The Score of a Lifetime: Women's Amateur League Basketball Players

Arissa I. Harrison
harrison_arissa@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Part of the Criminology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/7095

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

THE SCORE OF A LIFETIME:
WOMEN’S AMATEUR LEAGUE BASKETBALL PLAYERS

Arissa I. Harrison, MA.
Department of Sociology
Northern Illinois University, 2020
Dr. Diane Rodgers, Director

This research examines a predominately African American women’s professional amateur basketball league located on the Westside of Chicago, known as ASWBL Chicago Pro Am. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of amateur league team membership on the development and continued support of women players, in particular self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment. This study also presents the common issues women amateur basketball players are faced with, such as stereotypes and analyze how basketball influences their intersectional identities. Through the application of feminist theory and an analysis of ethnography and 15 semi-structured interviews with women from ASWBL, many experiences of women basketball players are portrayed. My study found that women basketball players, specifically amateur players, receive a distinctive amount of support when participating in such kind of leagues. Results highlight the significance of basketball within these women lives.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Dr. Diane Rodgers, to a wonderful Professor, Advisor, and Mentor. Thank you for your upmost patience and continuous support since our very first-time meeting. Before meeting Dr. Rodgers, I did not know if Graduate School would be something for me. From her kind words and always giving me that extra push, I will continue to believe that the impossible can be possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Simon Weffer and Dr. Jennifer Jacobs, for their valuable suggestions along the way and believing in my research.

Finally, I would like to send my absolute appreciation to ASWBL Chicago Women’s Pro Am. Ana, thank you for welcoming me with open arms and believing in my research for your brand. Also, thank you to all the women basketball players of ASWBL 2019 5th season.
Dedication

To my Mother and Sisters – Because it has always been us… I send a special thank you and abundant love to each of you. Thank you for believing in me throughout my educational journey and my future endeavors to come.

Philippians 3:13
Philippians 4:13
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE OVERVIEW</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Sport</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amateur versus Professional</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and Social Issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender, Race and Intersectionality in Sports</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMINIST THEORY AND INTERSECTIONALITY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The cheering could practically be heard from the parking lot even with the main entrance doors always being closed. From the lobby area to where the gym is located you could sense that there was unity, genuineness, and passion from the crowd and players. Have you ever walked into an environment and could just feel a sense of pureness and greatness present in the atmosphere, but you weren’t quite sure why you felt that sense to begin with? That is what it was like walking into the JLM Abundant Life Center to watch the ASWBL Chicago Women’s PRO AM basketball games. Everyone was always smiling, laughing, and greeting one another even if they did not know one another personally. Tuesday’s and Thursday’s at JLM Abundant Life Center was like being at a family reunion or having all the family over watching the Super Bowl, there was never a dull moment. These mostly former college players could sense the support from the crowd and the energy from their team whenever they stepped on the court. It was like they never missed a beat from the game, as ASWBL ceased to continuously offer that connection to the game for them. ASWBL was accepting of all players, all fans and supporters. As spoken to the crowd from the founder herself: “to believe in yourself is to believe in ASWBL, as you ladies and fans/supporters are what make this league possible.”

My research is on a predominately African American women’s professional amateur basketball league located on the Westside of Chicago known as ASWBL Chicago Pro Am. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of amateur league team membership on the development and continued support of the players, in particular the role of self-esteem, confidence and empowerment. Through the application of feminist theory and the methods of ethnography and in-depth interviews the experiences of woman basketball players will be portrayed. My study will present the common issues women amateur basketball players are faced
with, such as gender stereotypes, and analyze how basketball influences their intersectional identities. My study is important to the sociology of sport as it helps explain the role of sport on the identity of women basketball players. In particular, given that most of these women come from a college career playing background, the experience of playing basketball and continuing to develop their talent through an amateur league is an essential part of my study. While it may be a dream for a lot of basketball players to advance to a higher level of playing basketball after college, it is unfortunate that many of them do not get the opportunity to do so, and this can present serious challenges to their identity. I argue that amateur team sports uniquely offer many women basketball players the continued opportunity for empowerment during this transition.

**Background on JLM Abundant Life Center**

The JLM Abundant Life Center is a satellite site from the original Angel of God Resource Center Inc., located in Riverdale on the far Southside of Chicago. The ultimate mission of Angel of God Resource Center Inc., spread throughout the many of satellite sites it is partnered with is, “providing support for the well-being of the community.” The JLM Abundant Life Center is located in East Garfield Park of Chicago’s Westside. JLM Abundant Life Center first opened on the Westside of Chicago in July of 2007 and since has served as a guidepost in the East Garfield Park Community.

JLM Abundant Life Center’s outreach services continue to uplift the community through acts of providing food and clothing to its residents and training for disabled workers through the DHS Office of Rehabilitation Services. Most importantly is its contribution to strengthening families, providing guidance and social services to adults, as well as youth who are at risk for gang affiliations, unemployment, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, and school failure.
Throughout the years JLM Abundant Life Center has sought out ways to offer even more unique experiences to their community. For instance, making their own gymnasium available for additional opportunities such as: dance battle shows, camps, and the ASWBL Women’s Pro Am League. This is the reason many came to refer to East Garfield Park as a community rather than just any other neighborhood.

Authors such as Sampson (2013), and Gottidiener, Ryan, and Hutchison (2018) discuss this idea of what appears to be a thin line between neighborhoods and communities. Both focus on the effects of neighborhoods and communities and address what is known to be issues of certain places. Gottidiener et al. (2018) *The New Urban Sociology*, tackles the importance of space such as neighborhoods and communities as it relates to social lives and urban development. They examine how particular spaces within neighborhoods continue to grow and develop throughout years and this is seen because of social lives also begin to change over time. Sampson’s (2013), *Great American City* proposes that communities’ matter because individuals’ lives are essentially shaped by where they live. Sampson acknowledges that communities indeed influence a range of social phenomena, things such as crime, civic engagement, teen births, leadership, and networking. All of these issues are similar to those that JLM Abundant Life Center seeks to address within East Garfield Park.

To many of the neighbors that reside in East Garfield Park, and those who are associated with the JLM Abundant Life Center they recognize that this is more than just any location for them. JLM Abundant Life Center has granted East Garfield Park neighbors with the sense of feeling welcomed and being cared about within the community. JLM Abundant Life Center has become an extended family for many of the neighbors that live in East Garfield Park. This East Garfield Park Community has a population of 19,996 as of 2019. The population is 88.7% Black
or African American, 5.6% White, and 0.7% Asian, according to the Community Data Snapshot of Chicago’s East Garfield Park. The household income distribution ranges from less than $25K to $150K plus. Currently East Garfield Park has a high percentage of (52.7% percent) households making $25K or less a year. A little more than half of East Garfield Park Community are considered to be living in poverty, although income has risen over the last few years resulting in fewer individuals being considered impoverished. Yet, despite the many struggles that East Garfield Park continues to face, JLM Abundant Life Center has never fallen short with extending themselves to their local neighbors. Thus, this sense of place is also important to the amateur teams and gives them a continuous drive to want to be a part of ASWBL Pro Am League.
LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The Social Significance of Sport

The sociology of sport is still a relatively new subfield even though the general social nature and function of athletics has been evident since the 1870s (Edwards, 1973). According to Edwards, “within the United States statements were made attesting to the role of sports in character formation, in cementing group solidarity, and in the development of fortitude” (Edwards, 1973). However, it was not until the 1950’s that sociologists and physical educators trained in the social sciences gave serious consideration to sport as a social phenomenon (McPherson, 1975). Within the early 1950’s undergraduate courses in sport sociology featured “any study involving group (e.g., sport team), regardless of whether the level of analysis was an individual’s motives, attitudes, or personality, or the interactions were within a group” (McPherson, 1975). One of the very first papers written in 1954, “The Problems of Development Physical Culture in the Socialist System” written by A. Wohl concerned the role and function of sport and athletes in Poland (McPherson, 1975).

As the subfield developed it became more strictly sociological in focus. According to Theodorson and Theodorson (1969), sport sociology should not be interested in a specific individual or group, but more so in the social structure, social patterns, and social organization of groups who are engaged in the sport, whether it is at the microsystem (e.g., hockey team), a large complex organization (e.g., professional sport league, international sporting association), a sub-culture (e.g., ethnic groups), or a society level (e.g., nations) (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969).

Sociology of sport has continued to grow over the past four decades. Numerous handbooks and textbooks exist (Coakley 1978, 2000; Delaney and Madigan 2009; Edwards
1973, Hargreaves 1986, Leonard II 1993). It was the 1980s and onwards that the publications of a number of texts were firmly established in the field (Craig, 2016). One of the most influential texts from this time was *Sport, Power, and Culture* written by John Hargreaves (1986). His book’s influence “extended the field from examination of sport as an institution with various “functions” to a number of debates about power and culture and how these shaped access to, and the experience of, sport” (Craig, 2016).

*Amateur versus Professional Sports*

The literature in the sociology of sports addresses key differences between amateur and professional sporting. Padrao-Santos (2013) defines a professional athlete as one who is given a written contract between themselves and the institution where he or she practices; the athlete receives financial benefits as a representative of the institution. In contrast, an amateur athlete is free to participate or not participate in competitions. Given that an amateur athlete is free to determine their will of participation, the material incentives they receive varies and often do not represent an institution (Padrao-Santos, 2013). According to Casement (2013), the major difference between amateur and professional athletes lies within the frame of what benefits each group receives for their athletic performance. With true amateurism there are no athletic scholarships or other financial compensation given for being an athlete (Casement, 2013).

Casement (2013), further details that teams that operate on a “big-time model” are declared as professional, while all other teams are amateur. This big-time model and two-part structure are essentially the fundamentals that requires professional teams to operate (e.g., trainers, stadiums, contracts, business operations, talent). For instance, professional teams’ own contracts outside of just their players, they receive their own buildings, trainers and have some form of business operations (e.g., television deals). It is due to the fact that professionals bring in
more revenue which allows them to have extended incentive, as compared to amateurs who do not. However, athletic competitions at all levels have traditionally assumed a “larger than life” role in American society. Entire cities and regions rabidly promote professional teams while amateur athletes hardly receive the same kind of promotion (Casement, 2013).

Padrao-Santos (2013), investigated participants who were associated with sport organizations and participated in official competitions at professional, semiprofessional, and amateur levels. She used participant’s complete self-reported demographic surveys where she compared differences between competitive levels and gender. Respectively, the significant differences were reported between professional and amateur athletes for the socioeconomic domains and between genders (Padrao-Santos, 2013). Padrao-Santos findings suggest that professional athletes are more satisfied from socioeconomic perspective when compared to amateurs and women amateurs are more likely to be satisfied than male amateurs. In addition, Padrao-Santos, also reported her findings as the definition of the roles of the institution and athlete, and the stability of their relationship, defined by whether there is a contract, which is the most important factor to explaining the difference between amateur and professional. Padrao-Santos found a significant difference in relation to these athletes “peace of mind” and “self-satisfaction” (Padrao-Santos, 2013:5). While both levels reported some amount of both, in the area of self-satisfaction, many amateurs reported to be less satisfied even if their skills were better than an amateur (Padrao-Santos, 2013).

Despite the focus on professional sports in society, there is a growing literature that focuses on amateur sports (Allison 2001; Barcelona et al. 2019; Eitzen 2016; Forbes and Livingston 2016; Nowak 2014; Shropshire 2015). Eitzen (2016), explains that this term amateur signifies one who participates in sport due to the love for the sport (Eitzen 2016). Allison (2001)
notes that it could be argued that doing things for the love of it rather than money represents a higher and more meaningful form for some. Eitzen (2016), further explains that a true amateur is identified by his or her serious commitment to excellence in the sport as evidenced by hard work without any financial incentives. Much like Allison (2001), Eitzen (2016) too identifies that the love for being a part of a sport or game outweighs the financial incentives, thus this is what makes amateurs unique and different from professionals.

*Sports and Social Issues*

As the field of sociology of sport began to increasingly develop over the years, more specialized topics and social issues have been explored. For instance, sport as a business and cross cultural issues (Dong 2014; Ikeda 2014; Knijink 2014; L’Etang 2006; Merrett 2014; Pfscter et al. 2002) media and sport (Duncan and Hasbrook 2002), politics and sports (Gilchrist and Holden 2011; Sage 2010; Weffer et al. 2018), sporting behavior (Austin and Grundy 2019; Coakley 2001), race, ethnicity, and sport (Van Sterkenburg 2010; Wood 2007) women and sport (Franks and O’Neill 2014; Kay and Jeanes 2008; Woods 2007) and sport as promoting individual or community level social development (Jacobs 2017; Levermore 2008). Other social issues discussed in the sociology of sports include areas such as social identity (Harris and Parker 2009; Slater et al. 2014) and motivation (Khan et al. 2011; MacGregor and Otundo 2019; Stoeber 2011). Some of this literature on the role sports has on identities has researched difficult transitions or “foreclosures” to identity due to retirement, injury, or not continuing to play basketball after college (Beamon 2012; Lockhart 2015; Martin et al. 2014; Ronkainen et al. 2016). This is an important aspect to be addressed as my study shows amateur leagues can maintain the athlete identity for women basketball players.
Other work on social issues and sports has focused on disability and sport (Barda et al., 2016; DePauw 2005; Hassan et al. 2014; Le Clair 2012; Sparkes 2014), commercialization of sports (Edwards and Corte 2010; Rahman and Lockwood 2011; Slack 2004), fantasy sports (Kissane and Winslow 2014; Martin and Nelson 2014; Platzer, 2018), and law and sports (Boyes et al. 2012; Brown and Connolly 2010; Gardiner et al. 2012).

The existence of social problems in sports has become another specialized topic. Violence in sports as a social problem is much written about in the literature of sports (Dunning 2001; Kerr 2004; Kreager 2007; Young 2012), including fan violence (Spaaïj 2014; Ward Jr. 2012), violence by players on the field (Collins et al., 2007; Giulianotti 2013), and violence with players off the field (Catlett et al., 2004). Another related issue is drugs and sports, for instance anabolic steroids (Anton and Rodriguez 2011; Brun et al. 2011; Thorlindsson and Halldorsson 2010). The types of drugs that are mostly common among athlete are the types of performance enhancing drugs. More specifically, drugs such as steroid use has also been studied as likely to encourage violent behaviors and result in athletic downfalls (Monaghan 2001; Smith and Waddington 2009). Brejard et al. (2016) addresses the issue of stress for player that may be a cause for some of these behaviors. There is also an attempt within sports to counter these social problems through shaping the attitudes and moral values of players and developing strategies for good sporting behaviors (Woods, 2007).

Many of the studies on social issues have focused on specific types of sports as well. Sports highlighted in the literature include football and social issues, for instance “taking a knee” (Burdsey 2011; Perry 2019; Weffer et al. 2018), football and issues of helmet protection (Halstead et al., 2011; McIntosh, 2003) baseball and racial issues (Hewitt et al., 2005), baseball player salaries and organizational efficiency (Lewis et al., 2007), wheelchair basketball (Gil et al...
Wheelchair basketball has been around since 1945 and has since developed nationally into being the most popular sport for those with disabilities (Gil et al. 2015).

*Gender, Race and Intersectionality in Sports*

It was not until the late 1990s that the sociology of sports literature began to seriously address gender (Cahn 1994; Hargreaves 1994; Leonard II 1993; Messner and Sabo 1990; National Association for Girls and Women in Sport 1995). In Leonard’s *A Sociological Perspective of Sport*, he explained society’s view on sports are categorized as gender-neutral, feminine, or masculine based on the conceptions regarding gender, gender differences, and beliefs of appropriateness of participation in sports (Leonard II, 1994). Historically, the socialization of women into “proper” feminine behavior and the stigma attached to being defined as “unfeminine” often led women to exclude themselves from sports activity (Leonard II, 1994). The societal and cultural view of gender roles, for example that women should cook, clean, and nurture the children, was not only prevalent to the everyday lifestyle but in the sport realm as well. It was just not accepted for women to be doing anything outside of those core areas, especially nothing that required more physicality of them. Title IX the Educational Amendments to the Constitution passed in 1972. It states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance” (Cooky and Lavoi, 2012). Prior to Title IX, discrimination among women was huge and men felt that some sports should have just been restricted for men only. Since then, Title IX has since been featured in the literature, as more attention was paid to the exclusion and inequality in sports.
related to gender (Bell 2008; Bowen et al. 2017; Cooky and Lavoi 2012; Feder 2012; Kaestner and Xu 2010).

Current research continues to look at inequality, gender socialization, gender performance, images of female athletes, objectification of female athletes (Boddy 2014; Hardin and Greer 2009; Mennesson 2012; Roy and Caudwell 2014; Pope 2014), embodiment (Allen-Collinson 2009; Brace-Govan 2010; Hanis-Martin 2006; Velija et al. 2012; Waskul and Vannini 2016; Whitson 2002), sexuality (Aitchison 2007; Anderson et al 2016; Cahn 2015; Caudwell 2007; Carless 2012; Hargreaves and Anderson 2014; Krane 2016; Norman 2016; Toffoletti 2016), and the gendered space of sport (Adjepong and Carrington 2014; Elling and Janssens 2009; Comley 2016; Theberge, 2002). An example of the importance of sports for women and self-esteem is found in Velija et al. (2012) article, “It Made Me Feel Powerful” as the researchers explore the gendered and embodied experience of female martial arts athletes. Their findings suggest that women involvement in martial arts develop physical strength, which leads to individual physical empowerment (Velija, 2012). More so, these women noted their involvement increased their confidence and challenged their gendered embodiment. These women problematize the normative views of gendered embodiment which positions women as weak and men as strong (Velija, 2012).

Race and sports have been examined since the nineteenth century, however the critical sociology of sport and race substantially developed in the 1960’s. Two of the biggest academic studies of this era included C. L. R. James’s Beyond a Boundary (1963) and Harry Edwards The Revolt of the Black Athlete (1968). Both of these authors shined a light on the rather dark area regarding the differences in African American athletes and White athletes in sports. Much like there was racism around different parts of the world, there was also racism within sports. African
Americans were not viewed nor treated equal regardless of their talents. Some even suffered from not being able to participate in sports because of their skin color (Edwards, 1968). Due to this realized discrimination, authors began to explore and express the disparities of being a black athlete (Braddock 1980; Braddock 1991; Harris 1997; Leonard 1996; Sammons 1994). This began from the refusal to allow African Americans the opportunity to compete on sporting teams and leagues. Because sports were among the first and most high-profiled space to accept African Americas on relative terms of equality, sport has played a unique role within American culture (Harris, 1997). Current research into the area of race and sports continues to be an important topic as African American presence in sports has blossomed tremendously (Berry and Smith 2000; Darnell 2007; Doeden 2019; Sanderson 2010; Tudor 2018). Athletes still suffer from discrimination in the sports realm however, the athletes now are likely to receive the publicity and addressing to the concern right away rather than back in the mid-to-late 1900s. The literature on race and sports continues to cover discrimination while adding opportunities for all athletes to feel included.

The literature on race and sport is not only limited to the athletes. Race and the sociology of sports also includes areas regarding coaches, referees, and sport reporters (Erlandson 2013; Farrington et al. 2012; Genovese 2015; Jowett and Frost 2011; Ludeman 2013; Passmore 2013; Tsitsos and Nixon II 2012). Genovese (2015) examined sport television reporters at Regional Sports Network (RSN), a major East Coast market. His study included ethnographic techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviews to grasp details of sports journalists. Genovese’s findings revealed that women and African American sport television reporters working for RSN reported that they were indeed treated differently, even sometimes to their advantage (Genovese, 2015). For instance, they were treated like they were not capable of
gathering proper detail and had to deal with someone always being over their shoulder making sure they were doing things up to the white male’s standards.

Another related aspect includes the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and sports (Adair and Rowe 2007; Carrington 2002; Dagkas et al. 2014; Maynard 2002; McDonald 2014; Ratna 2014). Race, gender, and sports have been common intersections (Azzarito and Harrison Jr. 2008; Carter-Francique and Flowers 2013; Johnson 2015; Majors 2015; Walker and Melton 2015). Johnson’s (2015), *Cheerleading at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, centered the experiences of black college cheerleaders. Her work consisted of ethnography and interviews with cheerleaders who attended a historically black college (HBCU). Johnson’s research revealed how race, class, gender, and ideological perspectives mutually informed the HBCU cheerleading style and how these cheerleaders were interpreted by others based off their performances (Johnson, 2015).

While there are many studies on a variety of aspects that include gender, race and sports, there are not many case studies that include the intersectionality of gender, race and amateur women basketball league players. My study will focus on an amateur league of women basketball players, specifically concerning their self-esteem, confidence, and personal development through team sports. My research will therefore add to the growing literature on amateur sports, intersectionality and sport, and feminist theory.
Feminist theory is a theoretical perspective which observes gender in its relation to power, pertaining to the level of face-to-face interaction and reflexivity within a social structure. Gill (2001), proposed that the term “feminist” carries a variety of meanings and there is no single feminist perspective shared by all those who accept this label. One of the most well-known definitions of feminism was coined by feminist and social activist bell hooks. In 2000, in hook’s *Feminism is for Everybody*, she wrote that “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexiest exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). Notably, this definition is considered to be inclusive rather than exclusive, as it focuses on the action to end oppression.

I am using feminist theory as a framework to explore the intersectional identities and potential for empowerment of the amateur basketball players in my study. This idea of intersectionality was originally coined by a famous activist and legal scholar named Kimberlé Crenshaw. In 1989, in Crenshaw’s *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, she wrote about how the traditional feminist ideas and antiracist policies excluded black women due to overlapping discrimination that was only unique to them. This led to Crenshaw’s (1989, 1990) definition of intersectionality as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantages. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) also discusses intersectionality pertaining to race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression and resistance. Specifically, her definition states intersectionality is “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 299). Collins’ primary focus was with the relationships among self-definition,
empowerment, and knowledge concerning Black women. She argues that Black women are situated uniquely because they stand within three exceptionally prevalent and powerful systems of oppression: race, class and gender (Collins, 2000). Thus, she blends these very powerful systems by taking into consideration of how intersectionality creates different social realities and lived experiences.

This idea of feminist theory and intersectionality can be applied to sports. Flintoff et al. (2008), considered intersectionality to understand contemporary physical education. They argued this approach goes beyond the problems of a single category which would only focus on gender or race. Nonetheless, their work suggests exploring more deeply of the material body through an “intersectional lens” can help one understand the complexities of differences, and relations of gender to other social categories in sporting contexts. We can see how intersectionality and feminist theory both intertwine as they both seek to expand on these categorizations pertaining to women. Thus, this theory fits into my research as amateur league basketball players are a unique group of individuals. The teams and players self-identify by race, class and gender along with their other status as parents, teachers, coaches, or workers with regular day jobs, and their identity as an amateur basketball player.

Intersectional Feminism can be used to explain the complexity of stereotyping, self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment in sports. The issue of stereotyping is something that can be observed among women basketball players. If we consider stereotyping that comes along with women basketball players, a highly known one focuses around their sexuality. For instance, women basketball players are quite often identified as “lesbian” right off the bat just because many of them show a lower level of femininity (Griffin, 2014). Something as simple as gender stereotyping might trigger the different challenges women basketball players encounter, such as
increased or decreased levels of self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment. These challenges are likely to be seen differently among women based on their other intersectional statuses in society.

For instance, a Black woman basketball player who possesses a higher-class status is likely to have less trouble expressing herself or going against the grain of society because she has the ability to do so willingly and freely regardless of if she receives a backlash for playing basketball. Whereas, a Black woman basketball player who has a lower-class status may experience gender stereotyping a bit differently. The woman with the lower-class status may suffer in silence because she may have less initial self-esteem or confidence. She may gain her self-esteem or confidence through basketball, but the road to it may include many stressors. Intersectionality can also account for empowerment, and a women basketball player gains coaches, team members, fans, and sometimes even news reporters for support; not only can this change or address her status of self-esteem and confidence but can also offer support for fans who may idolize her.

Overall, intersectional feminist theory has been a contributing theory in the sociology of sport (Choi 2000; Gill 2001; Holliday and Hassard 2001; Krane et al. 2004; Olive and Thorpe 2011; and Scraton and Flintoff 2013). Notably, since feminist theory has been included in the sociology of sport context, a majority of it focuses on feminism and sporting bodies. There is a small amount of research with this theory that has also surfaced around basketball (Borland and Bruening 2010; Burke and Hallinan 2006; Enke 2005; Francombe-Webb and Toffoletti 2018; Hattery 2012; McDonald 2000), and yet, there is still very little on the specifics of female amateur basketball players.
METHODS

I conducted an ethnographic study and in-depth interviews with 15 women amateur basketball players ranging in age from 18 to 45 years old, to examine a women’s amateur basketball league located on the Westside of Chicago. The ASWBL Pro Am League consists of six teams with a roster of eight to ten players per team. Games for this league were held at the JLM Abundant Life Center and ran for seven weeks with six consecutive games each week. The players of this league consisted of a majority of African American women with a small percentage of Caucasian, and Puerto Rican women ranging in age of 18 to 45 years old. A majority of these women played in college (80%), some played overseas (40%) and 6.6% of them played in the WNBA. Although ASWBL was in their fifth season and has much publicity already, it had not so far been studied for any research project. Therefore, this adds to the significance of the data I have collected in regard to the effect basketball has on women athletes.

Ethnography is an established social science qualitative research method (Atkinson 2015; Coffey 2018; Emerson 2001; Delamont et al 2001; Fetterman 2009; Lofland and Lofland 2001). In conducting an ethnography, a researcher observes and often participates in naturally occurring groups or organizations to document the culture of these groups or organizations. This method is also known as field methods and/or field work (Hammersley, 2014). Ethnography fieldwork is conducted with many groups, including ethnographies on sports (Bolin and Granskog 2003; Burawoy 1991; Coffey 2018; Emerson 2001; Griner and Hovey 2014; Kidder 2017; Monlar and Purdy 2015). According to Coffey (2018), ethnographic research features people’s behaviors which are studied in everyday contexts with data gathered from observation. However, the first step for an ethnographer seeking observations includes choosing a site. A site setting(s) is where the researcher is present in a particular environment where members of the groups or
organizations can be observed (Emerson, 2001). How an ethnographer gains access to a site usually depends upon if the site is considered public or not. According to Emerson (2001), typically ethnographers who have a relationship with what they are intending to study makes it easier for them to gain access rather than those who do not. I spoke directly with the founder of ASWBL in gaining access to this site, having informed her of my research on the effects the game of basketball upon women basketball players.

Once the access is granted for a site is when the observations and fieldnotes can begin to take place. Emerson (2001), noted that fieldnotes are a crucial part of ethnographic research. He acknowledges that there are three critical steps in ensuring that the researchers’ fieldnotes produce strong data. These steps include observing, jotting, and writing full fieldnotes (Emerson, 2001). To observe means to be physically present at the site and observe the behaviors and social interactions that mostly would relate to the researchers’ research question. Jotting (also known as fieldnotes) consists of shorthanded notes of the observations while observing the site, in which these are used to help refresh the memory of the researcher when writing fieldnotes. Thence, full fieldnotes are the final step which the researcher should turn their jottings into detailed fieldnotes (Emerson, 2001). I began my notetaking with what Emerson et al. (1995) refers to as “headnotes.” When visiting a consistent scene, it is normal for researchers not to just dive in with writing things down, rather the field researcher is interested in taking mental notes of immediate details and impressions (Emerson et al., 1995). Given that I was present in an atmosphere that consisted of a variety of different interactions, details, and impression, this step to take headnotes first allowed me to organize my thoughts on what I witnessed and what I wanted to pay attention to; aside from the “initial impressions”, “key events or incidents” were also observed (Emerson et al. 1995: 26-27). My notes included the meanings of impressions and events through self-
reflexivity as well as observing and asking the women basketball players for their responses to any key events or surroundings. From my headnotes is where I began my jottings. My jottings were taken on an iPad in the Notes Application, which consisted of me taking key words or phrases heard within the site while I sat in the bleachers where I was observing. After each evening of observations my jottings were emailed to myself to ensure they remained in a secure location. My jottings then later were translated into full fieldnotes and summaries from the key pieces I picked up on from the site. Additionally, once my full fieldnotes had been written I allowed my summaries to guide me in the next direction for my observations. This particular aspect is what Emerson et al. (1995), define as “in-process memos.” In-process memos are typically written followed by the completion of the day’s fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 1995). As an ethnographer completes their fieldnotes, they sometimes skim their fieldnotes and pick up on incidents or impressions that they would like to revisit for the next observations. Much like headnotes, which could be considered the beginning of note taking per observations; in-process memos are the end of note taking per observations. This process helps direct ethnographers’ attention, focus, and guide for future observations. Therefore, I took on this aspect as I believe it helped to strengthen my observations which then helped me tell the story of these women amateur league basketball players.

This data I collected from my field research gave me insight into how women basketball players in an amateur league display themselves within their space of being an athlete. Observing these women before and after their games in the locker room, in the bleachers, near the concession stands, score table and lobby area, provided me some understanding of their behavior not only as an athlete but as women off the court. Also, the observations of their actions and conversations amongst teammates, other players, or fans allowed me to gain insight into how
they present their thoughts towards the sport to others. I played basketball for most of my life and still currently participate in seasonal leagues. I know the feeling of pressure with having a crowd in the stands rooting for your team or maybe even you as an individual. Much like scouts, fans also notice every little detail about a player. Outside of their skill level, their behaviors and interactions are also under watch. While although you are basketball player on the court, the fact still remains that you are a woman and people will notice abrupt behaviors. Vieyra (2016) found that specifically his insider status in studying pick-up game basketball allowed him to study the players at their core and build relationships among them. As previously mentioned I come from a basketball playing background, so I am aware of the rules and regulations that come along with the sport which was beneficial to me while I was observing, much like Vieyra’s study. However, given my research, not only am I considered as an insider but as an outsider as well. While I have much personal history with the sport of basketball and even some history with some of the women of ASWBL, I was not an active player on any team this season, rather my attendance at the games only consisted of conducting research with the women basketball players.

As an insider I did feel comfortable in the setting of JLM Abundant Life Center because it was like home for me, just being around other women basketball players and because I play as well. Also, knowing a lot of the women, seeing familiar faces, some of which I haven’t seen in years. Just being able to sit and conduct my research and not feel awkward at all because being known created that sense of comfort for me. In addition, the women in the league actually respected what I was doing. However, at times it became uncomfortable when I would need to observe or speak to people I did not know. For instance, speaking to those who owned JLM and needing to get a quiet room for interviews to happen. Usually the Founder would do this for me, but because she was busy at certain points, sometimes I had to find my way around the building
and ask questions to ensure my research ran smoothly. My discomfort in this aspect had to do with me being somewhat of an outsider to the community.

In addition to the ethnographic method I conducted 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and a half in length (Appendix A). Unless noted otherwise, these interviewees self-identified as Black women. These interviews complimented my ethnographic observations by adding the experiences of the women players expressed in their own words. As compared to surveys, in-depth interviews typically consist of a smaller number of respondents while also giving access to the observations of others (Weiss, 1995). There are many sources discussing the benefits of interviewing as a qualitative sociological method (Carson et al 2001; Givens 2008; Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Morris 2015; Weiss 1995). To understand the importance of in-depth interviewing and its appropriateness requires the understanding of how detailed a researcher wants their information to be. According to Morris (2015) the in-depth interview should be a flexible and free-flowing interaction in which the interviewer allows the interviewee a good deal of leeway. However, the interviewers’ job is to also direct the conversation as discreetly as possible to ensure that the interviewee conveys as much relevant information as possible in the time allocated (Morris, 2015).

Gubrium and Holstein (2001) also have explained that in-depth interviewing involves a certain style of social and interpersonal interaction. As a social form, it differs from the kinds of interactions one would usually find. To be effective and useful, in-depth interviews develop and build intimacy; in respect, they resemble the forms of talking one finds among close friends. As a researcher who uses in-depth interviewing a common goal is to seek “deep” information and knowledge, usually deeper information and knowledge than what is given through surveys, informal interviewing, or focus groups for example (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). Because I
spent the season with the league I feel that I have built up that level of intimacy that Gubrium and Holstein discuss. Since I am also a former basketball player who has either played with or against some of the women who were a part of my in-depth interviewing research, I had the ability to have deeper interviews due to the familiarity shared. I was able to feel comfortable talking to some of the women because of knowing them personally. I could tell that made those particular women more comfortable also when speaking to me and their answers were clear and often times very talkative, even sometimes off topic. I had to be somewhat cautious due to my insider status therefore, having to check myself to make sure that I wasn’t presenting myself too much as just a friend when talking to some of the women. I tried to balance that and understand my position as a researcher also and not just, “Arissa, their sister, former teammate, or friend.”

The data I collected from my in-depth interviews allowed me to gain some insight from these women basketball players on the influence of the game on their personal development. I have coded for emerging themes related to identities especially concerning self-esteem, levels of confidence, and feelings of self-empowerment relating to the sport. I gathered data on not only who they are as an athlete, but as a woman and how basketball has contributed to the woman they are today. Each of these women were given the opportunity to tell their unique story concerning themselves and basketball. By doing these interviews it allowed me to compliment the ethnographic observation, while also gaining a one-on-one understanding of how women may be affected by the sport.

My own story informed my research choice, the questions I asked, interview dynamics and the setting I chose. I began playing basketball randomly in sixth grade, but I did not play my first organized basketball game and join a team until I was in seventh grade when I played for my middle school. I played basketball all throughout high school and then I was not able to
pursue basketball any further. I had a good amount of college offers after high school but ended up having to turn them all down for personal and family reasons. However, I continued to seek out playing. I was always in a gym putting up shots, running drills, or playing pick-up games. I started to play for seasonal and amateur leagues, but they were all located too far away, which drove me to create my own organization of women amateur basketball players. This experience led me to observe how this women’s basketball organization I had created became so important to the women players. This then steered me in the direction of research on women basketball amateur leagues.

While the ethnographic method and in-depth interviews may have been the best approach for my research, I was also aware of the limitations of my study as well. As a former basketball player myself, I was aware of the importance of remaining objective. Given that some of these women in the ASWBL Pro Am League are women I have witnessed playing a dozen times, it was important for me to not allow that to interfere with the way I see them for my study. Going into this research it was imperative to remain in the lens of a more sociological perspective and not take for granted what is familiar to me.

Notably, I was also aware that in-depth interviewing will typically produce a rather small sample size. From a league of anywhere between 52-60 women players I only interviewed 15 players. Addressing concerns regarding external validity or generalizability, this is a representative sample and provides the in-depth individual portion of the investigation paired with the ethnographic observations. My study has generalizable results for amateur women’s sports teams and their effect on identity for players.
FINDINGS

The location for my study was in a gymnasium in East Garfield Park which is located on the Westside of Chicago. JLM Abundant Life Center is home for the women of the ASWBL Pro Am League. I spent seven weeks on every Tuesday and Thursday witnessing these women gather together with intensity, competition, encouragement, and most importantly support for one another. Although these women presented smiles and laughter as they sat in the stands, wandered around in the gym, and interacted with one another and fans, on the court during the games these women displayed tough love. This tough love was presented as sisterly love and care for one another, while also offering that push and challenge to one another’s game on the court.

Based on my own experiences of being a former woman basketball player, my initial thought was that these women only play in ASWBL because it is a league where they can just come out and have fun on the court, or because JLM Abundant Life Center was a central location for many of these women. Typically, basketball leagues are just for fun and to claim a championship at the end. However, after conducting my interviews with participants and having observed the atmosphere of JLM Abundant Life Center, I found that playing women’s basketball, and with ASWBL in particular, meant much more to many of these women. I will be discussing multiple women’s experiences as grouped into four main themes which arose from my data. The four themes are: Pro Am Inspiration, Challenges and Deflecting the Stereotypes, Individual Power and Growth, and Unity and Womanhood. Each of these themes arose significantly as patterns from my interview data even though all of these women basketball players have their own unique story.
As I exited my car from the parking lot, I throw my book bag on my back and begin walking towards the main entrance. There is usually a group of older men standing near the doors laughing and talking amongst one another. These men appear to be owners and workers for JLM Abundant Life Center. I can hear cars driving past the street with their windows down and music blasting. There is also distant chatter coming from people either on their porches of the block or just walking by. When I get to the door one of the elderly men always opens the door and greets me as I am coming in. I walk up to the table where two young ladies sit in order to collect the entry fee for those coming to watch the games. They greet me as they take my three-dollar entry fee and tell me to enjoy the games for the evening.

Through the gym doors I can hear soft music playing in the background and I see the founder of ASWBL setting up in different areas. As she sets up the concession stand, the sponsor banners, score table, team benches, and water pitchers for the players I cannot help but to think to myself how she manages to accomplish all these steps before the games begin and still interact as multiple people walk through the gym doors. In between games and after the games, she is always readily available for anyone in the gym. It is not hard to notice her efforts and love for the league and game of basketball just based off observation. To many, the Founder of ASWBL is the jack of all trades. Just a young Dominican Republic woman from the Bronx, New York who came all the way to Chicago, Illinois to make what she thought would be a small difference into a something that turned out to be much larger.

Through her league of ASWBL not only is she witnessing the rise in many positive characteristics within herself but from the women who participate in the league as well. This Founder is not just an individual who makes this league happen with the business aspect behind
closed doors, she is also a player in her own league. Playing in her own league allows her to be even more closely connected with the other women who participate. Her acts of participation show the women that they are not alone and her love for the game is far beyond just the set ups to make it happen on every Tuesday and Thursday. Additionally, her role as the Founder and a player illustrates the different connections of intersectionality. She is a minority woman in society who made her way in creating her own brand. She extends herself outside of her own personal life each year to create yet another season for women amateur basketball players.

I sit down on the first set of metal bleachers on the end closest to the door, so it is easy for me to see the entire gym. The players begin to trickle in one by one and by groups as the time nears seven o’clock. Some come in with children with them, some with significant others, some alone, and some with other teammates. I spent time observing not only the interactions from the women basketball players but the crowd and atmosphere as well. The connection between all of the different people who attend the games gives off a family kind of vibe to the atmosphere. Through the main entrance there were always people lingering in the lobby area to the gym. Women, men, children, and families all standing around, awaiting on the games to begin or just hanging out. The atmosphere is comfortable and inviting. The concession stand off to the far right side of the gym always has quick available snacks and drinks which are just enough to add to the taste buds for the entertainment. JLM Abundant Life Center is where ASWBL has held its Pro Am League games for five seasons. It is because of ASWBL that many of these women have formed some of their closest relationships and sisterly bonds with one another. It may seem strange to think about how these women could be as competitive with one another on the court and act as family off of the court, but that is just what comes with the game.
The inspiration from playing in this amateur league was a significant point expressed in over half of the interviews and viewed from my own observations. JLM Abundant Life Center had an effect on ASWBL as it was considered a mutual ground and traveling point for many of the women in the league. Not to mention, those who work for JLM Abundant Life Center always made these women feel welcomed and offered their support for what they were doing. Seeing the older men as they stood around and talked amongst one another just awaiting to see if either the Founder or anyone else needed help with anything, showed that not only did they care about their building, but the people who came out to it as well. It was an exciting time of the week on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s when people would gather together to watch these women leave it all on the floor.

To each of these women playing women’s basketball offered them something unique, but a majority of them expressed specific feelings towards playing in ASWBL at JLM Abundant Life Center. For example, when asked about the support and significance of ASWBL, Cristal, a young Black woman in her early 20s who is currently a college basketball player responded:

I’ve been playing ball for a long time and out of all the leagues I’ve participated in, the feel for just showing up here to play in ASWBL is a different type of vibe… I mean honestly, I think any basketball league you can get something out of as far as like exercise and a place to just build on your game from off-season but here it’s like more comes with it…we are all dedicated, we encourage one another, we push one another on the court for sure. We push each other to be better on the court, like its so much competition and really that’s what makes it stand out.

Similarly, Samantha who is in the process of transferring community colleges to continue her basketball career expressed the same kind of feeling. She said:

I would say there is support and encouragement that come along with the league. Like the Founder does a great job at making this league known and we pretty much all know one another so we want to see this succeed not just because it’s the Founders name, but because we all come together and we build off one another and really anybody could see that if they ever came to a game or whatever.
Another woman Ordina, who self-identifies as White and is in her early 20s, and whose first time playing for ASWBL was this season, also addressed the connection as such. She stated:

This is my first time playing in this league, so I am not sure of its significance really but from what I see it is a great league to play for. The energy is always high, and it has a lot of support.

Similarly, Denise a young woman who is still in her college prime and headed into her junior year of college playing basketball, and also her first time playing in ASWBL said:

This is actually my first seasonal league because I usually play travel. ASWBL is fun for sure because it…like the girls are kinda all grouped together and I didn’t know anybody coming into it…and just meeting so many different people from different places and so many different styles of play and personalities it’s great…the support is great here too they make a big deal about sponsorships their getting, they stream the games, they put up Instagram stories and with that they’re trying to go more public and get more support. I think it’s great here because it shows people actually care. The stands are filled and it’s just nice to see.

Right off the bat, many of these women talk about the support they receive and the uniqueness about playing in ASWBL as a high point for this league, even for the women whose first time playing was just this season. They go as far to address that not only do they receive this kind of support as a basketball player but just as a woman overall. Since some of the women in this league are mothers, playing in ASWBL is exceptional for them outside of just for basketball because the league displays kid-friendliness. I found this to be true from my observations as well. I observed that there were always kids lingering around the gym. From toddlers, to grade school kids and also teenagers. It actually surprise me that the individuals who would work the concession stand on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s appeared to be kids as well, between the ages of 12-17. It was always nice to see that during halftimes or before games the toddlers on the floor dribbling ball and attempting to shoot. Kelly, is a mother in her 30’s who was currently a player in the league, and she explained:
Tuesday’s and Thursday’s are a highlight for me. It feels good being out there on the court with longtime friends and the competition be so high but we all family though, and not to mention I feel comfortable bringing my child here to the games because its welcoming for them as well.

Thus, this league is filled with women basketball players but accepting to anyone who may decide to walk through the gym doors of JLM Abundant Life Center. This fact does not only appear apparent to the players but to the crowd and everyone else.

In my observations of watching the crowd of fans of the games for these women not only are the stands filled up with women and children, but to my surprise there were always a significant amount of men watching and supporting as well. Mostly at women’s games, and not just basketball in particular, but women sports in general at the level of college or beyond, for many years there was a higher ratio of women watching women play due to the discrimination that women athletes were up against (Bowen et al. 2017). This goes as far back to the beginning of Title IX in sports involving women athletes. However, as years progressed the discrimination against women sports has begun to die down and this seemed to show in the audience for the women basketball players of ASWBL. For these women, there were always plenty of men in attendance. More often than not, the support of men who attended these games were the ones to get the crowd and players going. From the score table to the announcers and to the crowd there were men offering their support to this women’s league. It is apparent that these men have the utmost respect for these women as basketball players and they made sure these women knew they were there for support. Some of these men appeared to be significant others, sponsors, workers at JLM Abundant Life, and/or friends and family members just there to watch the games.

Given my placement in the bleachers I would typically be near more men in the crowd than women. Often times I would hear them jokingly betting on the games or claiming which
players they think will “show out” or “go crazy” that night. When the games would begin to get intense the men would be out of their seats and on their feet cheering and talking smack to one another in reference to their favorite woman player that was currently on the floor. A lot of the times the women in the games would respond with laughter, smiles, or small talk to the men on the side because they always had some type of commentary directed to the players.

The all-around support these women of ASWBL receive from their community and Founder offers these women the inspiration to continue to strive as a woman basketball player. This particular amateur league not only offers them the continuum to pursue a passion and dream, but to also feel supported and appreciated along the way.

**Challenges and Deflecting the Stereotypes**

When discussing the relationship of these players to the larger basketball world, common challenges arose from the women’s responses. Many of these women basketball players discussed how women basketball players possibly appear to the outside world. Diana who recently finished up playing at the college level and is now pursuing alternative basketball outlets such as coaching or becoming an athletic trainer expressed:

> You have to really stand out in order to get the credit. And I feel for women if we don’t stand for ourselves no one will. You gotta know it and not be afraid to show it. You can’t walk into a gym and act like you scared. You know who you are so show it.

From this quote alone we can begin to see how many women might come to terms in thinking of themselves but not just in the basketball world alone. To stand out essentially means there is something significant about you in which draws attention from others. Yet, it takes a certain kind of individual to even attempt to stand out as boldness, a certain level of self-esteem, and confidence is needed in order to express oneself in that manner. Thus, this same manner applies
in terms of basketball. She states “you can’t walk into a gym and act like you scared”, meaning if
you may be fearful for what’s to come next on the court you have to display a certain level of
confidence not just for yourself but for your teammates as well. Being bold and secure with who
you are is essential for women to standing out and receiving the credit they deserve.

Another challenge that arose when discussing basketball at the national level pertained to
the lack of acknowledgment women basketball players even at the national level still are yet to
receive. Cassie, a mid-20s assistant volleyball and basketball coach who is intending to pursue a
future basketball career mentioned:

One of the spokesperson/basketball player (Jordan Clarkson) for the NBA after the finals
was done he had mentioned that basketball season was over but I found that funny
because the WNBA season had just started. That was disheartening.

Similarly, Laura, who admits she just recently started watching more basketball over the past
recent years discussed the impact she believes the media has on basketball at the national level:

I just feel with professional basketball everybody similarly has the same favorite players
like the Lebron’s, D-Wade, Klay Thompson, Curry, even like Zion Williamson because
his name has been so big since he was in high school and the list could go on and on for
men players, but women you don’t get that many names its always the same ones like
Maya Moore, Candace Parker. You got to really be into women’s basketball to know
who’s good but there’s so many women out there whose game is on top but they just
don’t receive the same hype like men do so it’s harder for women to follow women
really.

This shows how media plays a role in challenges for women basketball players, significantly
when we are looking at the national level. If these women are putting in the same amount of time
and efforts for a game they love just as men, it is a wonder why it is a challenge for these women
to receive the same kind of recognition publicly.

Thus, these are the kind of challenges women basketball players are faced with more
often than male basketball players. To add to the specifics of these challenges many of the
women also expressed how they feel women basketball players are viewed specifically concerning their sexuality. Riley, a college woman who is coming into her last season of Division I college basketball said:

Just the whole thing that every female basketball player is lesbian or in that kind of lifestyle- like she’s looked at as being too rough because she plays this sport. But I mean I don’t take it personally like some women might, I guess I just try to understand where outsiders are coming from. That’s just my personality because I’m not gonna get offended because I’m comfortable with who I am but other people might get offended by it.

Similarly, Jaz who did not get the opportunity to play basketball at the college level but decided to remain connected to the game by becoming a coach and playing basketball in her free time mentioned:

A lot of people think that every women basketball player is bisexual or have some time of gayness to them and it shouldn’t be like that but unfortunately it is but it’s whatever.

And Kendra, an older woman who is playing in ASWBL just to remain connected to the sport of basketball expressed:

We get thrown under the “all women basketball players are gay” and I don’t think that should be. Whether I’m gay or not I don’t think that’s something that should matter.

Latrice, a young woman in early 20s who acknowledges that she does not identify as gay or lesbian also stated:

People just assume women basketball players are all gay. Like if I’m playing with a bunch of guys, I’d get asked if I like women or men or do I have a girlfriend...and I don’t think that should really matter. Why does it has to be assumed just because I play ball that I like women. It’s a hurtful feeling.

These statements illustrate that women basketball players are aware of some of the challenges that come along with them being a female athlete. Yet, given these specific challenges a majority of the women basketball players I interviewed tended to not let these challenges affect them personally or affect their game nor the love they have for playing basketball.
**Individual Power and Growth**

The idea of gaining individual power and developing as a woman and basketball player was another significant theme that presented itself in almost all of my interviews. When not playing basketball, these women are parents, coaches, teachers, and work regular day jobs, and yet basketball being a part of their life has helped shaped and form the women they are today. Women undergo a lot of things on a daily basis which plays a tremendous role in how they carry themselves. Considering all of the different experiences women encounter from jobs, children, relationships (intimate or not), and for these women, basketball, one could imagine how all of these different encounters build upon their character. For instance, Trish, a mother who is also basketball coach talked about how her skills developed from playing basketball correlates to her personal life. She explained that it helped her in “running things” as a coach.

Because I’ve watched multiple coaches do it and now that I’m coaching I see everything they went through because really it’s hard coaching women. It’s a lot of different attitudes, a lot of different personalities but you gotta remain that same person to every one of them so it’s a bit challenging but I think if I didn’t play any sports I wouldn’t be this equipped to deal with women especially with coaching them…really with coaching as being a part of my identity it taught me how to be neutral, like you can’t pick and choose and really this has helped me as far as parenting my child as well.

Kelly, as quoted earlier discussing being comfortable enough to bring her kids to the games added:

It’s always taught me to challenge myself, it’s contributed toughness because playing ball especially at certain levels you just can’t be weak…and not even so much just physically but mentally too. Ya know, you gotta be tough…you fall down, you get back up it’s the same thing like in life. And like I have a daughter so I want to be able to teach her those same kind of fundamentals that I was taught and I picked up on and hopefully she takes on that identity as well and makes it special for her; be a basketball player and incorporate the sport, if not just on the court but in her everyday life just like me.
While each of these mothers had somewhat different responses as to how basketball correlated to their personal lives outside of it, needless to say it had influenced it in one way or another. Their experiences may be different, but their common denominator is that basketball has helped shape their identity and character, and they feel basketball helps shape the way they parent, hoping that basketball can essentially be a part of their children’s identity as well. We can then see how being a mother and a basketball player thus intersects for many women. Given that basketball is something that came first in most mothers’ lives prior to them being a parent, many of their parenting styles stem from basketball-like characteristics. The idea of being patient, having confidence, and displaying leadership for instance. Each of these characteristics are essential to being a basketball athlete and evidently a contributing factor to being a good parent according to these women.

Thus, while many athletes see basketball as being more physical than anything else because most think the physicality is what makes a basketball athlete or any athlete “good”, many women tend to think deeper when it comes to being an athlete. When I questioned the women on the depths of being a woman basketball player, Bree, a young woman who is seeking a coaching career after college explained personally of what it means to her and probably many other women. She stated:

Umm you gain so many things, you gain loyalty, trust, commitment, you dedicate x amount of hours to be good in this sport so those same hours can transfer being good in the next step in life. As much effort you put into basketball it turns out on the court and you could put the same effort into anything else and watch it turn out in other areas of your life.

Here we can understand that woman basketball players believe one can take the benefits from playing basketball and incorporate it into other areas of her life as well. For instance, Bree states:

If you relate you as a player to your everyday life that really helps you just build character and that plays into who you are-- your level of self-esteem and confidence. Like
for me my self-esteem is high right now and probably the highest it’s ever been but it took me to gradually get to this point you know what I mean…at one point my confidence and self-esteem was low with this sport because my dedication was off with it, I ain’t really know if this was the sport for me so I had to ask myself, is it? Do I love this game like I say I do, do I mean it, and I had realized I was losing sight of that love because of other personal things that were going on, or should I say I was letting go on, but the minute I put my all back into this game, in return it gave something back to me…my self-esteem, my confidence, my faith…it all came back around.

When asked to describe their point of view in balancing being a woman and being a basketball player, many of these women acknowledged one thing in particular that means a lot as woman basketball player and just a woman in general: self-esteem. Many of these women pinpointed that self-esteem is an essential part of being a woman, and some even went so far as to say self-esteem is extremely crucial for a black woman in particular.

For example, Kendra, a middle-aged Black woman who has been playing basketball for quite some time stated that self-esteem is extremely important for a Black woman and always has been. When asked to elaborate on this point she said:

Well you know how it is…

Assuming I know exactly what she is getting at because I too am a Black woman, but I asked her again if she could elaborate. Kendra then states:

It’s like because all eyes are always on us when you think about placement in society…but don’t get me wrong I don’t typically pull the race card because I mean…it is what it is nowadays. But what I tryna say is that it’s like if we mess it up then it’s like aw okay ain’t no coming back for us right but if a white man or a white woman mess up the results is different ya feel me. Really it’s like we can’t barely express ourselves or it’s oh she always mad, she angry, she always looking mean, something…it just be something at any given moment sometimes…but that’s just in the real world ya know, corporate world I guess but lowkey it’s kinda the same with ball too…we gotta watch how we move, we gotta watch how we respond that’s just what comes with being a black woman.

Jaz also responded in the same kind of manner:

To me basketball is the core to self-esteem like especially being a black woman because it’s like if you can present a game in front of a bunch of people you don’t even know to
me it’s like it shouldn’t be nothing you doubt yourself in. Basketball is a tough sport that’s a given can’t anybody just play ball, I mean I guess anybody could but to be good at it for real it takes a special talent, it takes dedication, patience, hard work, all that so doing, like having all those things tugging at you of course it plays around with your self-esteem because no matter want at some point we do doubt ourselves at one point or another so it’s like with basketball and there being all these different avenues that come along with the sport it definitely has an effect on self-esteem.

Women who play basketball feel it uniquely connects back to their “self”; basketball encourages them, not just on the court but off of it as well. Women associate playing basketball in relation to the woman they are outside of being an athlete.

**Unity and Womanhood**

Unity and womanhood are something many women seek to have among all the women in the world, hypothetically speaking. While it has been ongoing for quite some time now that races should stick together and support one another, the same applies for sexes. Specifically speaking in terms of African Americans or those who identify as Black, this idea for supporting one another has been seemingly expanding all around the world lately for many different reasons. For example, trendy hashtags such as #SupportBlackBusiness or #BlackLivesMatter have recently became actions of support with the Black community. In addition, the unified support among sexes has also been on a rise. For instance, considering women in particular, more and more women are seeking out ways to stand up for women as a whole and speak out, for example, recent movements like #Metoo or #BlackGirlMagic. #Metoo first began in 2006 which is considered a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. This movement was created by Tarana Burke, a Black woman who is also a sexual harassment survivor and activist. And, #BlackGirlMagic is a movement that became popularized in 2013 by CaShawn Thompson. #BlackGirlMagic was a movement created to celebrate the beauty, power, and resilience of
Black women. Thence, if we consider specifically Black women in particular, some might say such individuals may require a very distinctive amount and kind of support since they are knowingly oppressed because they are Black and because they are a woman. Patricia Hill Collins acknowledges, black women are essentially always situated uniquely because they stand within exceptionally prevalent and powerful systems of oppression and resistance, based around race and gender (Collins 2000). The women in this study generally claimed a desire to have a unified connection among other women, rather than bitterness and strife against each other. However, the question seemed to be how women can reach this point successfully.

Ordina states:

I mean it can be challenging at some points but really ball is like my second job so I love everything that comes with it and being around others that love it and is dedicated to it like the women in this league it’s really dope. You get to see so many different personalities so like individually we’re all different but together we’re something unique.

Similarly, Layla who is now on the rise to becoming a professional women’s basketball player expressed:

I think the benefits are one, figuring out yourself. With basketball it really teaches you about yourself and it builds a lot of courage, confidence, learning other people around you, working on your social skills, I think the biggest thing is being self-less… growing up it was like I was focused on scoring 30 but then I came to realize that that’s not really what basketball is about. It’s about can you have a complete game, can you score, can you make the right pass, can you encourage your teammates, are you gone put your body on the line for your teammates, are you respectful… that’s something that I’m really big on like even outside of basketball just making sure I treat everyone the same, regardless of if you’re the coach or the 12th man on the team. I think it’s important so making sure I give eye contact, making sure my body is intact like that’s all important and you never know who’s watching.

The strength in having teammates and development of sisterhood amongst these women basketball players became a relevant aspect in which others also discussed.

For instance, Samantha stated:
My teammates, them like my sisters, it’s like extended family and we treat each other just as that and I feel like it should always be that. Some of the ladies I play with in this league and even not I’ve known basically my whole life and these types of relationships you can’t replace.

Trish added:

Witnessing different things not just within yourself but from your teammates as well. We all are going through different things at different times and even sometimes at the same time, but just being able to adjust and create a balance and having a teammate who you’ve built that sister-ship with who’s going through the same thing or at least understands, just goes along way on and off the court and where else could you find a relationship like that outside of playing basketball.

Similarly, Kendra expanded on how playing with these women, although she is much older than many of them keeps her hopeful, connected and youthful:

These ladies are like my second family. I think what some people fail to realize is that when women come together, WE come together…and honestly basketball is such a great way to see this because we’re on the court and there’s a relationship there, being teammates being tough on one another, a sister, then off the court we’re sisters, friends, and a family and I just admire that…..

Given this woman’s statement, this is also something I observed from when these women were in their game mode. At a rare occurrence would I witness teammates engaging in small aggression of expressions and words with each other while playing. Small minor arguments occurred in the “heat of the moment” at times when these women were on the court. If a game was close or if there was a disagreement about placement on the floor during a possession is when these types of actions were likely to happen. However, even while that might have been the case for some of the teammates playing at that given time, when the game was over they never allowed those disputes or aggression to stick. What happened on the court remained on the court, as I observed many of these women would just go back to their natural selves. They would just be talking, joking, and laughing amongst one another as they sat in the stands watching the other games.
Needless to say, the Founder herself harps on the significance of unity and womanhood as those are two main things she seeks out to bring forth with ASWBL along with many others. In an interview she gave to CN100 Sports, she states:

It’s about women empowerment and all these ladies that you have talked to and all of these sponsors they know how important it is for me and women’s empowerment. We support each other. There is a lot of other ladies that have their own league and it’s about showing love; you know what I mean? (CN100 Sports 2018)

We can see how she acknowledges that there are other women who have their own leagues, but to her the importance lies within the support these women display amongst each other.

Additionally, she adds:

I just look forward to bringing in more people, more unity. The community near JLM, we want to make it all, everyone a part of it, that is what I want to do, I want to bring that to Chicago and I want that to stay, so 5-7 years from now, we’ll be here, trust me! (CN100 Sports 2018)

This shows how these women continue to seek to use basketball to help explain themselves as empowering women. The continuous building of relationships, self-esteem, and confidence coincides with the challenges they face overall and not just as an athlete. Even with this particular Pro Am League being predominantly Black women, as it is continuing to grow and expand among other races, their intersectionality continues to connect these women together. It is because of the genuine support, passion, and understanding that these women have, that these women are comfortable with embracing their multiple identities. Therefore, it is the intersectionality that brings them together, as well as the community support behind it. These women tend to feel that sense of inclusion rather than exclusion, and they all come together to support the here and now of basketball.
DISCUSSION

My findings illustrate what makes amateur basketball leagues so significant and empowering for women. Amateur leagues serve as an ample opportunity for women who are either off-season or no longer play as a career choice to never lose sight of their dreams and passion. Yet, when considering the literature, it is largely about college and national basketball. Most of the literature overlooks the reality that there is an in- between status for women basketball players, beyond college or professional basketball. While it is a dream for most women who play basketball in college to pursue their basketball career after college by being drafted into the WNBA, unfortunately that is not always the American Dream story for women basketball players. However, I found from my research that amateur league basketball for women offers that middle ground that many women want and often times need in order to reach their next level. These women begin to achieve their destiny with playing amateur league basketball by being able to still exercise their talent, learn more about the process if they wish to take the next step to a higher playing level, and receive an abundant amount of support from women who may have similarities in their lives.

There is much literature that speaks on the different transitions of playing basketball, which includes from college player to professional, retirement, injury, and some who just end at a college career due to being unaware of alternatives (Beamon 2012; Lockhart 2015; Martin et al. 2014; Ronkainen et al. 2016). Ronkainen et al. (2016) explored narrative and discursive approaches in understanding the disruption in athletic career terminations on the role of sporting. This act of transition for many basketball players from one level to the next or ending their careers often leads to these athletes experiencing what is labeled as “identity foreclosure.” Beamon’s (2012) study addressed identity foreclosure in his study of collegiate Division I
basketball athletes. Beamon noted that many collegiate student-athletes experience identity foreclosure because very few of these athletes actually advance to the level of professionals. While it is always a difficult time for athletes to leave their dreams, aspirations, and athletic identity due to injury or retirement, unfortunately for many college basketball athletes their exit from the game of basketball begins as soon as their senior year of college playing is over.

My study on amateur leagues makes a significant contribution to the literature on identity and sports because it sheds new light on the issue. It is known from prior literature that many athletes experience identity foreclosure simply due to the lack of resource on alternatives. However, my study has illustrated that the role of amateur sports can help to counteract identity foreclosure. The women in my study profoundly described how they were able to still maintain their identity as a basketball player because of the ASWBL pro amateur league. To these women it is because of amateur leagues like ASWBL that their transition out of their identity as a basketball player does not have to end as early as it might have without these teams. Women amateur basketball leagues allow these women to build on their self-esteem, confidence, and add empowerment to their identity of being a basketball player alongside their other intersectional identities.

In addition, previous literature written on the social issues of women and sport such as Franks and O’Neill (2014) and Woods (2007) claimed that women’s sports at the college and national level were still not receiving a certain level of support as men’s teams in terms of media coverage and audiences. It was therefore a surprise that my study of ASWBL displayed the total opposite of what has been written about. The support the community had to offer the women of ASWBL significantly differs from the literature that women basketball players do not receive much support. As I mentioned early on, the gymnasium for ASWBL was always packed on
Tuesday’s and Thursday’s and these crowds consisted of a good amount of women and men in attendance. This kind of support also displayed evidence that differed from the literature that women basketball players are less likely to be supported by men (Bowen et al. 2017). ASWBL Pro Am has established this continued supportive place in the East Garfield Park Community at the JLM Abundant Life Center. These women for the past five seasons have not just invested into any neighborhood, rather they have consistent with their location and have distinctively become a part of community that is seeking to grow towards better circumstances. Similarly, to what Gottidiener et al. (2018) mentions in *The New Urban Sociology*, the importance of space within communities continue to grow and develop throughout the years and social lives thence begin to change over time. Moreover, Sampson (2013), also acknowledges that communities matter significantly because individuals’ lives are shaped by where they live and communities influence a range of social phenomena. My findings showed similar patterns. These women of ASWBL actively express the ways they are supported in this league and the importance of it being on the Westside of Chicago. They would attest that the unity that comes with ASWBL at JLM is unmatched. These women valued the support that comes along with the community, as well the relationship they have among their teammates and all of the women in the league for that matter. This is what is unique about amateur leagues, in particular for ones like ASWBL. Being in the specific location of East Garfield Park makes it beneficial in terms of convenience in travel time for players, as well as the fans and additional supporters but the location is much more than a matter of convenience.

The challenges that are known and relevant for women basketball player at the national level unfortunately still tend to occur for amateur woman basketball athletes. One specific challenge for women athletes in particular is that their sexuality still appears to be a relevant
topic of inquiry by others. There is much literature that addresses this social issue of sexuality pertaining to women athletes, including topics such as lesbian identity in women’s sport, heteronormativity and homophobia (Aitchison 2007; Allen-Collinson 2009; Anderson et al. 2016; Boddy 2014; Cahn 2015; Caudwell 2007; Krane 2016; Norman 2016; Toffoletti 2016). Caudwell (2007) argued that lesbian-identified players provided a challenge to the “heterosexing” and “heterogendering” of sport and sport space. These lesbian-identified players are viewed as a disruption of normative sexuality in sports. Overall this issue has become labeled as a social problem within sports, and the sexuality of the woman athlete is deemed necessary to research and is also discussed by outsiders such as media, fans and others. Cahn (2015) examined the labeling of women athletes as “too aggressive”, “too rough or tough” and also perceived to be lesbians. Outsider assumptions and labeling of women basketball players is a serious challenge to the athletic identity of some women basketball players. For instance, the statement that, “most or all women basketball players are seen as gay/lesbian,” was often expressed by the women of ASWBL that I interviewed and was felt to be an ongoing stereotype that these women are up against.

However, it was to my surprise that the women basketball players of ASWBL were not at all moved by what appears to be a bigger issue at the national level of women’s basketball. This speaks to the need for more research into the role that amateur leagues have for identity formation in regard to sexuality. In my study, while these women recognize that they may be portrayed differently to the outside world, it seems as if, particularly within amateur leagues, these women do not face much or if any at all, burdens of their sexuality being questioned. I found there to be indications that the stigma over sexuality and women sports is more significant amongst the professional level, whereas with amateur leagues it is less so. These women
basketball players are completely aware of the challenges and stereotypes that they are up against but because of the acceptance of one another and community support they receive, these women do not feel the impact by these incidents as much. The women resist the problematic aspect of this because of the support they have from each other and the community outweighs the stereotypes that seem to become challenges for women basketball players. Another significant point was that whether these women identify as having attraction to the same sex or not, it did not take away from their identity as a woman, nor them as a basketball athlete. It was more important to them that their sexuality was not assumed or defined by outsiders. Additionally, this support extends a long way for amateur leagues as these women become so close-knit with one another that even if sexuality became a question, there would be no judgement amongst them anyhow. Whereas at the national level of basketball, women may not have those close-knit relations, but more of the media and unknown fans just weighing in on their life and being judgmental.

Moreover, in relation to the community being supportive to the amateur league games, the intersectional identities of mothers with children is a significant point to mention. While being a mother could be challenging on a several levels for women basketball players, amateur leagues essentially offer a great accommodation for these women to be parents and still engage in a sport they love. Considering the countless hours it takes to parent a child or the countless hours it takes to being an athlete, for the mothers who are a part of ASWBL, they managed to maintain the best of both worlds. Playing in this amateur league did not hinder these moms from playing the sport they love because as some of them mentioned this league did display kid friendliness. Players, fans, and the community as a whole all showed support and love for not only the moms but their children as well. Whereas, at the national level this could be problematic
as women players may not be able to take their child(ren) with them every step of the way. This could possibly lead to outsiders being judgmental about their parenting skills. They may be judged either from the angle that people might question why they are bringing their child(ren) everywhere or are always on the road focusing on their career with basketball and not their child(ren).

Thus, amateur basketball leagues become more than just a sport for many women in Chicago and also around the world. Much research shows that women choose to play basketball for numerous reasons, however, there appears to still be minimum research on why women choose amateur leagues specifically and what the uniqueness of playing for an amateur league are. While the literature on women and sports is increasing, more specific areas of research pertaining to women amateur basketball players is still lagging. My work contributes to this missing piece pertaining to not only amateur sports but women amateur basketball leagues in particular. My research regarding women amateur league basketball players has thus added to this literature as to why women seek out amateur leagues. Since many women basketball players tend to hold multiple different identities (i.e. being mothers, coaches, teachers, work regular day jobs) in which they all cease to intersect, amateur league basketball for women offers that space for them to still love the game and also be comfortable with their current state of womanhood.

Similarly, to Johnson (2015), the intersections of race, class, and gender is and always will be important aspects contributing to the lives of women athletes. These women basketball players in particular also show intersections of these same characteristics. Being that this league consisted of a majority of African American women with a small percentage of other races in which these women come from all different areas spread throughout Chicago, who they identify as beyond as an athlete but a woman in society matters significantly. These intersections matter
while they are on the basketball court or not, when they step off of the court these factors still remain the same if not more. In addition, self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment are also qualities that these women carry off court with them through day to day situations. It is because of basketball that many of these women found their voices and became comfortable within their own skin as a woman basketball athlete. Riley expressed:

As a kid basketball was just fun to play, it was more fun being around the guys than hanging out with the girls and doing things they were doing or what…but as I got older basketball started to mean more, I was looking at the game different because I finally began to learn from it ya know. Being a black woman basketball player and having moved from the city to a white suburbs I mean it was still fun of course like when I was a kid but that fun started stretching into teachable moments and it was like learning something I never have before…because all along outside of just studying and understanding the game…I was learning me and learning me began to help me become more comfortable with who I am for real and not just who I’m tryna be.

Other women interviewed thought like this as well. Basketball gave women an outlet to formally express themselves, especially for Black women in particular. Rather than having to hide in the shadows or looking over their shoulder, wondering about the judgements that might come, basketball gave them the reason they were searching for all along to fully express themselves and not be so focused on what one might think of them. Playing in an amateur league not only offers women basketball players’ fun and still a connection to what they love but as well patience, humility, and the space to express who they are as women. Even with the additional identities that many of these women hold, some being mothers, coaches, and also balancing everyday obstacles, these women still manage to triumph when being an athlete.
CONCLUSION

I believe that my research will create a foundation for further research on women amateur league basketball players. Interviews and observations offered a unique way to fully understand women basketball players when they were aware they were being watched (through interviews) and when they were not aware (through observations). Most of these women had experience with being the center of attention in their earlier college teams, however their basketball careers did not take them to where they originally envisioned. However, these women still learn and manage to thrive and derive the benefits of being a part of an amateur league team, as amateur leagues help many women keep their identity as a woman basketball player alive rather than dealing with the "identity foreclosure" issue discussed in the literature. My study is important to the sociology of sport because it explores the role amateur basketball has on the identity of women basketball players including during transitions. Many of these women transition from a variety of levels of basketball and while although some of them do not to pursue a dream they once had, it is because of amateur leagues like ASWBL that women are not forced to transition completely out of the basketball world. Women amateur leagues offer a middle and secure ground for women basketball players that are either off-season or whose basketball career has “ended.” These amateur leagues help these women keep their identity with basketball relevant also because of the community support that comes along with playing in an amateur league. The support from the community offers many women the strong sense of belonging and acceptance not just as a player but in unison with other women who are a part of the league and those within the community. Due to the support offered from the community and the respect the community has for these women, it creates a family bond in which these relationships last a lifetime.
In terms of future research, I would like to explore cross-cultural comparisons with women amateur league basketball. I would like to learn more about the ways women amateur leagues are supported within other countries. Do those women also have a community that they refer to as family or home that leads to the same kind of distinctive amount of support from the community, or do the leagues travel? If not derived from community, what is the most significant source of support of playing women’s basketball for an amateur league in other countries? I would also like to learn more about some of the specific challenges as well. For instance, when considering the challenge of sexuality, the amateur basketball players of my study deflected this aspect from outsiders. However, the sexuality of women basketball player at the national levels seems to get more attention and likely to not be deflected by women players according to previous literature. I believe that the questioning, acknowledging, and deflecting of sexuality of women basketball players could be further explored. Given the previous literature, I would like to explore this by directly comparing the findings from interviews of professional women basketball players and amateur women basketball players. Another challenge that deserves more study is about the women who are mothers who play in these amateur leagues. Although my findings showed support for women who are mothers in the amateur leagues, I would like to further study how women balance being a mother and still follow a dream of basketball.

The passing of Title IX became the turning point for women as it allowed them to become more involved with sports and since then women have become a growing percentage of athletes around the world (Cooky and Lavoi, 2012). Although it has become more acceptable and even encouraged for women to play sports, there are still disparities that come along with being a woman athlete. To the current day, women are still not able to have the kind of careers as
an athlete to the same extent that men are. While women have been taken more seriously in sport as years progressed and continues to evolve they still lag behind men in sports. For example, professional women basketball players experience less pay as compared men basketball players, and this can even be seen in other sports as well. My research on the amateur women basketball league ASWBL Pro Am contributes to the sociology of sport by presenting the idea that women basketball players are empowered through these amateur leagues. These professional amateur leagues offer these women a sense of belonging, growth, and a way to remain connected to the game. The promise of the sport of basketball for women’s confidence and self-esteem through group membership in amateur leagues is strong evidence of intersectional feminism achieved through sports.
REFERENCES


Johnson, Chelsea. 2015. “Just Because I Dance like a Ho I’m Not a Ho”: Cheerleading at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender.” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32:377-394.


APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE
Name:
Age:
Gender:
Race/Ethnicity:
Level of Education:

1. How old were you when you began playing basketball?
   A.) When you first began to play basketball, was it organized basketball taught by coaches, or were you taught from pick-up games with friends, relatives, or etc.?

   B.) If on a team was it was gender segregated or co-ed?

   C.) Describe what it was like playing your first basketball game.

2. Have you ever played any other sports? If so, which ones?
   A.) How long did you participate in the other sport(s)?

   B.) Do you still participate in the other sport(s), If not, why not?

3. What attracted you to the game of basketball?
   A.) Compared to the other sports you’ve played, what made basketball more significant for you to continue playing?

4. Do you currently or have you ever played basketball in college?
   A.) If yes, can you describe your college career as a basketball athlete?

   B.) If no, can you tell me why you chose not to play basketball for your college?

5. Is there anything significant about ASWBL Pro Am that makes women want to play in this league in particular?
   A.) How did you find out about ASWBL Pro Am?

   B.) How far do you travel to come to your games at ASWBL?

6. How would you describe yourself as an athlete?

7. How would you describe your relationship among others in the basketball world? (i.e. coaches, teammates, fans)

8. What role does basketball play in your life?
9. How has basketball contributed to your identity?
   A.) Do you believe these contributions will continue throughout your future?

10. Do you follow professional basketball? If so, which professional players and why?

11. Do you think there are benefits for women playing basketball?
    A.) How do you think it affects self-esteem?

12. Is there anything I have not asked about your experience in playing basketball that you would like to discuss or add?