MARGINALIZED ATHLETIC TRAINING STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY GIVING VOICE TO BLACK WOMEN

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Context: Black women are underrepresented in the profession of athletic training. Failure to introduce Black women and their perspective to the profession of athletic training and to the literature may result in their continued marginalization. Objective: The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived effects of mentoring and other factors on the retention and credentialing of Black women athletic trainers in order to understand the impact of those factors on the academic success of Black women athletic training students (ATSs) enrolled in athletic training education programs. Design: This was a qualitative study that utilized semi-structured, open-ended questions during interviews conducted with ten participants. Follow-up case studies were conducted with three of the participants. Setting: All interviews were conducted via telephone or in person at the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) meeting. Patients or Other Participants: Ten women were selected for participation via purposive sampling. The participants were practicing certified athletic trainers who self-identified as “Black” in the NATA membership database. They were selected by the researcher and current and former chairpersons of the NATA Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council. The chairpersons selected women they believed would be willing to participate in this study and had salient stories about their educational experiences. Three of the participants were purposely selected for case studies due to their prominent stories specific to racism and sexism. Data Collection and Analysis: The theoretical framework utilized in this study was a Black Feminist Theory, which recognizes and honors the unique perspective of Black women who are simultaneously situated in U.S. society at the intersection of race, gender and class. Qualitative data resulting from the interviews and case studies were triangulated with a personal data survey. Data analysis was achieved through cyclical and constant comparative analysis. Thick description, member checks, and triangulation were used to ensure verification of the results. Results: Based on the athletic training educational experiences of the participants, the findings revealed that, (1) racism, sexism and classism persisted as barriers to success, (2) mentoring promoted efficient matriculation, successful college completion and professional credentialing, (3) mentoring protected against racism, sexism and classism faced by the participants, (4) although shared race and gender were favorable mentor characteristics, accessible and approachable mentors were more essential traits, and (5) several characteristics inherent to athletic training education contributed to college completion and credentialing. Specifically, the clinical education component was frequently described as creating a tight-knit sense of family and peer mentoring that was highly desirable and supportive. Conclusions: These findings have many implications that potentially offer athletic training educators and clinical instructors ideas that may improve the athletic training educational experiences of Black women ATSs and lead to their increased involvement in the athletic training profession. Word Count: 450