1981). They have the lowest status and receive the worst treatment of any group in the United States. American power structures benefit White men. These structures were created for White males and their supremacy. Therefore, White men hold the most institutional power to oppress any group of people. There is often a power struggle between Black men and White women, where Black men can oppress White and Black women because of gender; while White women can be the oppressors of Black men and women because of their race.

Historically African Americans have been described as having a negative self-image resulting from their inferior status in the United States. In Jean Grambs’s (1965) early work on Negro self-concept, she explains why African Americans perceive themselves as inferior and have negative self-images. She states, “The self-concept of the Negro is contaminated by the central fact that it is based on a color caste complex” (1965, p. 13). “The self-esteem of the Negro is damaged by the overwhelming fact that the world he lives in says “White is right, Black is bad” (1965, p. 15). Grambs’s work is supported by Mamie and Kenneth Clark’s classic doll study. Clark and Clark conducted

studies with African American preschool-aged children and used dolls as a stimulus (1939). These children were asked to identify the doll that they would like to play with, the doll that was the prettiest, the doll that was the smartest, and the doll that most looked like them. The children were more likely to select the white doll as the one they would most like to play with and the one that was the prettiest. This finding concludes that after slavery, the historical context of separation and racism has affected the self-esteem and racial identity of Black children.

Contrary to the Clark doll study, Patterson (2004) examined the issue of African American women's self-esteem from a Black feminist perspective that acknowledged the existence of multiple oppressions in Black women's lives. The findings of this longitudinal study showed that African American women maintained high levels of self-esteem over a 14-year period. The most consistent predictors of self-esteem were the successful care of family as well as family and friendship support networks. These findings also indicated that for Black women, the concept of self-esteem was fundamentally community based and that these women were able to thrive in the face of a predominantly racist culture by internalizing community lessons of self-reliance, social support, pride, respect, and optimism (Patterson, 2004). This study contributes to the growing reclamation of self-esteem and personhood for Black women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

White male hegemony affects African Americans so profoundly that they find it difficult to embrace their "blackness". "The perpetuation of skin color and stratification in communities of color can be attributed to the legacy of colonialism, racial oppression

during slavery, legalized discrimination in the Jim Crow era, and de facto segregation in the post-civil rights era” (Herring, 2004, p.1-2). These factors have taught society that White is associated with all things good and Black is attributed to all things negative. The lighter a person’s complexion, the more opportunities they are given and the nicer, the prettier and the smarter they are perceived to be (Belgrave and Allison, 2010). The darker a person’s complexion is, the less appealing that person looks. Individuals with darker skin are also said to have distasteful personalities. Darker skinned Black women are said to be loud, rude and unintelligent (Belgrave and Allison, 2010). This issue is known as “colorism”. Colorism is the preference of lighter complexions over darker complexions. This idea has trickled down from the racist color caste system during slavery to a form of intra-racial prejudice within the Black community. This preference for lighter skin has become a form of intra-racial violence and has affected African American athletes as well, especially women.

The media has negatively impacted the self-identity of African Americans as well as attributed to the negative portrayal of them through stereotypes. These stereotypes and other damaging contemporary images include African Americans as flawless entertainers and athletes, while others are delinquents, criminals, devoted sidekicks and those who need saving by white counterparts (Stephens and Phillips, 2005). Specifically Black women are portrayed in a negative light in hip hop music videos, reality shows and other media broadcasts. These women take on eight sexual scripts that can be seen in hip-hop videos and on television. They are the Diva, the Gold Digger, the Freak, the Dyke, the

Gangster's Bitch, the Sister Savior, the Earth Mother, and the Baby Mama (Stephens and Phillips, 2005).

These racially derogatory scripts not only continue to promote Black women as hyper-sexual and dehumanized but depict them as “welfare queens”, “pornographic video stars” or simply “bad Black girls” (Richardson, 2007). Defining Black womanhood to the public's image of her as a manipulative, angry, careless, sexually available object neglects the history and lived experiences of the Black woman. Exposure to these messages may lead Black women to internalize them. Also, these negative stereotypes cause people to pass judgment about Black women and even target them for deviance.

This mentality has been internalized by the sports world as well. The Black body has been deemed as “inherently different from other bodies” (Douglas, 2002, p. 4). The Black female body has been representative of a symbol of sexuality and has been lusted over, despised, and raped. Since the early 19th century, narratives about Black women circulated throughout Western societies and have been transformed within public discourse. The characteristics unique to Black women were deemed as foreign and unnatural during the 1800s. “The lusciousness of her full lips, the voluptuousness of her full figure, the richness of her dark eyes, and the delightful texture of her hair were purposely made ‘ugly’ by patriarchal white male society,” (Porter, 2001, p. 19).

One of the most prominent examples of the representation of the Black female body in early popular culture is Sarah Baartman. Sarah Baartman, also known as Saartjie Baartman, or the Black Hottentot Venus was a South African Khoisan woman who was

put on display from 1810 to 1815 throughout France and England. She was taken by Dutch settlers and lured to Europe on the promise that she would earn a significant amount of money by exhibiting herself. Reports say that visitors would pay two shillings to enter and view her and she was only given half the admission fee (Master, 2004).

Baartman became a spectacle for her large buttocks (a condition known as steatopygia), large breasts and enlarged labia minora. Baartman was on display for eight months at a time over the course of five years. After dying of syphilis and alcohol poisoning at the age of twenty-six, Baartman's objectification ceased. Her reproductive organs were preserved and her postmortem body was dissected for scientific research. Until the 1970s, the Musée de l'Homme in Paris exhibited a cast of her body. In April 2002, all of Baartman's remains were shipped back to South Africa and laid to rest. Baartman is a clear depiction of how White society viewed the Black female body as erotic and fleshly.

In society today, Black women continuously take risky steps to measure up to the "standard of beauty" that doesn't exist for them. Black women apply chemical processes to their hair to correct the texture and permanently straighten it as a standard of beauty. Some Black women have gone as far as bleaching their skin to create a lighter complexion as well. While some Black women await society's approval of their appearance, others continue to alter their appearances and take chances that they do not always recover from (BBC, 2002; Master, 2004). Some Black women feel as though they have to engage in apologetic behaviors to be accepted as a Black female athlete.

Apologetic behaviors occur when female athletes competing in various sports choose specific social responses to deal with societal pressures of femininity. These responses include choosing a social life, a competitive life and having a balance. When having a balance is the response, athletes unconsciously feel pressured to portray a very feminine side outside of their sport, while competing with a more masculine role. This historical correlation directly relates to the way that Black female athletes have been regarded in the United States. Minority women, specifically Blacks, are and have been deemed as unfeminine by society (Roth and Basow, 2004). These women never had the chance to conform to White beauty or to be feminine. For example, Serena Williams is always being negatively attacked for her aggression and how strong she is as tennis athlete. People consider her style of play as very masculine and attribute her body type to that of a male competitor compared to the women she competes against. Although, outside of tennis Serena does modeling, she's on vogue magazine covers and she lives a very feminine lifestyle. This is not because she feels like she has to uphold this image of really being a woman, it's because that is a part of her character. Serena and other Black female athletes create their own image of beauty.

### **The Black Female Athlete Emerges**

Under Title IX legislation, the development of economic opportunities and female participation in youth sports emerged. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§1681-88 states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to

discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Office of Civil Rights, 1980). Title IX was implemented to eliminate gender-based discrimination in educational programs including public and private colleges and universities, high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in the United States. Title IX is significant to my research because it gave women and girls an equal opportunity to play sports through the mandating of equal treatment of men and women by schools when providing access to sports, scholarships, and funding for sports programs.

After opening up athletics to girls, scholars argue that Title IX has not opened many doors for Black women and that the benefits for White women have exceeded those of women of color (Martin, 2015). Instead, Title IX has become more about economics and tradition (Creedon, 1994). Black women lacked access to the money to afford “real female sports”, or female-deemed sports like gymnastics, figure skating and tennis, and thus participated in basketball and track and field. There is a clear socioeconomic demographic difference in the types of sports people participate in. Individuals in lower socioeconomic classes participate in sports that do not cost a great deal of money to participate in, track and field and basketball in particular. Others of higher socioeconomic demographics can afford to participate in sports that cost more (i.e. training, equipment, coaches).

Some sports tend to be more or less dominated by specific racial groups. This was also due to the history of family participation in these sports as well. Considering that

middle and lower class statuses are comprised of African Americans, they are more likely to participate in less expensive sports. When there is African American overlap in the more expensive sports, minority issues arise for these athletes. For example, for those Black women who participated in “real female sports”, they had difficulty being social as a single minority. Sometimes these athletes would quit because of their sense of isolation (Withycombe, 2011).

Entry into basketball and track and field offered a bridge for Black women into the world of athletics. Black female athletes were not viewed as “real” women by the dominant White culture because they participated in these more “masculine” sports (Miller, 2004). Moreover, with the standard of femininity defined as being White, educated and middle-class, Black women were not considered women. Some may view this as an advantage for Black female athletes. Black female athletes did not experience the social stigma and role conflict that heavily affected White female athletes. Black female athletes had more freedom in sporting activities and received more recognition for their sporting accomplishments than her White counterparts. This recognition vaguely shows that “the Black female could be strong and achieve in sport and still not deny her womanness” (Hart, 1979). Although the Black female body was seen as muscular and athletic, attributes that are historically assigned to men, their body types represent a new form of femininity. Though they were invisible in society, Black female athletes became visible in the Black community and gained support and encouragement from these environments.

Regardless of the support they received from the Black community, Black female athletes remained disconnected to the image of “female athletes” due to their lack of participation in “real” female sports. Black female athletes’ presence in any sports is not as important to hegemonic gender definitions because those definitions operate through White imagination. The omitting of the Black female athlete from the woman athlete category stems from the characteristics of “Blackness” being directly associated to the masculinity of Black male athlete. Since Black women have been denied femininity and womanhood, the process of their becoming sexy athletes results in their identification with Whiteness. “Representations of Black female athletes in mass media replicate and contest power relations of race, gender, class and sexuality” (Collins, 2004). Black female athletes have had myriad stereotypes and stigmas attached to their identification. For example, Black female athletes offer a range of images that collectively challenge representations of the “bitch”. In particular, they are labeled as being aggressive, beastly hypersexual and lesbian.

Jennifer Lansbury, author of *A Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth-Century America*, examines the experiences of six Black female athletes who competed competitively from the 1930s to the 1990s. Using race and gender as a lens, she analyzes the lived experiences, scholarship, and sports contribution of these women. Placing each woman in a societal context, she describes their contribution to sports as well as the progression of women and their struggles with femininity and sexuality. All six of these women were shown to have used sports to break gender and/or racial barriers

that challenged them within their lifetime. These challenges have carried over into the contemporary lives of Black female athletes.

In a 2011 article, “Intersecting Selves: African American Female Athletes’ Experiences of Sport,” Jenny Lind Withycombe interviews seven Black female athletes from a Division I University and gains their perspective of what it is like to be a Black female athlete. She also interviews a West Indian female athlete whose self-proclaimed experiences are similar to African American. Withycombe categorizes the findings from her qualitative interviews into two groups, racial stereotypes and gendered stereotypes. The gendered stereotypes imply that there was empowerment and disempowerment in the experiences of these women as Black athletes. One of the girls stated:

I feel like now [media] is very empowering, whereas like...I can just remember growing up...some images you would see of African American Women were not so.....I feel like a lot of African American Women are very conscious of what they do and how they portray themselves because it can be easily portrayed differently in the media. (Nailah)

This participant voices the opinion that a Black female athlete must remain cautious of her image and the way that she portrays herself. Specifically, since the media has the ability to make or break Black women, it is up to these women to portray themselves in a manner that is acceptable and does not subscribe to the stereotypes that consuming their past and present lived experiences. This careful way of living illustrates the regression that has been made in attempts to combat stereotypes.

Withycombe’s findings show that Black female athletes’ experiences have differed from that of their White counterparts. Black female athletes tended to be

observed as only being present at the university that they attended because they are good at their sports (Withycombe, 2011). Also, if a Black female athlete were a part of a sporting team that was predominantly White, as the Black girl, she was assumed to excel at the sport (Withycombe, 2011).

Other findings stated that Black female athletes' bodies tended to be of more interest than their talent. More attention is given to their hypersexualized grotesque and pornographically erotic bodies than their capacity as exceptional athletes (Collins, 2004). Black female athletes have been perceived as unintelligent academically and athletically. This reinforces the stereotype that Black female athletes have to be trained and that without significant help these individuals would have trouble succeeding (Douglas, 2002; Schultz 2005). In contrast, Black female athletes have also been perceived as "natural" athletes (aggressive, fast, etc.) and having more "masculine" and "animalistic" traits. While White women athletes are praised for their hard work, Black women have been discredited for their hard work in their sport. This lack of recognition only leads to the assumption that White athletes have more experience (Collins, 2004).

These findings can be affirmed through the April 4, 2007 conversation following the women's basketball championship game between Rutgers University and the University of Tennessee, where Don Imus took to the air and ridiculed the women of Rutgers University by referring to them as "nappy-head-hoes". Others who were involved in the conversation were Charles McCord, Don's sidekick on the show, McGuirk the executive producer, and Rosenberg who was on the phone with them at the time.

IMUS: So, I watched the basketball game last night between -- a little bit of Rutgers and Tennessee, the women's final.

ROSENBERG: Yeah, Tennessee won last night -- seventh championship for [Tennessee coach] Pat Summitt, I-Man. They beat Rutgers by 13 points.

IMUS: That's some rough girls from Rutgers. Man, they got tattoos and --

McGUIRK: **Some hard-core hos.**

IMUS: **That's some nappy-headed hos there.** I'm gonna tell you that now, man, that's some -- woo. And the girls from Tennessee, they all look cute, you know, so, like -- kinda like -- I don't know.

McGUIRK: A Spike Lee thing.

IMUS: Yeah.

McGUIRK: **The Jigaboos vs. the Wannabes -- that movie that he had.**

IMUS: Yeah, it was a tough --

McCORD: *Do The Right Thing.*

McGUIRK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

IMUS: I don't know if I'd have wanted to beat Rutgers or not, but they did, right?

ROSENBERG: It was a tough watch. **The more I look at Rutgers, they look exactly like the Toronto Raptors.**

IMUS: Well, I guess, yeah.

RUFFINO: Only tougher.

McGUIRK: The [Memphis] Grizzlies would be more appropriate (Kesler, 2007, p.1).

Other findings show that Black female athletes are perceived as aggressive and loud. This finding also bolsters the stigma that Black women are unable to show emotion

without being seen as the stereotypical “angry black woman” or “bitch” (Collins, 2004). An example of this is the 2011 U.S. Open finals, where Serena Williams struck what appeared to be a game-changing winning ball, after enduring a challenging match, and yelled in an effort to pump herself up. Since the point was not over, the umpire ruled that her yell violated a rule prohibiting players from distracting their opponent. This caused Williams to lose a point and the game as well. Upset about the call, Williams challenged the call as well as the umpire. After this incident she endured countless labels, from “childish and petulant” to “a stereotypical Ugly American.”

Research has shown that racial and gendered stereotypes have affected the lived experiences of Black female athletes and shown how these stigmas have continued to influence treatment for these women today. It acknowledges that there is an abundant amount of research on the Black woman, with little on her as an athlete. The Black female body has been made an object of ridicule while her mind has been broken to believe that she is inferior in race and gender. The information on Black female athletes shows the stereotypes and stigmas against their performance on the court and existence off court. Although current research has shown steps toward Black women regaining mental strength and self-esteem, this research does not go into depth about how these women have internalized their past treatment, responded to social narratives and how they have rewritten their own narratives. Labeling theory explains that deviance is determined by the interpretation of others and given consequences accordingly; therefore if the perspective of others toward the Black female athlete changes, the label should change as well. Meanwhile, if the labels of deviance persist, Black female athletes will

continue to respond through secondary responses. In my research, I plan to address these concepts.

In doing so, my research will contribute an authentic account of Black athletic womanhood, from Black female athletes who have endured experiences of various time periods. My research will fill in the gaps of literature that do not explain what it means and how it feels to be a Black female athlete in America. Finally, I want to contribute another way of thinking about Black women as athletes.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **OUTLINE OF PROCEDURES**

#### **Methods**

To conduct this research, I used a content analysis. Content analysis provides a technique to uncover frequency counts pertaining to themes that may be imbedded in manuscripts that detail life course experiences. I selected seven case studies that describe the lived experiences of Black female athletes. These sources are listed in Table 1. Using the time periods of Post-Slavery (1900-1940), Civil Rights era (1941-1970) and Contemporary (1971- present), these studies addressed three different themes. Table 2 details the three themes: (1) Race Legacy Descriptors; (2) Treatment Outcomes; and (3) Personhood Reclamation.

I created codes for each theme to better organize my data. These codes are labels that were be used to indicate stereotypes, treatment and behaviors in the Black female athlete experience. Race legacy descriptors were naturally coded based on race specific labeling. These variables are labels that have been specifically associated with Black women and the stereotypes they have acquired over time. To develop codes for Treatment Outcomes, I used four common areas of opinion where Black female athletes are presented before an audience. These codes included public opinion, media, social

media and sports competition. Public opinion refers to how people treat Black female athletes on a daily basis through casual conversation. Other areas of opinion included how Black female athletes are regarded in the media and social media. I wanted to make these two separate categories because the media has limitations that social media does not. People are able to voice their opinions without a filter through a social media outlet, while there may be more restrictions for the general media. Finally, sports competition places these athletes close to their audience and this treatment may be different due to close proximity. The codes for Reclaiming Personhood were derived from the various different forms of retaliation of Black female athletes, including internal changes and external behaviors. These codes represented secondary deviance responses against stereotypes, the rewriting of stories told about them, regaining mental and emotional strength and redefining who they are as Black female athletes.

**Table 1. Time Period Biographies and Auto Biographies**

Title	Author	Source	Time Period/Year
<i>Theme 1</i>			
Queen of the Courts: How Ora Washington Helped Philly Forget the Depression	Steven J. Niven	Biography	1900-1940
Wilma Rudolph: A Biography	Maureen M. Smith	Biography	1941-1970
			2006
<i>Theme 2</i>			
The Greatest	Claudia Rankine	Biography	1971-2015
Grace, Gold and Glory	Gabrielle Douglas	Autobiography	1971-2012
<i>Theme 3</i>			
My Life: Queen of the Court	Serena Williams	Autobiography	1971-2009
Faithful to the Task at Hand: The Life of Lucy Diggs Slowe	Carroll Miller & Anne	Biography	1900-1940
			2012

Florence Joyner Griffith*	Pruit- Logan Mark Stewart	Biography	1941- 1970 1996
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\*authorized biography

**Table 2. Race Legacy Descriptors, Treatment Outcomes and Personhood Reclamation**

Theme 1	Code	Theme 2	Code	Theme 3	Code
Hypersexed	1	Treatment in Public Opinion	7	Oppositional Gaze/Black Feminist Thought	11
Sexualized	2	Treatment in Media	8	Rewriting Personal Narratives	12
Masculine	3	Treatment in Social Media	9	Reclaiming Self-Esteem	13
Aggressive/Loud	4	Treatment in Sports Competition	10	Personal Identification	14
Objectified	5			AdHoc: Positive Outcomes	15
Animalistic	6				

Each concept was assigned a numeric value, which reflected content assignment categories. In other words, these codes were used to identify content that logically reflects the themes within my sources. The number of times that I can identify a coded number represents the frequency. The total frequency confirms the strength of the themes. I used the information gathered from frequency counts to indicate social facts

and narratives about the experiences of Black female athletes, relative to labels, treatment/channeling opportunities, and Black female athletes' responses.

Within the first theme, Race Legacy Descriptors, there were two case studies (shown in Table 2) that assess the lived experiences of Black female athletes; exploring casting, labeling and stereotyping during three periods of time. Selected sources were examined for indicators of how Black female athletes were regarded during its specific era. I focused on the labels, narratives, and characteristics that speak to the portrayal of Black female athletes. The goal for this theme was to discover society's interpretation of Black female athletes. The second theme is Treatment Outcomes. This theme looked at the overall handling of Black female athletes, as well as the reactions of society. In doing so, two of the case studies focused on the roles of mainstream society, the sports' world and social media and its reaction to illustrate treatment, the channeling of opportunities, endorsements, and staging of events for Black female athletes. The final theme for this data is Reclaiming Personhood. This theme will include the remaining three case studies to show indicators of personhood of Black female athletes. This theme will also examine secondary deviance among Black female athletes (i.e. oppositional gaze and Black feminist thought). This is a section that needs to be elaborated on, particularly on page

As a Black female athlete, I have the opportunity to reflect on my own experiences and examine them as a kind of data. I want to include my perspective of how Black female athletes feel about themselves, other Black female athletes and how they think others feel about them. I also want to discover if these experiences have led Black

female athletes to change not only their perceptions, but others' as well. I believe that my contribution will become instrumental in providing data with the positive promise of having lived this experience.

The intention of my research is to inform the reader on what it has meant and continues to mean to be a Black female athlete. Specifically, I am taking a historical approach to exploring the perception of racial and sexist barriers that Black female athletes have encountered and overcome to educate Black female athletes and mainstream society. It is imperative to teach people about this because mainstream society has created its own narrative for these women. The way that Black women have been regarded in American society has permitted negative stereotypes to impact the progress that Black female athletes have made.

Although the Black woman has literally been the “backbone” of this society, Black womanhood has been attributed to being manipulative, angry, careless, and sexually available objects. In the building of our nation, the labor of the Black woman and her countless roles has been forgotten and overlooked. Instead she has been transformed into a satirical character desperate to belong. Constant displays of these images have the ability to be internalized by Black women and others. The portrayal of these negative stereotypes in the media leads people to pass judgment about Black women and target them for deviance. To counteract these stereotypes, the mission of my research is to illustrate an authentic narrative for Black female athletes.

## **Limitations**

In my research design, I plan to conduct a content analysis where I gather information from the seven sources listed above that examine the lived experiences of Black female athletes. It is important to remember the implications that come with using a content analysis. My sample size is five biographies and two autobiographies. Of those biographies one is authorized. There have not been any rebuttals to criticize the works that are not authorized. This research may be limited in what it can provide me, in terms of amounts of information. Although, these sources can go in depth about what people really think and how their actual behavior is affected due to them being autobiographical and authorized biographical. With the language coming directly from the Black female athlete I am able to grasp a better understanding of how they have been treated. Being the researcher and having the freedom of choosing the data to include and how it should be categorized can lead to a different form of interpretation.

I have a vested interest in this research because I am a Black female athlete. I believe that my experiences as a high school, collegiate and professional track and field athlete can be very valuable in this research. My autoethnographic contribution will reflect logical insertions, where appropriate, and will not be based on emotional attachments that could become a social artifact or bias.

This research can get overwhelming and time consuming. After choosing my seven sources, the remainder of my time will be used coding. This coding can engulf me

as a researcher. Understanding what to include as legitimate data and when to say this is enough is very important in this study.

Ultimately, with the history of Black female athletes being narrated by the media, it may seem impractical to attempt to narrate to the general public the lived experiences of these women. The assumption that people want to be educated about my topic may not be realistic. The history of the Black woman is blatant and readily available, yet people choose to ignore it and allow dominant society to dictate her fate. Undoubtedly, people can see that Black female athletes are often targeted and negatively represented in the media. It is also easy to not see, especially when you are purposely overlooking. Sometimes a lack of information is not the issue and educating people on the lived experiences of Black female athletes can only reach certain heights. People are human and are going to continue to think what they want. Therefore, another limitation to my research is that my work cannot and will not reach everyone. Knowing this, I will continue to educate those who choose to learn about the history of the Black female athlete and how they are and have been regarded in American society.

## **Results**

With the frequency counts, I used one method of analysis to cover 3 time periods and three themes. Each count corresponded with a different theme and the final count determined the overall frequency results. In the first theme that looked at Race Legacy Descriptors within *Queen of the Courts: How Ora Washington Helped Philly Forget the Depression* and Wilma Rudolph: A Biography, the code that occurred the most was

Objectified (n=7). Closely following that code was Animalistic (n= 5). The other codes from that theme were as follows, Aggressive/Loud (n=2), Sexualized (n=1), Masculine (n=0), and Hypersexed (n=0). For the second theme, Treatment Outcomes within *The Greatest* and Grace, Gold and Glory, the code with the highest frequency was Treatment in Public Opinion (n=11). The other codes were as follows, Treatment in Social Media (n=5), Treatment in the Media (n=2) and Treatment in Sports Competition (n=2). In the third theme, Personhood Reclamation using My Life: Queen of the Court, Faithful to the Task at Hand: The Life of Lucy Diggs Slowe and Florence Joyner Griffith, the code with the highest frequency was Black Feminist Thought/Oppositional Gaze with (n=14). The remaining codes were as follows, Reclaiming Self-Esteem (n=10), Rewriting Narratives (n=3), and Personal Identification (n=4). Tables 3., 4. and 5 show the breakdown of these frequencies per theme.

**Table 3. Frequency Table for Race Legacy Descriptors**

Theme 1	
Code	N= Frequency
1	0
2	1
3	0
4	2
<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
6	5
15	5

**Table 4. Frequency Table for Treatment Outcomes**

<b>Theme 2</b>	
<u>Code</u>	<u>N=Frequency</u>
<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
8	2
9	5
10	2
15	3

**Table 5. Frequency Table for Personhood Reclamation**

<b>Theme 3</b>	
<u>Code</u>	<u>N=Frequency</u>
<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>
12	3
13	11
14	1
15	0

Overall, there were two overarching codes that showed increased frequency during my research. The findings from the overall frequency count are shown in Table 6. Those codes were Treatment in Public Opinion (n=27), Black Feminist Thought/Oppositional Gaze (n=27). These two indicators were more prevalent amongst all of the codes, when coding for all of the themes in all of the sources.

**Table 6. Overall Frequency Table**

<b>Overall</b>	
<u>Code</u>	<u>N= Frequency</u>
Hypersexed	0
Sexualized	1
Masculine	0
Aggressive/Loud	8
Objectified	9
Animalistic	8
Treatment in Public Opinion	27
Treatment in Media	14
Treatment in Social Media	5
Treatment in Sports Competition	18
Black Feminist Thought/Oppositional Gaze	27
Rewriting Narratives	6
Reclaiming Self Esteem	13
Personal Identification	10
AdHoc: Positive Outcomes	8

(overall refers to looking at the frequencies of all of the codes from all of the sources)

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this content analysis addressed the research questions: (1) who gets to narrate the story of the Black female athlete? and (2) how have Black female athletes today fashioned their own self-narratives? Based on the results of the content analysis, the opinion of the general public has made a statement towards who gets to tell the story of Black female athletes. Specifically, Black female athletes were made more objective in their race legacy descriptors. There were various accounts of the treatment of the public towards Black female athletes that have posed negative opinions of them as Black women, and as athletes. The opinion of the general public is not often formed on its own. The treatment of Black female athletes by the media has definitely had some impact on the way that they have been treated. In particular, Serena Williams was notoriously booed with racial epithets by a crowd for being associated with her sister. After the officials at a tournament waited until the last minute to scratch *Venus* from the competition, since Serena was her sister the crowd decided to degrade her due to association. Following the competition, when Serena decided to boycott the tournament for future competitions, the media labeled her as “vindictive, stubborn and reading too much into the situation.”

Since the ending of slavery and the birth of sports for Black women, they have sustained criticism and disapproval of their appearance, their performance and their existence. Despite how great of an athlete they were, Lucy Diggs Slowe and Ora Washington were not exempt from condemnation. Ora was made objective and aggressive where opponents accused her of “punching them in the stomach” every time they went for a jump ball. Other opponents classified Ora as “a different class of people” as well as a “ruffian.” White female athletes did not even recognize Black female athletes during this time and refused to compete against them. Black female athletes were only able to compete amongst each other and claim national fame of the African American league of that sport. The response of the media during this time showed that they were only interested in the more “feminine” athletes, despite their athletic talent. Specifically, the media chose to steer away from female athletes who portrayed more muscular traits, and focused on the more “glamorous athletes.” This was even prevalent in the Black press.

As the century continued, Black female athletes did gain more sporting opportunities but the telling of these women remained the same. Black female athletes continued to have their image distorted due to the media’s presence. While race remained a deviant factor, the image of the Black female athlete shifted from more muscular and unconventional to more sexual and animalistic. Wilma Rudolph and Serena Williams are perfect examples of this. To combat stereotypes, Wilma was taught by her coach to be “a lady first and a track girl second.” Before speaking with the media, she had to be showered and decent. She would even get her teammates to help with her appearance.

Serena's appearance has been criticized amongst all of the different audiences. Despite being in good enough shape to compete on a professional level, Serena has been called fat in the press, she has been asked why she was so out of shape before matches and she could grasp the general consensus -- that she was fat-- from the public. Wilma, Serena and Gabrielle Douglas have also been subjected to various animal names, including "the gazelle", "fat cow" and "flying squirrel". All of these descriptions remained with these athletes in the media as well as throughout competition. Black female athletes are subject to name-calling, racial slurs (as we saw in Indian Wells) and other forms of taunting on and off the court. As shown by these women in certain situations, Black female athletes often ignore or laugh these things off opening a door for the public to develop negative opinions of these women.

Currently, Black female athletes have made strides to contest negative images portrayed about them. Gabrielle Douglas, Florence Griffith Joyner, Serena and other Black female athletes have chosen to let their talents and performances speak for them. They have preferred to create their own narratives and to speak for themselves through autobiographies, interviews, fashion, etc. Although, Serena has taken measures even further and communicated a few threats.

The culture of Black female athletes has changed with the culture of America. During post slavery, race was a major factor and it was evident in sports competition amongst women athletes. As Blacks were given more opportunities and began to excel in certain sports, along with race, issues of masculinity and femininity arose. There to

decide was the general public and the media. As Black female athletes began to reclaim their own personhood, in attempts to generate positive images of themselves, media outlets were portraying the downfalls of these women while uplifting women of other races/ethnicities. To answer my research question, it is apparent that the opinions of Black female athletes are processed by the general public through the portrayal of these women in media outlets. Therefore, the media releases stereotypical narratives of Black female athletes for the public to interpret and support.

On the other hand, the Black female athletes who have taken the time to write their own autobiographical accounts of their experiences in this setting have taken control of the stories of Black female athletes as well. This addresses my second research question. Serena Williams and Gabrielle Douglas have given an authentic perspective of their experiences as Black female athletes for the public to understand as a form of rewriting their own personal narratives. Other instances of fashioning one's own narrative are shown in the high frequency of Code 11, Black Feminist Thought/Oppositional Gaze. Any instance where one of the Black female athletes took action and stood up for themselves, came together with other Black Female athletes, branched out and did something that was out of the ordinary or gave the "Don't try me" look (per Serena) showed Black female athletes fashioning their own narratives. Specifically, these were indications of Black female athletes choosing not to fall into the stereotypical image that the media and other outlets portray. Examples of this are Gabrielle Douglas refusing to lash out at her coach when he said she needed a nose job for the second time, or when people on Twitter ridiculed her appearance and hairstyles, or when Lucy Slowe chose not

to wear what the other tennis athletes were wearing in the early 1900s. These are all different accounts of Black female athletes making the choice that that they are in control of their lives.

For Black female athletes writing these accounts themselves, they control the amount of disclosure; they have the ability to share as much or as little as they want to readers. Autobiographers are able to create a story based on the type of person they want to be viewed as. This was evident in the life experiences that were shared in their autobiographies. Some of the authors chose to write about childhood experiences, how they felt in certain situations and how they coped with issues that came their way. Examples of this include Serena and Gabrielle's insertions about how important their devotion to their faiths as a Jehovah's Witness and a Christian were to their daily lives. For Serena's family, before relocating they had to make sure that they could connect with a church. Serena also included various chapters about how important practicing her faith was to her career, performance and her well-being. For Gabrielle, her mother was portrayed as a very spiritual woman that taught her children how to use prayer and their connection with God to combat any situation. This is clear in Gabrielle's writing; she begins multiple chapters with scriptures from the Bible, she includes various accounts of prayer sessions with her mom, and she even inserts a prayer that her mom created for her called "Our Secret". Other examples are how these two Black female athletes have had emotional relationships with their fathers and have incorporated those into their books as well. Both athletes are very detailed in their feelings about situations they have

encountered. Being able to connect with the emotions of the author as a reader made it easy to understand how these women felt during these experiences.

For those authors who have written biographies of these women, although they are compelled to provide an interesting story, they are somewhat limited in what they can include in their narratives. Authors are restricted to what the individual authorizes them to write, especially if the work is authorized, or their work may be criticized for inaccuracies. In the biographies I found it harder to extract sentiment from the chapters because the words were written as more of a narrative instead of a personal encounter. For some of the indicators that were coded, I had to read deeper to gain the true meaning. For example, some of the statements in the biography were “Black press focused on glamorous players” and “certain people were saying certain things” compared to autobiographical statements like “I like fried chicken as you can see from my thighs.” Although the biographical information about the athlete’s life and performance appears legitimate, I found autobiographical works to be more reliable considering that they provide a more complete honest account and that I am able to grasp an authentic emotion from the athlete.

### **Autoethnographic Contribution**

Growing up, I was always fast. I was faster than the girls and the boys in my neighborhood and at my school. The boys would always challenge me to a race or even to a game of basketball. I would get comments about my legs comparing them to a horse’s legs. I have larger calves and I have even heard that “I would kick the hell out of

someone” if they were to make me upset. As I developed into a more accomplished athlete, these comments continued but they became more sexual. Although I felt offended, in today’s society, these comments may seem to be positive. During and after college I received more comments about me being in great shape, having nice legs, and a nice body. I have received comments about flexibility, I’ve had guys intentionally stop me at the gas station initially asking “if I had a boyfriend who knew how to handle all of this”, and I have even had male athletes say that they’d like to have “athletic babies” with me.

Being a Black female athlete I feel as if I have to hold myself to a higher standard, in terms of the way that I carry myself. I am very aware of what the general public thinks of me and others like me. Even as a child my body was scrutinized and made to fit that of an animal. Most of the time, comments like this came from other athletes, specifically Black male athletes. During the early 1900s, Black athletes had to compete against one another because White athletes refused to compete against them. The Black community backed some of the athletes, although the Black press decided who they wanted to showcase. The Black press claimed to have focused on the more glamorous athletes. Therefore, if the Black press chose to portray an athlete as appealing, the general public was given the opportunity to cast their opinions of that athlete as well as the overshadowed athlete. Also, based on bell hooks’ breakdown of power in America, Black women possess the least amount. They are oppressed by both White and Black males and White females. Understanding this does not surprise me in terms of the comments

coming from Black male athletes. In order to keep the power they have, someone has to be exploited.

Other instances of calf comments came from Black female athletes. I found this to be very interesting because of the fact that as Black women, we share the same struggles. As Black female athletes, we also share the same struggles. Thinking back to the trouble that Wilma Rudolph had with her teammates and how after she started to excel in track and field, her teammates became envious of her success and wanted to disassociate them. Could these women have been envious of my body? Understanding how slave masters put black women up against one another based on appearance helps to identify the root of this issue. As other Black female athletes during this time, I felt as if I should not respond aggressively because I would only be reinforcing stereotypes of the “angry Black woman; even amongst other Black women.” I feel like I have to give off an even stronger energy that shows that I am different than that. I believe that Black female athletes succumb to the pressures that are placed on them and instead of speaking out against that, they ignore it. This was also shown in my research. There was a reoccurring theme of young Black female athletes looking at the environment they are in and not taking the confrontational route in handling uncomfortable situations. Gabrielle Douglas ignored her coach’s comment about her nose, Serena chose not to lash out against a racist crowd, Ora ignored comments about her being a “ruffian” and Wilma not approaching her teammates about their comments about her. I have even chosen to ignore certain comments made towards me. I believe that it is a combination of not wanting to ruin an opportunity, especially if you are from an underprivileged background and not wanting to fit the stereotype of the

Black female athlete. I think a lot of us feel the pressure of losing out on something that could open doors for our careers if we retaliate.

Being more knowledgeable about the stereotypes that people associate with Black female athletes and Black women in general, helps to understand where certain comments and actions were crafted. As I have gotten older I have learned that people are always going to have an opinion about Black women, whether it is accurate or completely far-fetched. The public has been conditioned to think that Black women are what they should not seek; they are hypersexualized, made objective and associated with masculine traits in the same breath. Breeding was an intricate part of slavery that ensured slave owners that they had free labor from the next generation of slaves. The exploitation of Black women turned into a profit for White slave owners. Black women were raped and used as breeders whether they were impregnated by their White slave masters or other slaves on the plantation. Either way, these women were stripped of their titles as mothers, wives and human beings and made into objects for the benefit of someone else. Being told that someone wants to make "athletic babies" with me was sickening and only reinforces the stereotype that Black women are objective beings that continue to be viewed as sexual objects. It also shows that we are unworthy of love and a relationship. The people who made those comments were not interested in a relationship or marriage, they were strictly trying to have sex with me and create "natural athletes." No one wants a Black woman, especially a Black female athlete; unless there is a benefit.

As a Black female athlete, I feel as if we do not receive the same opportunities as White female athletes and male athletes, regardless of race. Even in college, there is more publicity for male dominated sports such as football and men's basketball. This may be due to the popularity of those sports, but the attendance speaks volumes to this argument as well. The men's basketball team at the university I attended can fill a stadium of 30,000 people while the predominantly Black women's track team might get 30 people to attend a free track meet. Whenever other male athletes from the school came to support, comments about seeing the "track girls in their spanks" were made. Black female athletes experience this treatment on a professional sporting level as well. The WNBA does not receive the same amount of publicity in the media as the NBA. Some Black female athletes aren't even expected to pursue an athletic career because there is no true avenue into professional sports. There are 30 NBA teams compared to 12 WNBA teams. This shows the channeling of opportunities for Black female athletes compared to male athletes. The WNBA is predominantly Black and the fact that there are only 12 teams speaks to the limited number of positions available for these women.

The last verse in Kanye's song Golddigger reads,

He got that ambition, baby, look in his eyes  
This week he mopping floors, next week it's the fries  
So, stick by his side  
I know this dude's balling but yeah that's nice  
And they gone keep calling and trying  
But you stay right girl  
And when you get on he leave your ass for a white girl (West, 2004).

As the story goes, when a Black guy becomes successful, he seeks out a trophy wife. In the Black community, when Black guys date outside their race, it is assumed that they are not attracted to Black women, for whatever reason, although they are Black. When I was in high school I dated a Black guy who also ran track. After two months, he told me it wasn't working out because I wasn't "girly" enough for him. Soon after, he was dating a mixed girl. My sophomore year of college I had an experience where I overheard some of my teammates, who we classified as WGLs (White Girl Lovers= Black guys who only date White girls), talking about why they didn't date Black women. In the midst of the conversation, I heard that Black girls were "ghetto", "loud", "rude", "freaks" and "that they didn't know how to act in public." Being one of the older Black girls on the track team, I felt the need to involve myself in the conversation and enlighten these gentlemen. My roommate and I approached the table and explained the history of Black women, emphasizing the color caste system and explaining why they used those specific stereotypes towards women of their same race. We explained that through media outlets and the lack of Black women's history they are taught that lighter complexions are more appealing in terms of beauty and that Black women are to be used for entertainment and beneficial purposes. Black female athletes are hardly ever in magazines that embrace their beauty. We are pushed away as if we have one another to gain companionship. Our bodies have been compared to our male counterpart and shamed for being just as strong and muscular. No one ever says that they specifically want to marry a Black woman, or a Black female athlete in particular. After talking with them for about twenty minutes, the

final comment was “Well, my mama is ghetto and I don’t want to be with a woman like that”.

It was during this conversation that I realized that “no one wants to be with a Black woman”. I was deeply hurt by the way that our own people felt about us; especially since these were my teammates. I felt that if people this close to me can talk about me this way and stand firm in their arguments, I could only imagine how the general public felt. I was ashamed. Instead of beating myself up about it I decided to hold myself to a higher standard as a Black woman and Black female athlete. Sometimes I ignore stereotypes that are directed towards me, sometimes I lash out at the people who make the comments, and sometimes I just laugh them off. The fact that I have the ability to do that strengths me. I think that that my roommate/teammate, who backed me in contesting the labels that evening, helped me to regain my self-esteem. Black female athletes should come together more as Black feminists to combat negative stereotypes that affect our daily lives, our careers and our futures. It is evident that some Black female athletes have made these advances, but I believe that this could increase drastically.

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APPENDIX A

RAW DATA

Source: <i>Queen of the Court: How Ora Washington Helped Philly “Forget the Depression”</i>		
Description	Code	Page
Played by men’s rules rather than the divided court girl’s rules	11	2
Bennett players claimed Washington punched her opponents in their stomachs each	4	2
“a different class of people”	5	2
“the worst ruffian”	4	2
Looked like she had been picking cotton, shaving hogs and everything else	5	2
Greatest girl player of her age	15	1
Ball hawk	6	1
Black press focused on “glamorous players”	8	2
Certain people said certain things	7	2
They said Ora was not so good anymore	7	2
Ora came out of retirement beat Flora Lomax and retired afterwards	12	2

Source: <i>Wilma Rudolph: A Biography</i>		
Description	Code	Page
Cripple	5	3
I loved being a lady after the games	14	8
Skeeter (slang for mosquito)	6	8
I was somebody in school after that, for the first time	13	10
I told you to stick with me, I didn’t tell you to beat me. Run faster.	11	25
None of my girls have trouble getting boyfriends	15	50
They are young ladies first and track girls second	15	50
Young lady first, track girl second	14, 12	50
Owed success to their male coaches	8	49
China-doll type	5	49
No pictures until showered and in dress clothes	15	48
Animosity from teammates, getting all the attention	10	59
Teammate combed hair to make sure she look good	11	60
La gazelle	6	61

La Chattanooga choo choo	5	61
La perle noir	5	61
La gazelle near	6	61
Café au lait runner	5	61
Long lissome legs and a pert charm	8	62
The feminine exception of masculine freaks of nature	8	62
Resorted to jungle animal images	8	62
Wild beast albeit a gentle, attractive creature	6	62
Best track meet of the year, also the prettiest	2, 15	72
White man spits on Wilma's children	7	87
Felt exploited as a Black person and woman	14	87
Jobless, poor, denied employment due to being a Negro	8	87
Being Black, a woman and Wilma Rudolph worked against me	14	89
Wilma Unlimited	11	90

Source: <i>Florence Griffith-Joyner</i>		
Description	Code	Page
Intelligent	15	1
Artistic	15	1
Ambitious	15	1
Aloof	5	1
Outfits were unlike anything anyone in the sport had ever seen before	12	14
All eyes were on her as she approached the starting line compared to opponents in traditional tanks and tops	7	14
Forced to defend herself, she chose not to lash back at her critics	14	28
Running suits revolutionized the sports apparel industry	12	32
Florence brings glamour	7	37
She walks out on the track like she owns it	7	37
Florence Griffith Joyner Youth Foundation	11	42

Source: <i>My Life: Queen of the Court Serena Williams</i>		
Description	Code	Chapter
Blackie one and Blackie two	7	1
If we were typical California girls... Blondie one and Blondie two	14	1
She chased these boys down	11	1
Set up matches beforehand and figure out who'd win	7	3
They (tournament officials) wanted only what was best for them	10	4

Officials waited until the last minute to announce Venus' withdrawal to make them look bad	10	4
Claimed they manipulated the situation to their advantage	10	4
Casted as scapegoats instead of victims	6,10	4
Right away people started booing	10	4
Booing lustily like a genteel lynch mob	10	4
I heard nigger a couple times	10	4
The crowd stood and cheered for my opponent	10	4
I could still hear shouts of nigger	10	4
Everything I did, they booed	10	4
When I questioned a ball that was on the line, it was like they were going to string me up	10	4
I sat and cried in my towel, but whatever happened I would not be beaten down by it	13	4
I do what I do for me!	13	4
Replied in a press conference: And for those who didn't (cheer), I love you anyway.	11	4
Serena boycotts a mandatory tournament at Indian Wells every year	11	4
Replying: Hell no! I'm not playing Indian Wells. Are you out of your mind?	11	4
Vindictive	4	4
Stubborn	4	4
Reading too much into the situation	4	4
I love fried chicken as you can see from my thighs	13	5
I was so ugly. Wasn't always my thing, but it is now	13	6
I tune out when people give me flak about spending time on my appearance	11	7
They say "I'm an athlete not a fashionista"	7	7
If I'm doing my job, I'll be out there sweating and grimacing...I'll look a mess	7	7
I became known for my outfits, and my aggressive, relentless style of play	4	7
People started to wonder what I'd wear at the start of each tournament	7	7
Developed Arenes fashion line	11	7
Almost all of them (calls) against me	10	10
Even a call that shouldn't have been a call was against me	10	10
I marched over to the umpire's chair... "That ball was so in. What's going on here"?	11	10
I can't believe you would sabotage me like that?	11	10
...my match to win and it was being taken away from me in an arbitrary way	10	10
I kept flashing the umpire these cutting looks	11	10

I chose tennis. This was the first time for me.	13	10
I carried myself like a proud African American.	14	11
There's nothing that can break me. On the court. Off the court. Anywhere.	13	11
I can do anything. There will be no stopping me.	13	11
We will not be denied. I will not be denied.	11, 12	11
I just love you so much, Serena.	7	12
When I grow up, I want to be just like you	7	12
They were their role models. They called themselves Venus and Serena (2 little Black girls)	7	12
I started to think I can beat those girls. In my sleep, I can beat those girls.	13	12
I'd have to had been deaf and blind to miss all the criticism	8	12
The general consensus was that I was a big fat cow	7,8	12
The championship was a pipe dream for me because I was so out of shape	8	12
My best tour days were behind me	8	12
I just had to laugh (at the criticism)	14	12
I see my reflection and what I get back is hot and sexy and all that good stuff	14	12
Players who certainly didn't expect an overweight, out of shape, has-been champion like me to give them a game. (after beating players with a blister on foot)	13	12
Being called fat in the press	8	12
Being asked before every match why I was so out of shape	8	12
We argued about it for a while, and after a full minute or two of discussion I threw my hands up and said "I could have been back already!" (arguing with the umpire about going to the restroom)	11	13
To her good credit came over while I was down and struggling and wanted to let me know she was pulling for me (Daniela Hantuchova)	10	13
I was Serena Williams. Again. At last. And I would not be denied.	13	13
I think I look GOOD	13	14

Source: <i>The Greatest</i>		
Description	Code	Page
Serena interrupted during play, wagged her finger at the crowd and said "Don't try me"	11	40
She will tell an audience member or an official that they are disrespectful or unjust	4	40

No,no, no	11	40
I swear to God I am (expletive) going to take this (expletive) ball and shove it down your (expletive) throat. (to an umpire)	11	40
Serena broke her boycott against Indian Wells (where she was notoriously booed with racial slurs)	12	41
Umpire ruled against Serena for yelling “Come on” before a point was completed	10	42
Serena clutched her pearls and told her competitor not to look at her	11	42
I don’t want any incidents there. But I’m always going to be myself. If anything happens, I’m always going to be myself, true to myself.	13	42
Despite being ranked higher than Sharapova, Forbes listed Sharapova as the highest-paid female athlete at \$29 million, worth more than Serena at \$24 million	8	42
“ I think the corporate world still loves the good looking blond girls” (From Chris Evert, athlete)	7	42

<i>Source: Grace, Gold and Glory</i>		
<i>Description</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Page</i>
When I do tricks for the other kids, they give me their lunch money	5	40
As my skill level improved and I surpassed some of my teammates, a few of them seemed a lot less friendly.	7	79
Sometimes I’d see them whispering, but they’d suddenly stop talking if I came near.	7	79
Other times they wouldn’t look directly at me	7	79
Why doesn’t Gabby do it? She’s our slave.	7	80
I just stared at her.	11	80
Another teammate says, “That’s not cool. You should never joke about something like that”	7	80
She needs a nose job. (Coach says this about Gabby to another coach)	7	89
You need a nose job. (Coach says this to Gabby in front of teammates)	7	90
I stared at him in disbelief	11	90
A couple of my teammates broke the silence with a chuckle	7	90
Your nose is so flat	7	90
How do you even breathe out of it? (referring to her nose)	7	90
Thanks guys. I turned and walked away. (Gabby’s response to comments about nose from teammates)	11	90
I can’t believe you did so good. I thought you might get be in ninth or tenth in the all-around—but never fourth. (Coach tells Gabby this after competing)	10	123

Ooh that's gross! You're eating with your hands! (while Gabby was eating a strawberry)	6	139
The Flying Squirrel	6	159
At least squirrels are cute, so I'll take it!	14	159
...the media stopped labeling me as the gymnast who buckled under pressure, the one who fumbled on the balance beam..	8	179
It suddenly became a topic on Twitter after the team finals (referring to Gabby's hair)	9	203
Some people commented that they didn't think my hairstyle was neat	9	203
Other comments are too ridiculous to even repeat	9	203
I'm competing for the top prize in an elite sport, and you're talking about my hairstyle?	11	204
Some of the rude tweeters thankfully apologized	9	204
Hundreds of other followed up on Facebook and Twitter to express their support	9	204
I made a choice: I couldn't let that distract me. I refused to waste even a second on negativity.	11	204

<i>Source: Faithful to the Task at Hand</i>		
Description	Code	Page
She may have been Lucy Slowe, but on the court she was Lucy Fast	7	72
She encouraged the girls at Shaw Junior High school to play	11	72
She did not wear high neck blouses as the other tennis athletes were wearing	11	73
Slowe played hard	4	75