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# The Coach's Journal: Experiences of Black Female Assistant Coaches in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball

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## The Coach's Journal: Experiences of Black Female Assistant Coaches in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball

### Abstract

In NCAA Division I women's basketball, Black female coaches make up only a small percentage of the total number of coaches (i.e., 26%; NCAA, 2016) even though the majority of student-athletes are Black (i.e., 51%). Although these discrepancies have recently been recognized in sport studies literature (Borland & Bruening, 2010; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012), sport psychology researchers have yet to explore the underlying structural and psychological issues that lead to the underrepresentation of Black female coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. To this end, we utilized narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a) in the current study to explore the stories of eight NCAA Division I women's basketball assistant coaches who identify as Black females. During face-to-face interviews, participants described the roles they are asked to fill and the ways they cope with the multiple oppressions they experience as Black women in coaching. The first and second authors co-constructed four themes, (a) Pregame: Learning to coach; (b) First half: Experiences from the first 10 years; (c) Second half: Experiences from the last five years; and (d) Overtime: Thinking about the future, throughout their thematic analysis of these narratives (Braun & Clark, 2006). It is hoped that these findings will lead to the development of interventions that can empower NCAA Division I Black female coaches as well as challenge current structural ideologies that disadvantage Black female coaches in this context. Further, creating a more inclusive environment at NCAA Division I institutions could enhance the experiences and coaching career aspirations of Black female student-athletes by allowing them to see empowered Black female role models in coaching positions. Implications for certified mental performance consultants (CMPCs) working within NCAA Division I women's basketball, who are well positioned to contribute to these efforts, are also discussed.

### Keywords

African American, Collegiate, Women, Narrative Inquiry, Epistolary, Representation, Gendered Racism

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## The Coach's Journal: Experiences of Black Female Assistant Coaches in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball

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*In NCAA Division I women's basketball, Black female coaches make up only a small percentage of the total number of coaches (i.e., 26%; NCAA, 2016) even though the majority of student-athletes are Black (i.e., 51%). Although these discrepancies have recently been recognized in sport studies literature (Borland & Bruening, 2010; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012), sport psychology researchers have yet to explore the underlying structural and psychological issues that lead to the underrepresentation of Black female coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. To this end, we utilized narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a) in the current study to explore the stories of eight NCAA Division I women's basketball assistant coaches who identify as Black females. During face-to-face interviews, participants described the roles they are asked to fill and the ways they cope with the multiple oppressions they experience as Black women in coaching. The first and second authors co-constructed four themes, (a) Pregame: Learning to coach; (b) First half: Experiences from the first 10 years; (c) Second half: Experiences from the last five years; and (d) Overtime: Thinking about the future, throughout their thematic analysis of these narratives (Braun & Clark, 2006). It is hoped that these findings will lead to the development of interventions that can empower NCAA Division I Black female coaches as well as challenge current structural ideologies that disadvantage Black female coaches in this context. Further, creating a more inclusive environment at NCAA Division I institutions could enhance the experiences and coaching career aspirations of Black female student-athletes by allowing them to see empowered Black female role models in coaching positions. Implications for certified mental performance consultants (CMPCs) working within NCAA Division I women's basketball, who are well positioned to contribute to these efforts, are also discussed. Keywords: African American, Collegiate, Women, Narrative Inquiry, Epistolary, Representation, Gendered Racism*

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Researchers within sport studies have focused on either the effects of racism or the effects of sexism experienced by those involved in sport. However, few have investigated the effects of the intersection of racism and sexism (Borland & Bruening, 2010). The dearth of scholarship on and inclusion of Black women in sport led Bruening (2005) to question, "Are all the women White and all the Blacks men?" (p. 330). As a result, not only are Black<sup>1</sup> women in sport discriminated against and neglected in mainstream media and within sport organizations, but they are also ignored in sport studies research and literature (Hall, 2001). When Black women are included in research, it is typically in the form of descriptive statistics

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<sup>1</sup> During the interviews conducted for this study, participants used both Black and African American when discussing race. Therefore, Black and African American will be used interchangeably throughout the manuscript.

that identify Black women as an underrepresented group in the domain being studied (Bruening, 2005). Bruening further posited that, "...without the words, experiences, and meanings behind the statistics, it cannot be assumed that 'the life experiences of Black female athletes do not differ in meaningful ways from either Black male athletes or White female athletes'" (Sellers et al., 1997, p. 700; as cited in Bruening, 2005, p. 334). Sport management researchers have begun to address this gap in research by qualitatively investigating the experiences of Black female athletes and coaches (e.g., Borland & Bruening, 2010; Bruening, 2004; Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005); however, sport psychology researchers have thus far failed to answer Hall's (2001) call for more research on women of color who are competitive athletes and coaches.

NCAA Division I women's basketball has the highest percentage of Black female athletes and coaches across NCAA sports and as such, provides a unique context for exploring these sport constituents' experiences. In the 2014-2015 academic year, 4,984 women played NCAA Division I women's basketball (NCAA, 2016). Of these women, 2,543 identified as Black women, while only 50 of the 345 head coaches and only 314 of the 1044 assistant coaches of these athletes identified as Black women (NCAA, 2016). To state this more simply, 51% of the athletes in NCAA Division I women's basketball are Black females; in contrast, only 26% of the coaches are Black females. Additionally, 76% of Director of Athletic positions are held by White men, 13% are held by Black men, 7% are held by White women, and only 1% are held by Black women. This difference in representation is alarming given that research has found that a lack of visible roles models prevent Black female student-athletes from seeing a career in athletic leadership as a possibility (Abney, 1988; Borland & Bruening, 2010; Houzer, 1974).

While initiatives encouraging Black women to pursue careers in coaching are being implemented by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) and the NCAA (e.g., *So You Wanna Be A Coach*, etc.), little empirical research has been conducted to probe the underlying issues related to the underrepresentation of Black female coaches. The current study identified and explored three of these issues: (a) the roles Black female assistant coaches are asked to fill; (b) the ways being a Black female impacts the experiences of an assistant coach; and (c) the ways that Black female assistant coaches cope with gendered racism.

## **Roles in Coaching**

Assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball are often asked to fulfill a variety of roles. Weinberg and Gould (2011) defined a role as "the set of behaviors required or expected of the person occupying a certain position in a group" (p. 163). Roles that are common among assistant coaches in this context include recruiting, mentoring student-athletes, scheduling practices and workouts, scheduling games, planning off-season workouts, coaching on the court, watching film, preparing scouting reports, managing team equipment, organizing team travel, serving as a liaison to various university or athletic department offices (e.g., housing, academics, and compliance), and promoting the team in the community (Forood, 2005). However, there is limited research pertaining to the roles that assistant coaches are assigned. For example, in 1993, Anderson discovered that African American male assistant football coaches were more likely to be hired as position coaches and were less likely to fill decision-making positions (i.e., offensive or defensive coordinator). Additionally, Borland and Bruening (2010) found that African American female assistant basketball coaches identified becoming "designated recruiters" and not being exposed to other aspects of the coaching profession such as practicing and game planning or public speaking as barriers to becoming head coaches. These findings suggest that the roles Black female assistant coaches are required

to fill within staffs could serve as a form of oppression that limits Black female assistant coaches' opportunities to advance to head coaching positions.

### **Oppression in Coaching**

Research on the sexism experienced by female coaches and the racism experienced by Black male coaches can provide some insight into the multiple oppressions experienced by Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. Sexism and racism refer to "negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that devalue, denigrate, stigmatize, or restrict" individuals based on gender (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010, p. 1) or their skin color and/or ethnic heritage, respectively (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002). These oppressions can occur at a number of levels (e.g., individual, familial, institutional, and sociocultural) and can manifest in both external (e.g., discrimination and harassment) and internal forms (e.g., negative attitudes about oneself or the minority group in which one belongs; Szymanski & Stewart, 2010).

**Sexism.** Within the coaching literature, a vast amount of research has been conducted to call attention to the sexism faced by female coaches in sport (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). At the individual level, female coaches have reported lower levels of perceived competence and a greater need to prove themselves than do their male counterparts (Kilty, 2006). Interpersonally, women are excluded from the "Old Boy's Clubs" that are rampantly prevalent in sport, and this leads to feelings of social isolation (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Female coaches have also found it difficult to secure a mentor, the lack of which may result in fewer future career opportunities and limited possibilities for upward mobility (Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Lavoie and Dutove (2012) cited numerous research studies that give evidence of women being undervalued, underpaid, marginalized, viewed as less competent by administrators, and silenced at the institutional and organizational level. Lastly, sexism at the sociocultural level serves as a barrier for female coaches (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012); this is because effective coaches are perceived as coaches who demonstrate "masculine" characteristics according to the dominant ideologies constructed within sport (Kilty, 2006). However, to avoid being labeled a lesbian and face heterosexist oppression, female coaches must also demonstrate hegemonic femininity (Krane, 2001). As a result, women "...are left to negotiate conformance to feminine norms while simultaneously demonstrating competence by exhibiting male/masculine behaviours that society upholds as coaching effectiveness" (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012, p. 28).

**Racism.** In addition to sexism, racism has also been investigated across varying levels of sport to help explain the under-representation of Black coaches (Cunningham, 2010). For example, at the individual level, Cunningham, Bruening, and Straub (2006) found that Black student-athletes and coaches have reported feeling discriminated against and like they have having fewer advancement opportunities; this, in turn, has led to higher turnover rates than their White counterparts. Prejudice and discriminatory hiring practices; being valued as a recruiter rather than a skills or strategies coach; and the belief of some administrators that boosters (i.e., individuals who donate money to athletic departments) will discontinue financial support if a Black coach is hired are examples of racism at the organizational and institutional level (Cunningham, 2010). Cunningham (2010) further explained that at the sociocultural level, racist ideologies have been constructed in sport that depict "Whites as smarter, more ethical, better leaders, than their Black counterparts" (p. 397). Therefore, an effective coach is supposed to be not only male but also White.

Cunningham (2010) advises that the varying levels of sexism and racism “influence and are influenced by one another” (p. 402). This is especially important to note at the individual level to ensure that those who face internalized oppression are not blamed for bringing these experiences upon themselves. Internalized oppression is the result of inescapable external oppression that is constructed by the broader social system (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010).

**Effects of sexism and racism.** Sexism and racism at all levels lead to detrimental physical and psychological health effects as well as career implications for Black female coaches. In the general population, sexism has also been linked to greater psychological distress in women (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010). For women in coaching, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) identify alienation, feeling pressure to over-perform, increased risk of sexual harassment, wage inequalities, and fewer opportunities for advancement as some of the detrimental effects of sexism.

Racism has also been linked to increased psychological distress among Blacks in the general population (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010). Additionally, racism in coaching has been found to negatively affect career longevity, job satisfaction, physical health, and the possibility of career advancement (Cunningham, 2010).

**Multiple oppressions.** As previously mentioned, researchers have generally failed to consider the complexity that comes from experiencing multiple sources of oppression and the unique effects that the interaction of these oppressions can have on Black women (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010). Furthermore, the experiences of Black female coaches have been virtually silenced (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). One notable exception is Borland and Bruening’s (2010) qualitative study on the under-representation of Black females as head coaches in the NCAA. In this study, participants experienced isolation as they were often the only Black female on a coaching staff; were viewed as former players or recruiters more than coaches capable of doing a multitude of tasks; and felt the need to hide their race, gender, and sexuality to fit the norms of the collegiate coaching culture. The barriers experienced by these women could not be explained by considering race or gender alone; instead, these oppressions occurred because the participants were both Black and female (Borland & Bruening, 2010). As a result, Borland and Bruening used an intersectional approach to exploring Black female identity (Collins, 2000) to explain the barriers experienced by the participants.

The intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989) suggests that a unique experience is produced from the joining of various social identities and oppressions, and that the position created at the intersection of multiple social identities “may be different or greater than the sum of its parts”; this can adversely affect psychosocial health (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012, p. 14). By taking intersectionality into account, theorists and researchers recognize that Black women experience oppression in the form of gendered racism because they are women of color and not because they have separate identities as women or as a racial minority. Essed (1991) described gendered racism as the way sexism and racism interconnect and combine under certain conditions to form a single phenomenon. Gendered racism posits that “Black women are subject to unique forms of oppression due to their simultaneous ‘Blackness’ and ‘femaleness,’” and this oppression has a negative effect on the psychological distress of Black women (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008, p. 307). In her original article on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) argued that, “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 139). For this reason, in the present study, we used an intersectionality approach.

## **Coping with Multiple Oppressions**

Coping strategies are cognitive and behavioral techniques used by an individual in an attempt to manage a problem and the stress attached to it (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). When used appropriately, these strategies can work as a buffer against the negative effects (e.g., psychological distress) caused by racism, sexism, and gendered racism (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013). There are currently no studies within sport that investigate the ways Black female coaches cope with gendered racism.

In conclusion, sport psychology researchers have overlooked the unique experiences of Black female assistant coaches. In 2010, sport sociologists Borland and Bruening studied the experiences of Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball; however, they delimited their investigation to the systematic barriers these coaches faced and chose not to explore the possible psychological effects these barriers had on individual psyches. Thus, there is currently a lack of knowledge regarding the psychological effects that gendered racism has on Black female assistant coaches. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball by examining three important components: (a) the roles they are asked to fill; (b) the ways being a Black female has impacted the participants' experiences as an assistant coach; and (c) the ways that Black women cope with the multiple oppressions they face as Black women working in the White, male-dominated culture of NCAA Division I sports.

## **Theoretical Framework**

How best to explore issues of intersectional identity in sport is one of the central questions for researchers in cultural sport psychology (CSP; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). Although cultural sport studies have been a focus in sport sociology since the 1970s and 1980s, the use of a cultural studies framework by sport psychology researchers and practitioners is relatively limited (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003). Though no single definition of CSP can be identified, six essential characteristics of works grounded in CSP shape the current study. (Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010). The study is (a) interdisciplinary; (b) informed by multiple theories; (c) positioned in a specific context; (d) concerned with social difference, power dynamics, and social justice; (e) focused on praxis; (f) reflexive (Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010). An additional advantage of using CSP is the freedom to use a variety of methodological approaches including narrative inquiry, which we used for the current study (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003).

## **Narrative Inquiry Methodology**

The purpose of the current research is to understand the experiences of Black female NCAA DI assistant coaches, as little is known regarding the ways they experience their trajectory in coaching (Borland & Bruening, 2010). We used a qualitative approach to this study (Bhattacharya, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), more specifically, narrative inquiry, which allows for understanding experiences as stories lived and told (Kim, 2011; Kramp, 2004; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Robert & Shenhav, 2014).

Narrative inquiry has gained vast popularity since its start in literary studies decades ago (Webster & Mertova, 2007), and now is used by a variety of fields within social sciences including sociology, anthropology, history, education, and psychology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet narrative is still in its infancy in sport psychology research (Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Smith (2010) noted that recently, many sport psychology researchers have

turned toward narrative inquiry to better understand the experiences of their participants (e.g., Busanich, McGannon, & Schinke, 2012; Denison & Winslade, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2005, 2009a, 2009b; Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Storytelling is a universal human trait that goes beyond a single field or nation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), making it an appropriate design concept for sport studies as well as our undertaking here.

Within sport psychology research, and for the purposes of the current study, narrative inquiry is defined as “a dynamic process founded on a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions which are at play from the first narrative imaginings of a research puzzle through to the representation and judgment of the narrative inquiry in the research text” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b, p. 3). We operated under the following assumptions (Smith & Sparkes, (2010):

1. Narrative inquiry is shaped by interpretivism.
2. Humans are storytelling beings, and we construct stories from our cultural life to help it make sense.
3. Narrative is a means to knowing. It allows us to know ourselves, others, and the world.
4. Humans live ‘storied’ lives. “We live in, through, and out stories” (p. 80).
5. Humans make meaning and use narratives as cultural resources to do so.
6. Stories are both personal and sociocultural. (see pp. 80-81)

Furthermore, narrative inquiry is understood to have a unique writing style in which the representation of the data is also storied (Smith, 2010), allowing us to better tell the story of Black female NCAA Division I assistant coaches. Through participant stories, we learned how assistant coaches situate themselves socially and culturally while also expressing agency (Day Sclater, 2003; Smith & Sparkes, 2010). Using narrative inquiry allowed the first author, Leslie, to develop meaningful relationships with the participants as rich and complex stories were co-constructed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during the dynamic and interactive nature of the interview phase (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012). Within a narrative interview, the researcher is not tasked with getting the story; instead, she “enters into and explores the story with the participant such that they *co-construct* it together” through the back and forth dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Beuthin, 2014, p. 13). Throughout the study, Leslie worked to stay present and engaged during the interviews and shape questions and comments around the stories that the participants shared to create a space for co-construction to occur (Riessman, 2008). For the Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women’s basketball who served as participants in this study, it is hoped that these stories have the ability to uncover the temporal, emotional, relational and contextual aspects of their lives; reveal and honor the complexities of their experiences; and promote personal and social change (Smith, 2010).

## Participants

Eight Black/African American females, ranging in age from 29-36 (M=33.6 years), who held a position as an NCAA Division I women’s basketball assistant coach at the time of the interviews participated in the current study. The participants coached in a variety of NCAA Division I conferences in the South and Midwest regions of the United States. The participants had an average of 10.5 years of total coaching experience as well as at least four years of playing experience at the collegiate level. All of the participants self-identified as Christian. Three self-identified as gay or lesbian, and five self-identified as heterosexual or straight. Four participants reported being single; two reported being in a relationship; one reported that her relationship status was complicated; one reported being married; and none had children. Due

to the small population of Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball (N=314) and a commitment to protecting the confidentiality of the participants, a demographic table of individual participants is not included, and each participant was asked to provide her own pseudonym.

**Recruitment and selection.** We used criterion-based selection and snowball sampling to recruit participants (LeCompte & Preissle-Goetz, 1993). Leslie began by asking the assistant coach who participated in an earlier pilot study to ask coaches that she felt would be appropriate for the study to contact Leslie or get permission from them to send Leslie their contact information. Leslie also asked former colleagues from earlier experiences in coaching to send contact information to other coaches who may be interested in participating. Potential participants who granted permission for their contact information to be shared were then sent an email asking if they would be willing to be interviewed for a study about the experiences of NCAA DI African American female assistant basketball coaches. In total, Leslie contacted 25 potential participants, and eight were able to participate in the main study.

## **Procedures**

**Bracketing interview.** After receiving IRB approval to conduct this study and prior to data collection, Leslie participated in an audiotaped bracketing interview to identify ways that her previous experiences and resulting narratives may influence, limit, or facilitate the narratives she would co-construct with the participants (Patton, 2002). She then thematically analyzed the interview in a fashion similar to the analysis of the interviews described below. Themes that arose from this bracketing interview were: race, gender, age, and education, all factors that contribute to what roles are assigned to assistant coaches; for Black female assistant coaches, their race can provide a way into coaching, but not a way up; Black female assistant coaches are placed into recruiting positions because of their race and gender; Black female coaches do a better job of developing networks than White females coaches do.

**Interviews with participants.** Leslie conducted face-to-face interviews at a location chosen by the participant (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Interviews began by asking participants to tell their story about how they got into coaching. This question helped develop rapport as well as introduce the narrative interview structure to the participants (Riessman, 2008). From the start, Leslie invited participants to approach the interview like a conversation and encouraged them to tell their stories (Smith, 2010). Allowing the participant to lead the direction of the interview is recommended in narrative interviewing in order to help balance the power dynamic (Riessman, 2008). This interviewing style led to in-depth and unpredictable interviews laden with rich data with a great deal of contextual meaning (Smith, 2010). The interview ended by asking several general demographic questions. The interviews lasted between 46 and 102 minutes.

**Self-Reflexivity.** Once the themes were constructed from the bracketing interview, Leslie was reflexive about how these themes were the product of her own context and the ways race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and social class affect how we all shape knowledge construction (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). Further, following the instruction of McGannon and Johnson (2009), Leslie reflected on how the political nature and power dimensions present in the interviews with participants affected the construction of knowledge. These reflections were collected in a research journal that Leslie kept throughout the research process.

**Member checking.** We view member checking as an essential technique for establishing credibility in our work together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once the interviews were transcribed, participants were emailed a copy of their interview to ensure that the transcriptions were an accurate representation of what they said (Patton, 2002). None of the participants requested any changes to be made to their transcripts. To promote further discussion and to assist with the analysis process (Riessman, 2008), Leslie sent an email with the completed thematic analysis to participants (Mays & Pope, 2000). Within this round of member checking, Louise responded with:

This is great! I thought you did a great job of blending everyone's experiences. It's crazy how familiar these thoughts were, I honestly didn't know what was something I said or someone else until I saw the name. Speaks volumes of how we're at different places yet feeling and experiencing the same things.

## Data Analysis

An African American female who previously held a position as a Division I assistant track coach served as a "critical friend" throughout the analysis process to ensure that the researchers' narratives did not overtake the narratives of the participants (Eley, 2012). She helped recognize the role of race in the construction of the participants' narratives that might not be recognized due to the White privilege and positioning of us as authors. To further strengthen the rigor of this study, the second author, Leslee, served as a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis focused on "what" was said rather than "how" or "for what purposes" (Riessman, 2008). Using an inductive approach to ensure that the themes found were constructed from the data (Patton, 2002), we followed the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clark (2006): (a) become familiar with the data, (b) create initial codes, (c) find the themes within the codes, (d) check the initial themes against the entire data set, (e) define and name the final themes, and (f) produce the final report (see p. 87). As suggested by Braun and Clark (2006), we chose names that would "be concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about" (p. 93) and used these themes and data extracts to write the final report.

The themes from the data are presented as a composite first person narrative in the form of a coach's journal. Our composite first person narrative involves researcher interpretation that brings order and meaningfulness to participant data (Kramp, 2004; Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, & Marlow, 2011) highlighting a "sense of community as...multiple voices become one" (Lapum et al., 2012). Our hope is that the reader will personally relate to the themes we present, imagine events in the story occurring in a contextual way, and gain a new understanding of our coach participants (Todres, 2008). The end product is a document that is relatable and allows readers to better understand how coaches described their own experiences, while still maintaining academic rigor.

## Results: The Coach's Journal

The journal begins with a brief introduction. Then, the journal is divided into four sections, which serve as representations of major themes in the research. These themes, labeled in the context of basketball, are: (a) *Pregame: Learning to coach*; (b) *First half: Experiences from the first 10 years*; (c) *Second half: Experiences from the last five years*; and (d) *Overtime: Thinking about the future*.

The themes and subsequent division of the journal based on the number of years in coaching were constructed from the data. The split between *First half: Experiences from the first 10 years* and *Second half: Experiences from the last five years* represent the ways that participant narratives shifted based on how long the participant had been coaching. The *First half: Experiences from the first 10 years* was primarily co-constructed from the experiences of Tiffany, Jordyn, Susie, and Lakeisha (who have coached for 10 years or less), with some reflections from Dominique, Kim, Rhea, and Louise (who have coached for more than 10 years). The *Second half: Experiences from the last five years* was co-created from the current experiences of the coaches who have coached for more than 10 years. The other two themes were co-constructed from the narratives of all of the coaches. Each theme is defined in the Introduction to the Journal and includes several subthemes that were constructed throughout the analysis process.

Each journal entry is named after the subtheme that it represents. In each journal entry, direct quotes are used from several of the participants with linking phrases inserted by the first author to create a single, co-constructed narrative (Beuthin, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2017). The direct quotes from participants are presented in italics, and the speaker is identified at the end of each quote.

### Introduction to the Journal

As I begin my fifteenth year of coaching at the collegiate level, I have decided to *try to journal my experience...to really just kind of write about how it made me feel* (Louise). While I will write about how I got my start in coaching and the ways I have developed as a coach in *Pregame: Learning to coach*, my primary focus will be on the ways my experiences have shaped my career. Early in my career, which I discuss in *First half: Experiences from the first 10 years*, I believed that being a Black female was an advantage that allowed me to obtain jobs, and I accepted the structure of coaching and the roles that I was assigned as a recruiter and mediator. I also possessed a positive outlook on the control I had over my own advancement in NCAA DI women's basketball coaching. Within the last five years, written about in *Second half: Experiences from the last five years*, I have become aware of both the advantages and challenges and how I handle both of these aspects of being a Black female assistant coach in NCAA Division I women's basketball. Namely, while I am getting jobs, they are not the jobs that I ultimately want, and I no longer believe that I can fully control whether or not I will get these jobs. I end this journal by talking about what my own future as a Black female head coach might look like and by brainstorming ways to help more Black females become assistant and head coaches in women's basketball, which I write about in *Overtime: Thinking about the future*.

Though you will not see it in these excerpts, I also use this journal to further help me prepare to become a head coach. For example, *as I'm scouting, I'm looking at different things. If there is a play or something, I'm like, "Oh, that would fit into my system," and I will diagram the play out. If I hear a quote or something. I brainstorm what will my philosophy be and things like that. It's all written in my journal, so when it comes time for me to put my stuff together to be a head coach and do interviews, it will just be pulling my ideas and putting them together out of my journal [rather] than having to come up with some concept; it's all there* (Rhea).

### Pregame: Learning to Coach

**Getting into coaching.** I was a great player in high school and college, and even though *my coaches used to ask me all the time, "Do you want to coach after this? What do you want to do?"* (Dominique); *at first, I was like, "nahhhhh..."* (Jordyn), *I don't want to be one of them.*

*I don't want to do that" (Rhea), but my coaches and others around me kept encouraging me to think about it. Further, I was influenced by [the coaches] where I played (Susie). I kind of gravitated toward coaches that made me feel ... [important and valued], and then, once I realized that I could do the same thing [really impact somebody's life and change it for the better], it was like a no brainer to me (Louise). Since I was blessed...throughout high school and college [to have] had great coaches ... I just [wanted] to give back in that sense (Kim) and become a coach.*

Once I finished playing at the collegiate level, one of the coaches that knew me as a player called me and was like, "Hey, do you want to coach for me next year?" She was giving me the opportunity to jump right into [coaching], and I've always been told it was hard to break in, so I just went for it (Tiffany).

**My development as a coach.** Once I figured out I wanted to be a coach, I participated in the [NCAA/WBCA] program, *So You Want To Be a Coach*, and I thought it was awesome (Susie). They had panels of speakers come in, and there were different topics that they talked about. The key that they really hammered home was networking, and what's it's like to not be entitled...It was great that you got the chance to hear and learn from so many people (Tiffany), and it was more of an intimate setting with them...They talked about...what head coaches look for. What not to do... They preached on hardworking, loyalty, initiative, support, all those things (Susie).

*I enjoy going to the Final Fours and the different coach's clinics or symposiums or different stuff like that where you can interact with other assistant coaches and...even some head coaches and ADs (Jordyn). In recent years, when I've gone, I try to see what I can learn different, especially last year, they had such a variety of different things you can learn; whether it's in the office, something on the court, in the community, marketing, budget[ing], different things like that that I feel I can still listen and get better at (Louise).*

*I have also been to [Felicia Hall Allen's] A Step UP Symposium, it's an assistant coaches' symposium...It is very similar [to] and [has] almost the exact same structure as the Final Four, but it is so much smaller, and the reason that I love that is I know half of our business is about networking and getting to know your peers, your colleagues and all that good stuff...[A Step UP is] such a smaller scale that it forces you to be so much more intimate with people. So you can break off...and be in a group with a head coach from an ACC School, and here I am coaching at...a mid-major program. You can have these intimate conversations and pick their brain[s], and...last year, you know, there was an athletic director in the huddle, and you are learning...what they look for in not just head coaches, but assistant coaches as well and how to prepare [yourself] (Jordyn). Felicia Hall Allen runs this symposium, and I think she is trying to educate Black coaches in general, mostly females...and get them prepared...It's not tailored to Black folks, but...a majority of her clients are usually Black people...so she does a good job educating them (Rhea).*

These conferences and symposiums have been great experiences and have provided me with a lot of information, but *more so than anything*, I have learned from *just taking my personal experience and...implementing it (Rhea). It may be kind of lame and cliché, but I feel [that] every situation I've been in, I've been able to walk away with something (Jordyn). Not every situation is going to be all good, and that brings me to the point [that] sometimes you have to learn what not to do. (Lakeisha). All of these experiences are what makes me confident. I was afraid to do everything when I first started [coaching], you know, and every job presents new challenges. But it's funny because every single job before I get there I'm just, "This isn't going to work, I'm not going to know what I am doing, everyone is going to be so much more advanced in everything than I am," and now [with] every single job that I have taken, a little bit more of that fear goes away each time (Susie).*

## First Half: Experiences from the First 10 Years

**I am needed because I am a Black female, and that's a good thing.** *Because women's basketball is primarily young Black females, I think a lot of head coaches are looking for that same, they are looking for young, Black females (Jordyn). I'm not going to lie; I have probably gotten most of my jobs because I am a Black female. I mean...everybody wants a Black female on staff... You know what? Now that I think about it, being a Black female definitely got my foot in the door, and it's kept my foot in the door (Rhea) because [having a Black female] is kind of a requirement for every staff I guess you could say, so that's a plus (Susie). There needs to be someone on your staff to be able to relate to the kids and their families... You need [an African American], and I think that's an advantage sometimes (Tiffany). If you are good at what you do, [being a Black female] basically assures you a job, and that's a good thing (Susie).*

**I am the only Black female on staff, and that's just how it is.** *One big challenge [is] knowing that there are not multiple African Americans on staffs typically. You know that you are going to be in a dog fight for a position when it comes down to it... so when you are applying for a job, the first thing you do is look and see if they have a minority on staff and if they don't, now, it's like, "Yeah, I can get that job." It gives you more confidence that you can get that job, but it is a double-edged sword. If you are looking on a staff, and it is something that you really, really want, and you know you are qualified for it, but they already have a minority on the staff... it makes it a little bit difficult... I've been coaching right at 10 years, and I've yet to be on a staff with more than one African American... So it's to be expected. So I don't know if I can say that's a challenge because it's something that is expected (Lakeisha). It's been the norm for so long (Susie).*

**All about recruiting.** *My primary role is recruiting. I'm a recruiting coordinator, so I do all of the organization as far as tell[ing] our staff where we need to be, who we need to be watching... [Recruiting] is the lifeline of [a] program, so I would say that's probably 80% of what I do. I mean I do scouting as well, but it is mainly the recruiting component (Tiffany).*

*I know that the Black assistant coach is the one that is supposed to get the kids, they are not always expected to come on and just be great X's and O's gurus... As a Black female coach, we are expected to be able to go out and recruit, and get some players... You better be able to do it... If you can't recruit, you are probably not going to have a good chance of staying on... I'm a strong recruiter, so you know, I think it is a plus when you are a strong recruiter, and you can add that tag to your name, it gives you another leg up when it comes down to going out for a job (Lakeisha).*

**If I work hard, good things will happen for me.** *I try my best to take a "This is the stereotype, but I'm like blowing it out of the water" type of approach... I want to be [in a position that] my boss can't do without me, period. It doesn't matter (Susie). I think, "I'm just going to do my best, do whatever I have to" ... and [I] just try to... do [my] best, so ultimately, the only thing that is thought about is, "You know what? [She] was a good hire." Regardless of race, gender, whatever... I hope once again... it's one of those situations where... I'm going to work my tail off, I'm going to work as hard as I can, I'm going to do the best that I can do and hopefully that will speak for itself... I think it will get to a point where... it will just be a no brainer that... you know what I mean? "Oh, clearly she's qualified (for a head coaching position) (Jordyn).*

**I am the mediator.** It is important for me to be someone that my players can relate to and talk to about issues that may be bothering them. *A couple of kids...have needed to go talk to someone but made the comment they didn't feel comfortable talking to a Caucasian because they didn't feel like they could relate to them in a lot of things, so they feel more comfortable coming to me or some other African American (Kim). I think that's why it's important to have someone on your staff that either relates racially, age-wise, someone that can bridge the gap, because when things like [the athletic department disregarding racial concerns] happen, I understand. [The players] could have tried to go talk to another staff and [the staff] would be like, "What, huh? Okay." ... and it wouldn't have been as big of a deal, and [the staff] wouldn't understand how it hurts.*

*There was one instance that I can think of last year. It was Martin Luther King Day and we had a game on that day and during the game, there was promotion stuff ... for the veterans. They didn't even acknowledge what day it was, and that threw me for a whirlwind, and I knew it did for our kids...It didn't even cross our staff's minds and our game promotion people didn't even realize that [it] was a big deal, but I think it was very offensive... It's almost like [the staff and administrators were like], "I don't know how that could be offensive." It's almost like if it doesn't affect you personally, it's...hard to understand how that could have hurt...I get it, because I'm a minority person working with a majority staff...in a majority department so I understood why the majority was confused by it being offensive, but parents and people in the stands and our kids don't necessarily always understand the way I would, I guess.*

*I tried to talk to [the players] about the fact that ignorance isn't necessarily trying to harm...that the oversight wasn't intentional and [that] it may feel like it was, but I guarantee that it wasn't. So for [the players to] just try to put [themselves] in [the staff's] shoes for a second. It wasn't like they weren't honoring good people that day...I think the point got across. I hope it did (Tiffany).*

## **Second Half: Experiences from the Last Five Years**

**Take care of yourself because others may not.** I always felt safe in my position because I felt needed, worked hard, and had a great relationship with my boss, but I learned that sometimes that is not enough. *A head coach that I worked for...for [4] years and I did everything for our program, and not only was I her assistant, we were friends...And when I was fired...first of all, it was without cause. We were in the same room. She didn't speak to me; she didn't look at me, like nothing. I was treated like I had slept with a player or had some big scandal...And, like this is someone who was my professional mentor, who could have easily said, "Okay, we are in the [4th] year of a [5-year] contract. W...we are not winning. Like, I've got to make a change, you can get a job. This is what's going to happen," as my friend. Or, once you've done all this, like make a call to someone to help me get a new job (Dominique). But [she] didn't help me, [she] didn't answer [her] phone, [she] didn't answer my text messages, [she] didn't make a comment to the paper, there was just [the] headline, "Long-time assistant gets fired" ... But I didn't realize how negative [getting fired] would have been ... 'Cuz everyone was like, "What did she do? She has been there for [4] years; they have had all of this success. They have had top recruiting classes. What the hell did she do? What did she do?" Well, I didn't do anything...I gave all I had to somebody that I knew and I trusted and loved and got screwed in the end (Rhea).*

*Whenever you go to conferences, you learn you have to be loyal to your head coach... but you can't forget about you in the process (Dominique). You have to also be for yourself (Louise). I will tell you that I haven't had that mentality the whole time...It has definitely developed over these last 2 or 3 years (Rhea).*

**I am in a box.** Early in my career, I recognized that I got jobs and certain positions because I am an African American female, but *I [had] no problem with it because I [understood] that game and [knew] that you make a name in recruiting. So when I got in, after I got in with [the first head coach], it was like, "You are going to get out of [junior college (JUCO)] by proving that you can recruit. Right now, no one is going to care if you can coach."* ... Initially, *I didn't have the desire...to coach Division I, and all the fears that I had came true on my first Division I job. My job was to be the recruiting coordinator...I didn't think anything of it. I [was] hungry, and I had new challenges, so I was just going with the work, but it wasn't until I was like, "Whoa," really stepping out, I'm in a box, as a Black female, that's what they see, and so it was like, "hmmmm, ok."* I didn't have any scouts at the DI job. I didn't have any [basketball] responsibilities. It was a crazy dynamic. It was crazy all around...And so my next job when I left and went to [a new school]. The things that when I took the job, [I said,] "I want to do scouts...I want to have more of a role on the basketball side of things." ... I never lose sight of what it is that got me here. I was gonna recruit, I've got to recruit. I have to do that, but it was important that I start adding different things in. Again, as an African American female, you get stuck in this box of just being able to recruit, and that's all you are, all you are... But at the end of the day if you don't have a head coach that's willing to actually let you do more that is visibly seen on the floor during the games, then, you are still that token Black female; and you're a recruiter; and that's what it is. That's kind of discouraging (Kim).

[The] assumption is we're going to come in, and then, [they're] gonna kind of put us, like all Black females, in this [recruiting] box, and this is all you have to be. And I think I do have friends that are Black females that are recruiting coordinators that don't have the personality for it...like, you know, either they are still learning how to do it, or they're unsure of themselves because it's not a natural fit, and I think that's the hard part, people just assuming that it's supposed to be a natural fit because [a black female is] supposed to be XYZ, and [they're] not. And...I think so many of them get out (of coaching) because they do feel pigeonholed. They don't see that there is opportunity for growth. (Louise).

**I want different responsibilities.** In order to move outside this box, I've been thinking that I [would like to] relinquish that role (recruiting coordinator) ... and have more physical, vocal control as far as on the court, X's and O's (Kim). Ideally, I want the opportunity to grow, to stretch [myself] a little bit...A position breakdown...and skill development [are areas] where you can grow because you gotta do some [individual] sessions...and it allows you to kind of go borrow, because that's how we do in this business, borrow and recycle information and then kind of like the X and O stuff. You learn from it (Dominique). I would also like a little bit more active role in the budget and other side of things (Louise). I would really just like more balanced involvement (Rhea).

**You have to prove yourself to be taken seriously.** Another thing is having to prove your worth. You know, I am a coach. I like basketball. If I wanted to recruit, I could do that for a business or administration or admissions at a college. Recruiting can be anything. The basketball part is what has me here, not the recruiting, if that makes sense...but you have to prove yourself over, over, and over, again. Like your resume doesn't have anything to do with it, like [it] doesn't even come to play...It's like, "You're a Black female with a really good resume, but we are not even going to acknowledge [the] fact that you have actually done this stuff." It's like I just made this resume up (Rhea).

I think the part that has been probably one of the hardest to shake as a Black female is [that] I don't know if people take you...seriously sometimes when you say, "I want to make this adjustment in this game, or I have this suggestion." You're almost looked at like, "Is this a legitimate suggestion, or is this you heard somebody else say it, and you said it first?"...I have

*done a better job of trying to be extremely thorough in scouts, so when I do offer information...it is obvious that I am not just pulling [it] out of a hat suggesting something...This is the 5th university that I have worked at, all Division I level, and this is probably the second one that I felt like I could have somewhat of a voice with X's and O's. But I think that...there's probably nothing more deflating than being assigned a scout, knowing that you have watched X amount of hours of film, and [upon giving] a simple suggestion, no one wants to take you serious[ly] (Louise).*

**I am prepared to be a head coach, but I might not get that opportunity.** *I'm ready to be a head coach (Rhea), but generally what you see on staffs (at the BCS level) are Caucasian male or female at the head, but Black assistants (Dominique). It's almost like we're good enough to be assistants, but we're not good enough to be head coaches, "You know, you're good at this, but we don't want you to...you can't run it. You can't run this whole thing" ... How much sense does that make (Rhea)? I want it to be different.*

*I would like my experiences to be about, we get started at the same time, both got 15 years in, we are gonna be interviewed for a coaching job in the Spring, and you (White female) will probably get it over me, like more times than not. As a Black female it gets so frustrating to think that you have to do things 15, 15 to maybe 20 years unless you have the name of being a former "all everything" player to get an opportunity to move on, to move up, ... and I think that part gets frustrating. At what point, if we have the same thing on paper, is that enough? And why do I need 3 more extra years of experience compared to you? And I don't know, I don't have an answer, but I think that's one of the things that I've noticed that does kind of get frustrating, where literally they tell me this has been the science of preparing myself for the opportunity, and to feel like it's not going to be enough, I'm just gonna have to...be an assistant for 20 years, and at 15 after this season, who knows, but it's rarely occurred when someone else of another race, gender had to be an assistant this long until they have an opportunity ... It's probably one of my biggest frustrations.*

*I really thought a) I would be a head coach by now. I really do feel like I've done enough professionally, personally to kind of put me in that situation, and it's still not enough. I think it gets very taxing; it just gets taxing ... I think that's why it's getting even more and more difficult to keep coaches, regardless of race and gender when that next tier of us that really want to be head coaches have like, "When is your opportunity going to come?" or waiting for a lucky break ... It just ... just saying that it's deflating is giving yourself a compliment because it's more than that ... I think it's, women's basketball, the generations before, before me, have done a great job of paving the way where you can actually make a living financially off of it and raise a family, so a lot of people are seeing it as an opportunity to just come in and see more about the money and the easy life that it is than about the impact. I think that's the hard part, people that do it for the wrong reasons that get the opportunities that you have been working for (Louise).*

*Honestly, a lot of times, I feel like getting a head coaching job will only happen if my agent is able to have a better relationship with this AD than others (Kim), and I am going to have to be lucky, patient, and be at the right place at the right time (Lakeisha).*

**Dealing with all of this.** *Right now, while I do some things that help me, I am not sure that I handle not being taken seriously or being passed over for jobs very well all of the time. One helpful thing that I do is pray about things. Like when I got fired, I knew that it [was] what I prayed for. I didn't pray to get fired, but I prayed for a way out. So I can't be mad about it (Rhea). Another thing I do that helps is talking to other coaches and people in my life that I respect. I just try to use my little network of people...to keep me sane (Louise).*

I used to make jokes about everything, but *I'm over making jokes about it. It's really not that funny to me anymore. A few years ago, it was like, "ha," but now, it's like, "Really? What the hell?"* (Louise). And when other members of my staff or coaches and administrators outside of women's basketball are disrespectful, *I've learned...not to say [that something bothered me] as much if it bothered me because people think that it's just another way for either making excuses or complaining ... It's like [I] don't get to be bothered,* (Louise), *so I shut down ... But I've learned that's not the best way to handle it. I'm getting better, just takes a little more energy and letting people know you are there ...* (Rhea).

### **Overtime: Thinking about the Future**

**Being a Black female head coach.** *I could be a head coach (Dominique), but there are so many factors that go into being a head coach, it's not that simple...you gotta find the right place and find the right staff (administrators and assistant coaches), and I think everything else would work itself out, but those are two hard obstacles* (Susie). *We have to make sure we're getting the right jobs that...we can be successful in.* (Rhea). *African American coaches, females, a lot of the time don't get leeway that Caucasian males and women get, so the pressure is on that you have to go and you have to do well and you have to represent well because you are getting watched, and it's 9 to 5* (Kim).

Then, there is even more pressure because *we still have to be overly qualified in some cases because if you don't, then people are looking at you like, "You only got the job 'cuz you're Black and you're female."* *And I think in the of case working for [a Black female head coach], it was just a terrible demise at the, probably after the first year, it was all just downhill, nosedive of her just being extra paranoid of, "People don't think I'm qualified..." They thought the White male at the time, he's the one that's coaching the team; he's the one that's successful...I think affirmative action is meant to help and give you the opportunities, but it's just it incites this level of paranoia that now, people are just looking at me because I am just Black and nothing else. And I think for me, I think it goes back to if I go out of my way to make myself qualified, this is why I invest so much and put my own money in personal/professional development, so they can see that I might have gotten the opportunity to be interviewed, but that's not why I got the job. I am very qualified, and here is my resume* (Louise).

**Getting more Black females into coaching positions.** When I think about ways to increase the number of Black female coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball, *I don't know if there is any one thing. I don't think there is a cure-all. Like you would be asking for too much. You would be asking for world peace* (Dominique). But there are some things that can be done. The NCAA could provide *more workshops or better advertising for workshops or allow more spots* (Susie), or since *I'm already in the business, there being more resources maybe provided to minorities to help prepare them to be head coaches....so maybe if they are getting that within their job...I mean you see it in the teachers within the school system. They have their hours that they have to get to retain their teaching certificate, so maybe if there was something like that in place* (Tiffany).

Head coaches and administrators also play a role in increasing the numbers of Black female coaches. *If you have a coach that is willing to allow you to get outside and grow you as a coach, then that makes a lot of difference* (Kim). *Administrators have to just give [Black female coaches] the opportunity... and give them the time to recruit, implement their staff, get the right crew and kind of change that culture. I think that's an important thing for them to be able to have...you know. Yeah, you let them in the door, but you gotta let them do some things* (Jordyn).

*I think some of it we have to do ourselves too (Louise). It starts as a player. Had I not, when I was in college, been a respectful person on and off the court and handled my business, then I wouldn't have had this opportunity (Kim). Then, also as a Black female, take advantage of everything. Like if they put you in a situation where you don't feel comfortable, make the most of that situation...Like they want to pigeonhole you as a recruiter, well you make sure you meet everybody you can meet out there- meet ADs, meet senior women's executives, meet other coaches. I learned that here too, like, "You don't want me doing scouting reports? Guess what? I'm going to watch the film on every opponent anyway, and then, when we get ready to play, I've got some input." I'm not gonna to sit here like, "Well you didn't want me to do my scouting report, so what do I do now?" (Rhea). Lastly, we just have to support one another better...Because I think a lot of situations we don't help each other, we just don't. I mean when jobs and stuff become available we don't recommend each other, like we don't recycle each other (Dominique). You can't be one of the few that do make it and not give back in a sense. I'm not saying you have to then go hire a Black female assistant, whatever, but I think you do have a responsibility to mentor in your own way...I am not saying you're gonna speak at the Final Four, that's definitely great, people can see you in a larger scale, but really taking your time and identifying that next group of Black female coaches that could be where you are and help them make that transition (Louise).*

## Discussion

This study presents a co-constructed narrative in the form of a coach's journal and serves to illuminate the varied experiences of eight Black female assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. The results of the current study can help sport psychology researchers to better understand not only the lived experiences of Black female coaches, but also the social inequities and power dynamics within NCAA Division I women's basketball. Throughout this discussion section, we expand on the knowledge that can be gained from the participants' narratives and relating the current study's results to previous literature.

**Coaching roles and experiences based on Black female identity.** The coaching roles assigned to Black female assistant coaches and the experiences of these coaches based on their Black female identity are inextricably intertwined throughout the narratives. Thus, these topics will be discussed in tandem. As the participants described their entry into coaching, it is unsurprising that their identity as a Black female was implicated. Based on the narratives of the participants in this study, it seems that the path to NCAA Division I coaching for Black females begins with their being high caliber basketball players. All of the participants were offered scholarships to play at Division I schools. Furthermore, all played Division I women's basketball, except Dominique, who played at the NCAA Division II level. It is currently unknown whether it is an unwritten requirement that Black females be former high-level players, and as such whether this could be a source of gendered racism that limits potential coaches from entering the profession.

In addition to the shared characteristic of being high level players, most of the participants in this study were encouraged to go into coaching by their own coaches, as was also found by Borland and Bruening (2010). Participants "were influenced by [the coaches] where [they] played" (Susie), and this made them realize the type of influence that they could have on the lives of young people. Kim explicitly expressed that "[she] just [wanted] to give back in that sense." Further, the participants noted the positive impact of being coached by Black females. Susie was first coached by a Black female assistant coach in college, and she described her experience by saying:

I just never thought of it like I could be them [a coach] until I saw her. And that was a big deal, and even what she is doing now, being at [BCS school], but she was the first one I ever looked at that I could be like.

Not only do these findings highlight the importance of current coaches serving as mentors to Black student-athletes, but they also speak to the need to increase the number of Black female coaches within this context so that student-athletes can have more visible role models (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Once they became coaches, participants noted that they were asked to fill a variety of roles on coaching staffs, but the participants explicitly stated that they were most often assigned roles as recruiters and post or guard skill developers. These role assignments are in line with the perception that Black female assistant coaches are needed to develop relationships with Black student-athletes and recruits, while also reinforcing the coaches' statuses as former Division I caliber basketball players. These findings mirror Cunningham's (2010) conclusion that Black male coaches are valued more for their ability to recruit than for their ability as a skills or strategies coach, and support Borland and Bruening's (2010) assertion that Black women in coaching felt that others perceived them as only being useful as a student athlete or as a recruiter. Additionally, the results from this study extend the stacking and positional segregation research that typically describes the tendency for Black male athletes to be "stacked" into positions that only require physical gifts and not intelligence (Best, 1987; Loy & McElvogue, 1970; Smith & Leonard, 1997). This study suggests that Black female assistant coaches are also "stacked" into recruiting positions or positions that require them to use their athletic skills rather than their decision-making skills.

A focus on recruiting and skill development limits the time that Black female assistant coaches can devote to developing game strategy knowledge and the other essential administrative skills (e.g., game scheduling and managing a budget) that, according to the participants, are necessary to becoming a head coach. The results of the current study are similar to the findings from previous coach development research (conducted with groups of coaches outside of the current target population). Similar to the coaches in previous studies, the participants in this study gained coaching knowledge primarily from informal learning situations (e.g., daily experiences) and nonformal ones (e.g., conferences, workshops, and symposiums), but believed that informal learning situations were the most effective form of coach development (Cushion et al., 2010); Rhea expressed that she has primarily learned from "taking [her] personal experience and implementing it." As direct experience is seen as the most effective means of learning, it is detrimental for Black female coaches to be assigned recruiting roles and thereby have limited opportunities to develop hands-on expertise in areas outside of recruiting.

Furthermore, experience is a source of coaching efficacy information, where coaching efficacy is defined as coaches' beliefs in their ability to impact the development of their athletes inside and outside of sport (Feltz, Chase, Moritz, & Sullivan, 1999). Therefore, in addition to hindering Black female coaches' opportunities to develop new skills, a lack of experience can negatively affect coaching efficacy. The narratives from the participants in the current study support this idea. When I asked Susie what contributed to her confidence, she simply answered with, "Experience."

Interestingly, participants with less than 10 years of coaching experience embraced their roles as recruiters and viewed recruiting as a way to advance in their careers. In contrast, the participants with more than 10 years of coaching experience were more likely to describe this tendency as a negative because being "pigeonholed" as a recruiter did not allow them the opportunity to grow as coaches. Borland and Bruening (2010) suggest that Black females remain in recruiting roles because they have been socialized to believe that they can only exist

within sport if they fulfill specified roles (Coakley, 2009). This finding is clearly intimated by participants of this study in their early years of coaching through sentiments such as “As a Black female coach, we are expected to be able to go out and recruit... if you can’t recruit, you are probably not going to have a good chance of staying on” (Lakeisha). The less experienced coaches perceive that their value as a coach is rooted in their ability to recruit. However, through the narratives of the more experienced coaches, this study suggests that there are factors, in addition to socialization, that influence the roles that Black female coaches fill. When considering the more experienced coaches, there is a notable shift from the idea that as a Black female coach their role is to recruit to the sentiment that “I am a coach... the basketball part is what has me here, not the recruiting” (Rhea). The more experienced coaches express desires to “have a hand in everything” (Dominique), and they actively seek positions where they “have more of a role on the basketball side of things” (Kim). Ultimately, these coaches show that though they may be influenced by the discourse of “Black female assistant coach equals recruiter,” they can break from it and create their own truth for what it means to be a Black female assistant coach in NCAA Division I women’s basketball.

Unjust hiring practices at the institutional level represent another way the Black female identity impacts the experiences of Black female assistant coaches. Many of the participants expressed a belief that typically, there could only be one Black female per staff. The participants stated that if they were interested in a position on a staff that did not already have a Black woman, they felt confident in their prospects. Conversely, if a Black woman was already on staff, the participants stated that they would often be hesitant about applying. In the 2014-2015 season, 30% of NCAA Division I women’s basketball assistant coaches were Black females (NCAA, 2016). Each staff is allowed three assistants. These numbers indicate that, based on percentages, the participants’ assumptions that there is usually only one Black female per staff is supported. This hiring tendency limits job opportunities for Black female coaches. Furthermore, this form of oppression results in Black women competing against one another for a limited number of positions. It is unsurprising then that according to several of the participants, Black women do not openly share information or form networks like men in the “Good Ole Boys” club do. One explanation for this could be the inherent competition for positions that has developed due to the oppressive hiring practices currently in place. Further research on the development of personal networks in NCAA Division I coaching is warranted to better understand the potential benefits and consequences of these networks for Black female coaches (Ibarra, 1995).

Identity further affects experience as previous research has found that Black female coaches will often accept positions even if they believe that they are only being hired because of their race (Borland & Bruening, 2010). Coaches in the current study admitted that they too had been hired because of their race and gender, and they credit their being a Black female for “getting their foot in the door” of NCAA Division I women’s basketball and keeping it there (Rhea). Though many of the participants recognized this hiring practice as an advantage, the limited hiring of Black female assistant coaches can also lead to tokenism.

While Borland and Bruening (2010) found that the participants in their study often felt like “tokens” due to the “designated recruiter” perception, the participants in the current study cited feeling like a “token” because the majority of the players they were coaching were Black. As a result, the coaches felt that they were only needed when the situation involved a Black student-athlete (e.g., recruiting visits, meeting with the head coach, or conversations about sensitive racial topics). Researchers have repeatedly revealed the undervaluation of female coaches at the organizational level, and based on these results, it seems that Black female coaches are no exception to this type of oppression. Additionally, tokens are considered “representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals” (Kanter, 1977, p. 208). As such, the participants perceived that they were expected to be able to develop relationships

with all Black student-athletes and their families. Furthermore, many of the participants in this study explained that there is a great deal of pressure on Black female head coaches to perform well in order to ensure that other Black female coaches will receive opportunities in the future. The participants in the current study admitted that feeling like a “token” led to frustration, paranoia, and increased pressure. Tokenism has also been found to lead to higher levels of depression and anxiety (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995).

**Coping with gendered racism.** The above discussion addressed the multiple oppressions experienced by participants based on their Black female identity. Describing ways participants have coped with these multiple oppressions further expands the literature. Since no studies currently exist within sport psychology or coach education research that address the means by which Black female coaches cope with oppression, the results from this study add new insights to these fields while mirroring the findings of psychology research. Shorter-Gooden (2004) found that Black women often use internal resources, which are defined as belief systems that shape how a woman perceives herself and her place in the world, to cope with racism and sexism. One internal resource that the participants in the current study used as a way to cope with oppression was resting on faith (i.e., relying on prayer). Rhea and Dominique both felt that getting fired was an answer to their prayers. Rhea stated, “This is what I prayed for, I didn’t pray to get fired, but I prayed for a way out. So I can’t be mad about it.” Role flexing (i.e., changing behaviors to fit in with the dominant group) is an additional coping strategy that has been used by participants in previous research as well as by participants in the current study. Several of the participants mentioned that they role flexed by making sure that they were dressed professionally and acted professionally at all times. Kim expressed being “very conscious of [her] dress” and being on guard about the things that she says and how she says them. Further, participants in the current study mentioned relying on social support to cope with gendered racism by reaching out to other collegiate coaches, family members, and others who they respected outside of sport. Relying on social support is a strategy that has appeared in previous studies about how participants cope with racism, sexism, and gendered racism (Lewis et al., 2013; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

When coping with gendered racism, Lewis and colleagues (2013) found that *using one’s voice as power* (i.e., speaking up to address an oppressive situation and regain power) was a resistance coping strategy used by the participants in their study. In Tiffany’s narrative about Martin Luther King Jr. Day, she directly challenged the staff and administrators who failed to recognize the significance of the day, but she downplayed the severity of the oppressive experience when she was discussing the situation with the student-athletes. Avoiding oppressive experiences and downplaying their severity has been cited as a self-protective coping strategy in previous research, and this mechanism was also used by the participants in this study (Lewis et al., 2013). Many of the participants believed that gendered racism just “is what it is” and “expected.” They would not confront their oppressors because it would only reflect negatively on them. Louise shared, “I’ve learned now probably not to say [that something bothered me] ... because people think that it’s just another way for either making excuses or complaining ... It’s like you don’t get to be bothered.” A second self-protective coping strategy, and the coping strategy that was used most frequently by the participants in the current study, is the *becoming a Black superwoman* strategy (i.e., being strong and self-reliant and taking on a multitude of responsibilities) that emerged from Lewis and peers (2013). This strategy is seen throughout the *If I work hard, good things will happen for me* and *I want different responsibilities* journal entries. While coping strategies are intended to reduce the stress of gendered racism, self-protective strategies such as downplaying the severity of and avoiding oppressive experiences and becoming a Black superwoman, can lead to heightened distress (Lewis et al.; Thomas et al., 2008).

As evidenced throughout this discussion, gendered racism is prevalent in NCAA Division I women's basketball and can have deleterious effects on the psychological health and the career ambitions of Black female assistant coaches. To improve the career path for these women, interventions are necessary. These interventions are not exclusively the responsibility of the Black women in Division I basketball; instead, everyone is responsible for working in collaboration with Black women to promote positive changes within individual institutions and the NCAA as a whole (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The following section will discuss possible interventions that target perpetrators (e.g., men and White persons) of sexism, racism, and gendered racism, as well as interventions presented to targets of sexism, racism, and gendered racism.

### **Practical Implications**

One of the six essential characteristics of works grounded in cultural sport psychology is that the work is focused on praxis (Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010). Therefore, it is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study can be applied in practical settings to improve the lives and career paths for these women. As evidenced throughout this discussion, gendered racism is prevalent in NCAA Division I women's basketball and can have deleterious effects on the psychological health and career ambitions of Black female assistant coaches. To improve the career path for these women, interventions are necessary. Everyone is responsible for working in collaboration with Black women to promote positive changes within individual institutions and the NCAA as a whole (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012); in other words, contrary to participant beliefs in the current study, such interventions are not the sole responsibility of Black women in Division I basketball.

**Interventions for perpetrators.** Intervention strategies developed and implemented by sport psychology consultants can be directed at male and White perpetrators of oppression in the sport context. Two of these strategies include providing educational opportunities and strengthening prosocial norms. These two strategies have been taken and adapted from a more extensive list of global intervention strategies offered by Szymanski and Moffitt (2012).

For example, when beginning an intervention program with men and White persons about gendered racism, providing educational opportunities is essential. In the current study, Tiffany believed that the White staff members and administrators just "didn't get it." She recalled these individuals making statements like, "I don't know how that could be offensive;" therefore, she did not think they could understand how their actions could hurt Black women. The desired learning outcomes for the perpetrators taking part in these opportunities would then include: increased awareness of the perpetrators' attitudes and biases toward African American women; a better understanding of the perpetrators' own social identities; recognition of the privilege the perpetrators possess and an understanding that this privilege is sustained by society; the ability to identify types of gendered racist behaviors; and lastly, acquiring skills to challenge and stop oppressive behaviors as they are happening (adapted from Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). A sport psychology consultant could have perpetrators participate in a privilege walk; complete an identity wheel; find examples gendered racism in news stories involving African American female athletes and coaches; and role play situations in which they discourage others from using offensive language about race and gender and offer suggestions for using more inclusive language to accomplish the learning outcomes of the intervention program.

Sport psychology consultants can also help strengthen prosocial norms as an intervention strategy targeting perpetrators of gendered racism. With this type of intervention, the goal is to "[create] a dominant culture of safety and respect, tolerance, and affirmation"

(Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012, p. 20). A sport psychology consultant can accomplish this by encouraging peer and community leaders within athletic departments to participate in group discussions and programs that inform other members of the athletic department about the negative effects of gendered racism and to champion respect and civility. The Men 4 Men program at the University of Missouri is an example of a program that is implementing this type of intervention strategy, and it can be used as a model for other athletic departments (Malnati et al., 2016; Mizzou Network, 2015).

**Interventions for targets.** Sport psychology consultants can also implement interventions for African American female coaches (i.e., the targets of oppression) to help reduce the negative effects of the gendered racism they routinely face. Possible intervention strategies are educating targets and building on the targets' strengths when developing coping strategies. These global intervention strategies were originally offered by Szymanski and Moffitt (2012) and have been adapted here to better fit the sport context.

Similar to the interventions aimed at the perpetrators, education is a key first step in interventions presented to African American females by sport psychology consultants. During our interview, Kim was "shocked" to learn how *few* Black female coaches were currently in NCAA Division I women's basketball. An educational intervention can come in the form of a workshop, printed materials, or information from websites and social media. The purposes of the educational intervention include: helping African American women gain a better understanding of their multiple social identities, introducing them to the pervasiveness and negative effects of gendered racism, and encouraging African American women to critically interrogate the Caucasian, male-dominated structures in society. Education is especially important for African American female coaches because they have a greater likelihood of experiencing oppression in the male-dominated profession of coaching in college athletics.

A second intervention strategy is using the targets' strength when identifying useful coping strategies (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). This strategy involves sport psychology consultants working with African American females to discover what coping strategies have worked well for them in the past and building from these experiences. For the participants in the current study, relying on social support was one coping strategy that the participants cited as useful. Therefore, a sport psychology consultant working with these women could help the women to identify people in their network who could best help them based on the situation being faced. This is essential in the words of Louise because:

You have all of your different friends and different mentors, and you're not going to go to Victoria Secret looking for a pair of Jordan's. It's the wrong store to go in, so [you have to know] what your friends provide for you, what you need from them, and who [is] going to be rational.

African American women can also work to develop moderators and mediators that will allow them to better cope with the oppressions that they face. These can include self-esteem, sense of control, and the internalization of racial and gender identities (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012).

Sport psychology consultants can also encourage African American female coaches to take action to combat the multiple oppressions they experience and gain a sense of empowerment. With this type of intervention program, sport psychology consultants may want to collaborate with sport psychologists to ensure that they are staying within their realm of competency.

## Limitations and Future Research

Throughout the course of the current study, the participants and I co-constructed a narrative of the experiences of being a Black female assistant coach. This narrative has the power to shine light on the oppression experienced by these participants and can offer researchers insight into interventions that might reduce the likelihood of future oppression. Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, the results are not generalizable to a larger population of coaches; however, the focus of the study is the temporal, emotional, relational, and contextual aspects of the current participants' lives; revealing and honoring the complexities of their experiences; and promoting personal and social change (Smith, 2010). A limitation of the study is the use of snowball sampling. This sampling technique resulted in all of the participants being from the Midwestern and Southern regions of the United States, as well as them all being part of a similar coaching network. Lastly, while my experience as an assistant coach in NCAA Division I women's basketball positions me as an insider, racially, I am a member of the racial majority group and as a result, an outsider. Being both an insider and an outsider places me in the "space between," which could have affected the co-construction of stories within the interviews (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

While the current study and the study conducted by Borland and Bruening (2010) begin to answer questions regarding Black female coaches, more research is warranted. Quantitative studies that investigate the roles that assistant coaches fill in NCAA Division I women's basketball could provide further evidence of the "stacking" of Black female coaches into recruiting and skill development roles. Additionally, the criteria that athletic directors use when hiring head coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball are currently unknown. A study investigating these criteria, as well as how the criteria privilege or oppress applicants based on race and gender would be of great value to the field. Lastly, to my knowledge, there are currently no studies that investigate the experiences of Black female head coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. Conducting a critical narrative inquiry on the experiences of Black female head coaches would allow these individuals to share their stories that have been silenced; in addition, it would create an opportunity for researchers to work with these coaches to further address gendered racism and challenge the current oppressive system (Kim, 2011; Taylor, 2008).

## Conclusion

To date, sport psychology researchers have overlooked the unique experiences of Black female assistant coaches. It is believed that the narrative that we and the participants have co-constructed in this study begins to fill this research gap and allows researchers and practitioners to better understand the intersectional identities and lived experiences of Black female assistant coaches within NCAA Division I women's basketball. By understanding the roles that are assigned to Black female assistant coaches and the ways that these coaches cope with the multiple oppressions that they face, researchers and practitioners can begin to develop interventions to improve both the current and future experiences of Black assistant coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball. It is also anticipated that the relation of these experiences will help White and male coaches to see the role that they might be playing in gendered racism in Division I women's basketball. Lastly, it is hoped that the interventions developed in light of this research enhance the experiences and coaching career aspirations of Black female student-athletes by allowing them to see empowered, Black female role models in coaching.

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### Author Note

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