

***An element of freedom: Black female collegiate athlete experiences in a culturally relevant leadership program***

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The purpose of this paper is to understand the experiences of Black female collegiate athletes whom participate in a culturally relevant co-curricular leadership program. Black female athletes are said to be in a "double bind" based on their race and gender (Smith, 2000). Thus, Black females whom participate in culturally relevant organizations and programs are provided an opportunity to contextualize their double bind, or marginalized status, within the predominantly white institution (PWI). Employing critical race theory and Black feminist thought, this qualitative study explores the transformative dynamic and empowerment promoted within the culturally relevant program. More importantly, understanding how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender resonate within the individual consciousness and personal experiences of the Black female collegiate athlete is important when addressing the benefits of this co-curricular leadership program. The researched participants were selected based on their participation in the co-curricular leadership program at a major Division I university in the southwest United States. Utilizing a qualitative approach, narrative interviews were conducted to promote the voice and experiential benefits as Black female collegiate athletes. While the findings are not generalizable, the information obtained presented psychosocial (e.g., self-esteem, identity development) and sociocultural (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) concerns experienced by Black female college athletes. In addition, participant experiences could speak for the need to create similar programs for Black women in PWI athletic environments.