Understanding The Lived Experiences of Black Female Student-Athletes and Factors that Influence their Anxiety.

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Background

45% of college student-athletes report symptoms of anxiety outside the normal ranges (Drew & Matthews, 2019). These stresses are compounded for student-athletes as they face additional pressures due to their athletic obligations (Davoren & Hwang, 2013). These stressors in student athletes’ lives have been linked to multiple issues including academic and athletic performance, family and coach pressures, and loss of scholarships (Wilkerson et. al 2002). Studies have been performed to better understand college student-athlete as a whole and to create appropriate interventions to improve their well-being. However, applications of these findings are limited as racially diverse individuals are underrepresented. Moreover, few Black female student-athletes (BSFA) are included in these studies, suggesting that the intersection of race and gender and their effects on anxiety in this population have not been fully explored.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of BFSAs and highlight influential factors on anxiety based on the intersection of race, gender, and sport.
This study was guided by the following research question:

RQ1: What are the sociocultural factors that affect anxiety in BFSAs?

Theoretical framework

BFSA’s lived experiences are shrouded in racism and sexism (Carter-Francique, 2013). Therefore, a theoretical framework that accounted for the gendered racism these athletes face was needed. Conceptualized by Patricia Hill-Collins, Black feminist thought (BFT) was utilized to investigate this population as this theory highlights the experiences of BFSA through the interlocking and oppressive nature of gendered racism (Collins 1986, 2000). Scholars have utilized this framework effectively to provide implications of BFSAs’ experiences (Carter & Hawkins, 2011; Carter-Francique, 2013; Olushola et al, 2013).

Method

To investigate sources of anxiety in BFSAs, an interpretive phenomenological approach was utilized to explore their lived experiences and identify areas that are most salient. Given the multifaceted and interconnectedness of the factors shaping the well-being of BFSAs, utilizing narratives is a beneficial technique to understand the experiences of this population. This socioecological model offers insightful analysis into understanding this population. After IRB
approval, nine BFSA from an NCAA Division I program agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Probing questions were used to allow for more authentic expression (Creswell, 2012). Open and axial coding was used to identify emerging themes from the participants' lived experiences with a focus on sociocultural ideologies shaping factors that influence anxiety. Member checking was conducted for clarity and accuracy.

Results

Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the participants, four themes emerged for the sources of anxiety: regimented schedule, forced community, emphasis on athletics, and navigating marginalization. Two unexpected themes also materialized: family support and suggested solutions.

Implications

The aim of this project was to contribute to the literary scholarship that highlights the sociocultural factors that are detrimental to the well-being of BFSAs. Findings highlighted the role race, gender, and athletics play as direct influences on their anxiety. Additionally, as anxiety is correlated with well-being, the results of this project will be pertinent to the development of targeted sociocultural interventions that improve this population's overall health outcomes.