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BLACK ON ICE

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BLACK ON ICE

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Master’s Project

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to gain perspective into the lived experiences of Black female athletes on the axis of marginalized intersecting identities. Based on the framework of Black Feminist Thought, this project explores how Black women face issues of race while simultaneously battling obstacles related to their gender. Research shows that being situated in this unique position makes it difficult for Black female athletes to focus on playing sports compared to their counterparts. Previous literature indicates that Black female athletes who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have different experiences than Black female athletes who attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). However, more research is needed to fill in the gap between the experiences of Black female athletes who participate in sports that are predominantly occupied by White athletes. This qualitative project concludes with an excerpt of creative nonfiction in the form a self-narrative. In this piece, I delve into my experiences as a Black female athlete in the sport of figure skating. Through various writing techniques I express the joys, struggles, and triumphs I faced and overcame as a Black female athlete participating in the predominantly White sport of figure skating.

Keywords: intersectionality, black feminist thought, self-narrative, Predominantly White institutions (PWIs), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)
**Black on Ice**

As a young skater I always wished I had someone who looked like me to look up to. Most times when I went to the rink, I would see everyone except people who looked like me; Asian people, White people, and others. It wasn’t until I was older that I began to look up to a couple of Black women at the elite levels of figure skating. On very rare occasions did I see skaters who looked like me at local rinks.

I hold the identity of a Black Female Athlete who participates in the sport of Figure Skating. Throughout my lifetime and experiences, I have been aware that I am in a position that is not held by many others. Being a Black woman in sports has its own struggles, but as I add on the identity of figure skater, even more constraints arise.

On any given day I may be the only Black female and/or Black person on the ice or in the facility altogether. As I navigate life with these marginalized identities, I encounter many experiences that other people without my identities would not have to face. My experience is unique and can provide insight to those who don’t hold my identities and bring solidarity to other people who may find themselves in similar positions.

**Literature and Research**

Though the current literature has evolved from where it was years ago, there is still a need to fill the gap in research surrounding Black female athletes who hold marginalized intersecting identities. Most current research highlights Black female athletes who have attended PWIs and their experiences. There has been a recent expansion of the literature towards Black female athletes who attend HBCUs. Gaining insight to both experiences is important and can give perspective into varying aspects of what it means to be a Black female athlete.
I have identified six themes that have emerged from the literature: Black females as other, stereotyping, isolation, sole representation, support which is broken down into two categories: lack of support and community of support, and identity. Within all themes, discrimination is a constraint that Black female athletes face based on their race and gender (Carter-Francique et al., 2011). It is important to note that the research findings show that Black female athletes who attend HBCUs or are part of organizations run by Black women for Black women, have experienced a stronger sense of belonging compared to Black female athletes who attend PWIs (Cooper & Newton, 2021; Wegner et al., 2016). The following review of literature will explore the research regarding the Black female athlete experience.

**Black Female Athlete as Other**

Historically, White women have been the standard on which femininity is based (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014). For Black women, this is something that is unachievable because they can never be White. In much of the research, it is evident that Black females are deemed as other. Adjepong and Carrington (2014) coin this as Black women being “space invaders” on the White standard of femininity. Collins (2009) says that the binary is what shapes human thinking around differences. She says that differences are often opposites for example, White vs. Black or male vs. female (Collins, 2009). In the binary, the opposition is what needs to be manipulated and controlled and in this frame of thought, Black women are at the opposing end of both binaries leaving them as the other of society (Collins, 2009).

Blodgett et al. (2017) presents findings exemplifying Black Female athletes being othered. In this study, one athlete participant highlights differences that can be seen in pictures where her skin color, hair texture, and facial features are distinctly differentiated from her White female athlete counterparts (Blodgett et al., 2017). Some Black female athletes have been
discriminated against and prevented from playing on teams due to their lack of blonde hair and blue eyes (Carter-Francique et al., 2011). “Nike will never use you in any of their advertisements because you’re too dark and you don’t fit the look” described a participant from Couch et al. (2023, p. 77).

Differences in skin tone and hair texture are not all that arise; some Black female athletes also have differences in dress, speech, and financial status which impacts these athletes being painted as other (Blodgett et al., 2017; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). The otherness that Black female athletes face, impacts them while also trying to focus on training and playing their sports (Blodgett et al., 2017). Regardless of Black female athletes' accomplishments, or the way they try to shift themselves to fit in, they still are framed as others or space invaders compared to the White standard (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014).

**Stereotyping**

It is apparent that many Black female athletes feel that they are treated unfairly and not given equal opportunities due to plaguing stereotypes (Carter-Francique et al., 2011). Carter-Francique et al. (2011) conducted interviews with Black female athletes where they describe times when their coaches treated them differently due to the way that they looked. Athletes in the study stated that they should’ve played, but their opportunities were taken away from them by coaches or other administrative staff members (Carter-Francique et al., 2011).

The stereotypes that Black females face range from the way they speak (Blodgett et al., 2017) to views of intellectual inferiority (Carter-Francique, 2018) all based on their race. But, because these Black women are also female, they also face stereotypes based on their gender as well. Facing both sets of stereotypes leaves these women to contest and defend themselves against the forces against them (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014).
As Norwood et al. (2014) point out, stereotypes not only come from White people, but they also can come from Black people as well. Their findings show that when Black female athletes participate in sports that are not common in the Black community, the athletes face stereotypes from all people. An athlete interviewed by Norwood et al. (2014) stated that White people said, “‘Oh I would’ve thought track!’; or ‘Really! You can swim?’; and ‘What! You’re a swimmer?’” (p. 266). And Black people would say, “‘Oh man! I can’t swim! Black folks can’t swim!’ What in the world?” (p. 266).

More generalized stereotypes show that people expect Black females to act flamboyantly and are surprised when they are not (Norwood et al., 2014). Other Black female athletes are told to “speak English” when they utilize colloquial language (Blodgett et al., 2017). Another stereotype that Black female athletes face is that they are going to be ghetto and when they are not, people seem to be surprised (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Blodgett et al., 2017; Norwood et al., 2014). Adjepong and Carrington (2014) describe ghetto as acts of violence, associated with gangs and death. These stereotypes frame Black women in a negative light. Findings show that Black female athletes fight back against these negative preconceived stereotypes placed upon them by society (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Blodgett et al., 2017; Carter-Francique, 2018).

Isolation

It is important to note that the feelings of isolation that Black female athletes face is dependent on their environment and whether or not they attend an HBCU or PWI. Black female athletes who attend PWIs often feel isolated and lack a sense of connectedness and belonging (Bernhard, 2014; Carter-Francique et al., 2017; Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 2020). Black female athletes who attend HBCUs or are a part of organizations run by Black
women for Black women report a sense of belonging racially and culturally (Cooper & Newton, 2021; Wegner et al., 2016).

Many Black female athletes who attend PWIs have feelings of isolation when they are the only ones in their classroom, reporting that other students are “not like them” (Bernhard, 2014). Athlete’s report feeling bothered that they are the only ones in the classroom with their identities (Couch et al., 2023). Black students who attend PWIs tend to feel the cold campus climate and lack a sense of belonging in the campus community (Cooper et al., 2020). Regardless of success levels of the Black female athletes including Olympians, they still remain on the outside (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Couch et al., 2023).

The athletes who attended HBCUs or participated in communities with people like them had a stronger sense of belonging and less isolation. Previously, athletes were used to being the only Black females, but once they began attending HBCUs, they felt like it was more of a family and they were able to enjoy sports more with their peers (Cooper & Newton, 2021). Wegner et al. (2016) showed that sport organizations run by Black women, for Black women, provide not only feelings of support, but also structural support for Black women without them feeling like an out group. From these findings we can see that isolation and belonging are congruent experiences for Black female athletes depending on the environments they are in.

Sole Representation

Black female athletes report times when they were the only Black females on the team or within their schools (Bernhard, 2014; Norwood et al., 2014). These athletes faced issues of racial stereotyping, loneliness, and a disconnection from their team. They also had to negotiate cultural constraints when they participate in sports where the majority of participants are predominantly White (Carter-Francique et al., 2011; Norwood et al., 2014). Black female athletes who
participate in predominantly White sports have to represent themselves to the White community and represent themselves for their Black community (Norwood et al., 2014). Some athletes report being the only Black person at competitions and getting weird looks because of it (Carter-Francique et al., 2011).

When Black female athletes are the “only ones” they are left to be representatives of their communities, whether they choose to be or not (Blodgett et al., 2017). Black female athletes who follow Eurocentric standards feel that they must be aware of how they carry themselves as that representative of their community, which places stress on them while they navigate school and training (Blodgett et al., 2017). Black female athletes who do not conform to Eurocentric standards have to work against the negative stereotypes placed on them as they represent their race (Blodgett et al., 2017).

When it comes to representation in administration, the research shows that more needs to be done. Just knowing that there is a Black coach or administrator on campus is comforting for Black athletes (Bernard, 2014). However, organizations and universities should be careful of this as having only one Black person on the administration serving as a token can be a heavy burden for that staff member (Bernard, 2014). Athletes report wanting to see a visual representation in the administration that reflects their identities (Bernhard, 2014). If there are White coaches of Black athletes, they should take time to educate themselves on their athletes’ culture and the issues they may face (Carter-Francique, 2018; Norwood et al., 2014).

Support

Lack of support. Black female athletes who attend PWIs, seem to face a lack of support and a lack of sense of community (Cooper et al., 2020; Couch et al., 2023). Some administrators at PWIs state that their schools are hard places for Black athletes to thrive due to the lack of
diversity (Bernhard, 2014). In addition to this, some Black female athletes faced discrimination and harassment. In a study conducted by Carter-Francique et al. (2011) a Black female athlete said that people threw bottles at her and her teammates during a meet. Even Black female athletes who played at the Olympic level report a lack of support, stating that they wished there was more support and guidance for them overall (Couch et al., 2023).

In addition to lacking general supports, Black female athletes report having a hard time socializing and getting to know other students (Bernhard, 2014; Carter-Francique et al., 2011). Some Black female athletes report that they don’t have a social life because no one else was like them (Bernhard, 2014). To combat this, athletic departments should create more culturally responsive spaces for their athletes on campuses (Cooper et al., 2020).

Lastly, another support that is often overlooked for Black female athletes is their hair routines. To the average person hair may seem like a small detail, but for Black females it is a very important part of their culture and a constraint they face handling while playing sports (Norwood et al., 2014). Black female athletes report having limited access to hair stylists while attending PWIs stating that trying to find someone to do their hair was a hassle (Norwood et al., 2014). Some athletes have to travel to find hairstylists or go home to get their hair done (Norwood et al., 2014). Support around Black athletes’ hair is limited and is a topic that can be further researched and shared about (Norwood et al., 2014).

Community of support. Although a lack of support may plague many Black female athletes, those athletes who attend HBCUs or athletes who engage in organizations run by them and for them, report having stronger support systems (Cooper & Newton, 2021; Couch et al., 2023; Wegner et al., 2016). Black female athletes report fitting in and having close bonds with coaches and teammates while attending HBCUs (Cooper & Newton, 2021). Athletes also report
that attending an HBCU felt like family allowing them to foster strong social connections (Cooper & Newton, 2021). Black women who participated in organizations for Black women run by Black women, reported having structural support organizationally through logos, slogans, and unique colors that support Black women while also having a community of people who looked like them to lean on (Wegner et al., 2016). Family and community are proven to be strong forces for Black female athlete participation (Couch et al., 2023).

However, an anomaly occurred in a study conducted by Norwood et al. (2014). A participant who was Black swimmer attending a PWI shared that her coach listened to her and did not minimize her situation. Norwood et al. (2014) state that other White coaches of Black athletes should do their best to provide support for their Black students. Administrators can do this by equipping coaches with education that provides a fundamental understanding racial and ethnic issues (Norwood et al., 2014). And rather than having one person being the sole representative of diversity, there must be multiple people involved who can provide a community of support for athletes with diverse backgrounds (Bernard, 2014).

**Identity**

Many Black female athletes report having to conceal parts of their identities to fit in (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Blodgett et al., 2017; Couch et al., 2023; Norwood et al., 2014). Some Black female athletes change the way they verbally speak to teammates by avoiding colloquial language (Blodgett et al., 2017). Doing this allows athletes to be accepted and deemed intelligent and educated by others who do not hold the same identity (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Blodgett et al., 2017).

Other Black female athletes report that they try not to let their identity and culture go as they enter White spaces (Norwood et al., 2014). Some Black female athletes report not wanting
to fit in because they knew they weren’t like the other athletes anyways (Norwood et al., 2014). While some athletes changed the way they spoke, others continued to speak the way they always have to remain true and authentic to themselves (Blodgett et al., 2017).

Some Black female athletes who attended HBCUs or participated in Black female run organizations have demonstrated positive experiences surrounding their identity while Black female athletes at PWIs report negative experiences surrounding their identity. At HBCUs athletes felt like they belonged and had a sense of pride that came with being a Black female athlete on and all Black team (Cooper & Newton, 2021). In addition to this, Black female athletes felt as though they were culturally accepted in their identities while on HBCU teams (Cooper & Newton, 2021). Black female athletes who participated in an organization by them and for them, reported having a stronger sense of identity in relation to the sport in which they participated (Wegner et al., 2016). As athletes participate in sports with people of similar identities, they begin to develop their identities further and restore their sense of belonging and connectedness (Wegner et al., 2016).

**Black Feminist Thought**

Black Feminist Thought is a critical social theory coined by Patricia Hill Collins. It places emphasis on intersectionality which Collins defines as “systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age [that] form mutually constructing features of social organization” (Collins, 2009, p. 320). Including Collins’ work on Black Feminist Thought, other research surrounding Black female athletes addresses intersectionality to demonstrate that Black female athletes face different issues than athletes of other identities.

Black women face constraints that are influenced by both their race and gender identities: lack of exposure to physical activity as a child, a deficit of physically active Black female
role models, idealization of a larger body type, and hair maintenance have been among the constraints that interfere with participation in physical activity in a way that is unique to Black women. (Wegner et al., 2016, p. 382)

“Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (Collins, 2009, pp. 25-26). In addition to this, Black Feminist Thought shares Black women’s lived experiences and seeks to provide better future experiences for Black girls and women (Collins, 2009). With the gap in current research surrounding the lived experiences and standpoints of these women, it is vital that we broaden the perspective and make room for more stories to be told. Collins posits six pillars that are essential to understanding Black Feminist Thought.

The first pillar Collins (2009) introduces is Black women as a group. Collins states that “U.S. Black women as a group live in a different world from that of people who are not Black and female” (p. 27). Because Black women hold these intersecting identities of being both Black and female, they face individualized struggles that people in other social groups do not face. With this, Black Women as a group can relate to each other and can share common experiences, but this does not guarantee that all experiences are the same (Collins, 2009).

The second pillar of Black Feminist Thought is that not all experiences are congruent. “Despite the fact that U.S. Black women face common challenges, this neither means that individual African-American women have all had the same experiences” (Collins, 2009, p.29). Even though Black women may face similar struggles, that does not mean that all Black women will have that same experience or that they even interpret that struggle the same way. There is still a sense of individuality even when we are referring to this specific group of people. Differences in age, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and more can create different
experiences among Black women (Collins, 2009). It is important that a variety of perspectives and stories are shared to gain an understanding of what various Black women go through.

The third pillar of Black Feminist Thought says that Black women should define themselves. “Black feminist thought concerns the connections between U.S. Black women’s experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint” (Collins, 2009, p. 33). Black women as a collective should create their viewpoint based on their knowledge and the experiences they’ve had for themselves. When marginalized groups work to define themselves by their own standards, they tend to face resistance (Collins, 2009). But it is important that Black women define themselves for, “if we don’t define ourselves, we will be defined by others-for their use and to our detriment” (Lorde, 1984, p. 45)

The fourth pillar Collins discusses is, “the essential contributions of African-American women intellectuals” (2009, p. 37). Collins says that it is vital to have diverse examples from Black women intellectuals. Intellectual does not always mean academic. Many Black women tell their stories through music, poetry, vocals, writing, speeches, and art (Collins, 2009). If we limit Black Feminist Thought to only those Black women who are in academics, we are restricting the scope of whose stories are told (Collins, 2009). This goes against the very fabric of Black Feminist Though. With the long history of struggle that Black women have faced, it is apparent that Black women can have a variety of backgrounds and experiences. All forms of intellectualism should be portrayed, recognized, and valued.

The fifth pillar of Black Feminist Thought is that it is dynamic and “concerns the significance of change” (Collins, 2009, p. 43). As society evolves so do people’s experiences and stories. Having someone tell their story once lends some perspective, but the world is ever shifting. The stories that are being told must reflect the evolving society. Additionally, the
research must reflect that as well. Academics must do their part to stay up to date with the experiences people face, continuing to breakdown the construction of social conditions (Collins, 2009).

Collins’ sixth and final pillar focuses on Black Feminist Thought’s “relationship to other projects for social justice” (Collins, 2009, p. 46). Black Feminist Thought seeks to empower Black women as a marginalized group. With this comes fighting the struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice for all people (Collins, 2009). Without addressing other people’s struggles, whether similar or different, we risk failing the human race.

**Utilizing Black Feminist Thought**

Framed by Black Feminist Thought, I seek to share my lived experiences as a Black female athlete in a predominantly White sport. The story I am telling fits into Collins’ theory of Black Feminist Thought by adding my experience as a Black woman to the group of other stories shared by Black women. My story is unique as I represent being a Black Figure Skater and talk about the individual struggles and accomplishments I have faced. Through my self-narrative, I am able to address the ways in which other people may have defined me and share my story to re-define myself by my own standards. In addition to the narrative, my project is dynamic and allows me to add the dialogue of Black women intellectuals as I base my project from the need of more research surrounding the Black female athlete experience. Overall, both my narrative and project reflect various pillars of Black Feminist Thought.

Lastly, I utilize the pillars of Black Feminist Thought by emphasizing a need for diversity in the figure skating and sporting community overall. Although my story highlights the underrepresented standpoint of Black female figure skaters, it is conducive in the fact that other marginalized groups may face similar struggles either in figure skating or other sports where
participants are predominantly White. In general, there needs to be spaces for all athletes to feel welcomed to participate regardless of race, gender, social class, religion, ability, etc.

**Creative Nonfiction: Self-Narrative**

Caulley (2008) suggests that creative nonfiction was previously seen as contradictory because of the terminology *creative* and *nonfiction*; however, that is a false idea because creative nonfiction is purely rooted in truth and is written with factual information. Smith et al. states that, “Creative nonfiction is a type of creative analytical practice (CAP) that tells a story which is grounded in research data and draws on literary conventions” (2015, p. 59). All forms of creative non-fiction are abstract in their format, but factual in the content that they produce (Smith et al., 2015). There are seven factors that Smith et al. (2015) suggest are important when writing creative nonfiction.

Smith et al. (2015) discusses the various essentials of creative nonfiction. First, creative nonfiction is a way of getting to know one’s self and analyzing the data. Second, creative nonfiction is based on theory and can show theory through the use of stories or narratives. The third implication for utilizing creative nonfiction is that it can provide an ethical benefit of allowing researchers to share events of real happenings. Fourth, creative nonfiction allows for researchers or participants to provide readers with an emotional experience. The fifth reason that creative nonfiction can be a great method of writing is because it allows people to share their testimonies and readers to be witnesses of those stories that are shared. Sixth, creative nonfiction provides a sensory experience for readers. Lastly, creative nonfiction has the ability to reach an array of audiences rather than just those in the academic field (Smith et al., 2015).

Within creative nonfiction, there are two methods that can be utilized. The first method is the dramatic or scenic method as presented by Caulley (2008). This method seeks to *show* rather
than tell the story. An example of telling would be, “he jumped over the fence.” Rather than just a plain statement, the researcher can show by using a statement like this, “with fear in his eyes, he quickly leaped over the fence to escape the doom that awaited him.” With this version, a picture is painted for the reader which shows what happens rather than just talking about what happened (Caulley, 2008). Showing depicts the emotions that the character is experiencing in the moment. This method provides a close-up shot of what is occurring (Cheney, 2001). The second method of creative nonfiction presented by Caulley (2008) is the summary or narrative method. Typically, this method is the wide-lens and bigger picture of the two methods (Cheney, 2001). It includes summaries or scenes of events that happened over time, to paint the big picture (Caulley, 2008).

**What is a Narrative?**

The form of creative nonfiction that I will be utilizing is a mixed method creative nonfiction approach. Within my narrative I will utilizing showing rather than telling over a series of short scenes surrounding my experiences as a Black Figure Skater. The narrative style of writing has been composed for decades, but has been difficult for researchers to categorize. Although they have struggled to create a clear-cut definition of what narrative writing is, Smith and Sparkes (2009) do their best to define it based on previous research and their own findings:

> Narrative inquiry can be described as committed to interpretivism and is a way of understanding experience. Arguments for the development and use of it emerge from a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, are storytelling beings who lead storied lives. People shape their daily realities by narratives and we know our lives and worlds through them. They are a personal and social means by which our experience of the world is interpreted and made meaningful. Narratives are also an
embodied relationship, constitute people’s selves and identities, and are a primary way of organizing our lives in time. (p. 6)

In addition to a mixed method creative nonfiction approach, I utilize the form of self-narrative. A self-narrative allows the author to evoke vividness of an experience through re-envisioning the stories we tell about ourselves (Duncan, 1998). Duncan presents how one can portray themselves through their writing. To create a strong self-narrative, you must imagine who you are by creating yourself through your story (Duncan, 1998). Although the self-narrative may be about oneself, the author relates the story to the greater struggles that people with marginalized identities face (Duncan, 1998).

After reviewing the previous literature regarding narratives, four major themes have emerged. The first theme of narrative writing regards meaning making and how that meaning is constructed. Smith and Sparkes (2009) state that being a human means that meaning is made. This meaning is how people interpret their experiences and build perceptions of the world around them (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Fabry shows that meaning can be created both internally and externally. Internal meaning is how the characters make sense of the events taking place around them (Fabry, 2023). External meaning is the connection that occurs when the researcher builds meaning for the reader (Fabry, 2023).

The second theme within narrative writing is temporal order. Temporal order is how narratives are structured and organized in time (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). The timing of the scene(s) in a narrative must be structured coherently (Fabry, 2023). There must be a clear beginning, middle, and end to a narrative (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). A good narrative will not only be coherent but will be relevant and dynamic through the past, present, and future times (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).
The third theme emerging from the literature is significance. Smith and Sparkes (2009), state that narratives must have both personal and social significance. Narratives are platforms for people to share their unique, individualized stories and experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). While doing this, narratives are simultaneously structured in social and cultural contexts, as one human being cannot have an experience without the bounds of society and culture (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Additionally, narratives can deepen social significance by showing the where, who, and when of the storyline (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

The fourth and final theme of narrative writing is characterization. This theme regards how the character in the narrative is portrayed from their own perspective and others perspectives. As Smith and Sparkes (2009) put it, “a person cannot be a self on their own but only in relation to certain ‘interlocutors’ who are crucial to their language of self-understanding” (p. 5). The characterization not only surrounds whoever is being narrated, but also whoever else is there in relation to the main character.

Fabry (2023) states that characterization is also about who is telling the story and who the story is being told about. The context of the narrative must be determined in the stage of characterization. Fabry (2023) demonstrates this through the concept of the narrating “I” and the narrated “I.” By utilizing the narrating “I,” the researcher is demonstrating that they are writing the narrative and telling the story about themselves. The narrated “I” represents that a character is having their story told by the researcher. In each of these different characterizations the researcher will choose between utilizing third or first-person language based on the narrating “I” or narrated “I” (Fabry, 2023).

**Narrative Writing Techniques**
Caulley (2008) describes the standard framework for narrative writing techniques. The beginning of the narrative should be something that hooks the reader's attention, while the ending should leave the reader surprised yet simultaneously satisfied (Caulley, 2008). The three techniques that make effective narratives are showing rather than telling, utilizing an active rather than passive voice, and various aspects of style.

A great narrative always shows the reader what is happening by giving descriptive details rather than telling the reader what is happening (Caulley, 2008). An example would be rather than saying “he fell” say, “he contacted the ground with a force that knocked the wind straight out of his lungs.” The narrative should paint a picture as it shows the reader what is taking place. The researcher can do this by using the second writing technique which is the active voice.

The active voice occurs when the subject of a sentence performs the action described by the verb of that sentence: The clown grabbed her and hugged her rather than the passive: She was embraced by the clown. Rather than saying Her hair looked beautiful, say whether her hair bounced, tumbled, cascaded or swung. (Caulley, 2008, pp. 434-435)

When striving for the active voice, the researcher must avoid the killer bees of writing: am, is, was, were, been, had been, to be, and be (Caulley, 2008). Replacing these words with active verbs helps to bring details that make the narrative come to life (Caulley, 2008).

The third technique in narrative writing is about the style that is utilized. Caulley's (2008) main points regarding style are: diction, syntax, tone, and metaphors and similes. Diction is referred to as the words researchers choose to use. The selection of words is important as the way they are used can set the style of the narrative causing it to be either formal or informal (Caulley, 2008). Additionally, researchers should be decisive in word choice by picking words that are not
“wishy washy” (Caulley, 2008). “Don’t say you were a bit confused and sort of tired and little depressed and somewhat annoyed. Be tired. Be confused. Be depressed. Be annoyed” (Caulley, 2008). Syntax is another key point in style. If the researcher uses sentences that are too long, they’ll lose the reader; too short and they won’t get the point across. An effective narrative writer will vary the length of sentences to find the perfect balance (Caulley, 2008).

The tone of the piece indicates how the character is feeling regarding what is taking place (Caulley, 2008). Is the character feeling light and airy, or is there an ominous tone emanating doom and gloom? How the researcher utilizes all themes and techniques will set the tone of the narrative. The last staple of style is the use of metaphors and similes. Metaphors and similes will allow the researcher to use comparisons that make the readers five senses come alive.

A great narrative evokes sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or feelings for the readers (Caulley, 2008). In research conducted by Staller, they note the importance of sound, stating that “each of us lives by a master sound track that is unique to our lives” (2015, p.449). Setting the soundscape can help to give great detail to the story being told (Staller, 2015). The last technique that is specific to sport focused narratives is the emphasis on the kinesthetic sense. Samudra (2008) identifies the kinesthetic sense as the feeling of the body in space. This “feeling” is outside of the main five senses and can be experienced through balance, vibrations flowing through the body, and people’s adjustments of their bodies in space (Samudra, 2008). Researchers can focus on translating the kinesthetic sense into language through “encoding kinesthetic details, describing new sensations, and narrating physical training” (Samudra, 2008, p. 665). Researchers should do their best to use sensory language that provides a deep somatic experience allowing readers to comprehend how bodies move in space (Samudra, 2008).

My Self-Narrative
With the need for more research surrounding the Black female athlete experience, I seek to add my story to what has already been presented in the literature and dialogue of those before me. The format in which I will present my story is through creative nonfiction in the form of a self-narrative. Through self-narrative, I provide the reader with a wide lens of my story as a Black figure skater in a series of short scenes over time. By evoking emotion and kinesthetic sensations, I show the audience what my experience was like as a Black figure skater.

Rather than harping on one perspective I seek to shine a light on the holistic version of my story, sharing a variety of situations that have impacted me, positive, negative, and all in between. I share my lived experience through the lens of Black Feminist Thought. In sharing my narrative, I hope to shed a light on the issues that Black females face in predominantly White sports and spaces.

**Black on Ice**

Have you ever felt like a fish out of water? Gasping for life, flopping around, searching so desperately, longing to swim in the water you know you belong in.

This is how I felt being Black on Ice.

**Young and Free:**

During my childhood I only knew what children know. I belly laughed and giggled at anything and everything. I was full of life, running around playing, doing whatever activity would let me move my body in a new way. My first memories of physical activity are of nights in the rink.
Carefree and fearless, bundled in layers, my parents lace up my skates and push me onto the ice. Liberation and freedom flowed through swift smooth glides. Cool air whipped past my skin, transporting me on a floating cloud. Teary eyed, I hit the ice over and over again. Grit oozed from my pores as I stammered to get back up each and every time, regardless of how red hot flustered I was. Being on the ice at that early age meant no boundaries. I was free to be me, uninhibited by the worries of the world.

My dad and I spent endless hours in the crispy musted air scented of rubber, propane, and rolling hot dogs. On the occasional Saturday evening we would go to fabulous skating exhibitions where the women wore dresses that hugged their bodies tightly and were sliced and diced with cutouts that attracted the eye. The men were a mere accessory helping draw attention to the real stars of the show who dazzled and glistened with every twist, lift, and turn. I dreamed of skating a clean program. The roaring crowd vibrating my whole body, spotlight warm and glaring, with all eyes on me.

The Hiatus:

As childhood closed and adolescence began, small cracks formed in the ice that was my life. With my parents' divorce looming, my dad moved to an island far away and my mom and I were left braving the blistering cold of the Midwest winter. Visiting dad was the only time I saw sunshine, but even that came with stormy nights welled up in tears missing mom. I longed for the pieces of my family to be put back together.

Dwindling down to one income was painstaking. All that I indulged in previously became luxuries of the past. The limitlessness of childhood bounded now by new rules that accompanied
being the child of a single mother. Giving up skating meant flushing my dreams down the drain. A reality that many Black kids experience due to financial constraints that flood our community. As I hung up my skates, I balanced what it meant to go from a whole family to mere single people strung together by the single thread that was me.

*The Comeback:*

Life moved briskly as I navigated unfamiliar territory. Mom needed support to raise the head-strong teenager I was; a village to say the least. Moving to the big city meant being ripped away from everything and everyone I knew. Earthshattering exhausting nights, ridden with flame spewing fights between my mom and I about the move. I yearned for the cold, familiar, homey shelter.

Skating was long, but never lost. Sitting on my bed the phone rang three times,

“Hello?”

“Hello, can I please speak to Precious?”

“Ummmm, yes, this is Precious.”

“I wanted to let you know that we have one spot left in our learn-to-skate program, if you would still like to sign up.”

My eyes opened wide, and energy surged through my body. With restraint, I struggled to steady my voice,

“Yes, that would be great. I'll take the last spot!”
This was my chance! Finally, after ten dreadful years off the ice, I had the opportunity to ever so carefully pick up the skates I hung up all those years ago. With comfort and ease I laced up, like riding a bike, one never forgets. *Tap tap tap* on the rubber floor, I kicked my heel toward the back of my boot. With a strong grip, I pulled the laces towards me tight against the white leather tongue. A quick *crisscross crisscross* hooking the white threaded laces onto the matte metal eyelets. I tied beautifully looped bunny ears and a double-knotted bow for extra security. I was ready to go.

I soon found my footing, gliding back into skating. I vowed this was the thing I would remain committed to. I wasn’t willing to give it up or leave it behind like so many other aspects of my life. With this newfound commitment it was time to show off my skills and work towards my dream of being in the spotlight.

*The Struggle:*

The skates are where it all began. I open the blue box, where my untouched skates are wrapped in plastic, surrounded by perfectly folded tissue paper. I slowly picked up the boot examining the smooth white leather, not a single scratch and the blade sharply shining before my eyes. Julie, the shopkeeper, quickly hands me a pair of tan nylon socks stretchy like the material of tights.

“Here you go!”

“Thank you.”
The nylon socks look odd, bright tan lying against my deep dark skin. Peeling back the tongue of the boot took me aback even further, shaking my head I asked,

“Excuse me Julie, why are the insides of the boots tan? And do you happen to have another color of these socks?”

She replies hesitantly,

“They’re meant to match the skin tone and we only have that color in the nylons, but you can always go barefoot if you’d like.”

I look at my hands and feet and again at her. *Exactly whose skin tone is this meant to match?* I think to myself.

This “skin-colored” tone follows me into the fitting room. I find cutouts woven in tan mesh peeking out at my collarbone. *This cutout is usually unrecognizable on the other girls,* I thought to myself. I pull the curtains resuming my hunt. Peeking through carousels of dresses without open cutouts was my saving grace. There it was, my beautiful navy-blue meshed dress with silver glitter diamonds, and my favorite accessory, finger holes. With a shimmy, my dress eases on over my curvy hips. I pull one arm in, then the other, and reach around fastening the clasp securely around my neck. After hours of searching, I finally found the one.

As I began my collegiate figure skating career, the struggle buckled me down further like a seatbelt holding me in during a head-on collision. Cheering for my school's Division I Hockey team left me no longer in the shelter of my small homy rink, I was on the big screen now; shown off as BG’s finest, emanating beauty, glitz, and glamour. I had two options: skate with bare legs
risking getting scratched, scraped, and scarred; or skate with legs ten shades of White lighter than me. Choosing ten shades of White kept me safe and voided concern of any indecent exposure, but it was evident that I needed something more complimentary.

“They have anything to match your skin tone?”

My teammate asked as we quickly changed from warmups into game day uniforms.

“No, I’ve checked everywhere, they just don’t have anything for me.”

“Well, that’s dumb, they should have something!”

Rushing out of the locker room, we lined up by the doors of the ice. Flags and poms in hand, ice glistening from left-over Zamboni water, my teammates moved around shaking out pre-game jitters. Sweat beads formed as thoughts swirled my mind, *has anyone noticed my legs yet? Are they going to laugh? I shouldn't be out here looking like this.* Zeroed into how I appeared, I felt a thrust.

“Come on P, it's time to go!”

Gliding into place, I shook off the thoughts and smeared on a soft smile.

_A Clean Skate:_

Sitting in my coach's office, I exclaimed my frustrations.

“I can’t find anything! There's nothing in the pro shop or specialty shops, I don’t know what to do!”
“Well hold on, we might be able to find something”

She tosses me a catalog. I flip through pages while she pulls up any skating apparel websites she can think of. A couple minutes later, I turn to the very last page of the catalog. My heart beats faster and eyes shuttered in disbelief as I jump up yelling,

“I found them!”

They were the holy grail. The one and only brown pair of tights in the entire catalog were now mine.

Transforming in the bustling locker room from warmups into my game day uniform, I look up and see bright smiling faces.

“Wow P! Those look great on you!”

“That looks so much better!”

“You look amazing!”

We rushed to the ice. Flags and poms in hand, ice glistening from left-over Zamboni water, my teammates and I shook out the pre-game jitters. I held my head high with confidence and beamed with joy as I glided to my rightful place on the ice.
Reference List


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