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Corporate Sponsorship And The Consumer Socialization Of African American Women Athletes: A Qualitative Study

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CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP AND THE CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ATHLETES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my heart and soul: my beautiful parents. During this journey, you have taught me strength and resilience over all else. Your example of black excellence has always driven me to have higher expectations for myself. Thank you for always letting me freely pursue my dreams and passions and pushing me to be the best version of myself. This is only the beginning. I love you.

I would also like to dedicate this work to the coaches and mentors I've met throughout my journey and who have pushed me to excel on and off the field. This culmination of hard work is also dedicated to Gerry Quinn. Without your guidance and the eye for my potential, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for the opportunity, my gratitude to you is endless.

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AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ATHLETES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

TAHLA M. WADE, B.A.

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Abstract

African-American consumption is a unique feature of the American consumer market. A characteristic of African American consumers is their participation in conspicuous consumption. A look into the sociological concept of consumer socialization can drive insight to what initiates purchases of this group. However, this is not studied as an evolving process. Over time, individuals may encounter several new influences that affect their consumer socialization and purchase behavior, including the possibility of corporate sponsorship. To explore this evolution, I examine if corporate sponsorships affect the consumer socialization of African-American women collegiate athletes. Fifteen NCAA Division I African-American women athletes from a mid-major, southwestern university participated in the study. Using photovoice, respondents documented personal athletic clothing purchases made while being a collegiate athlete. Interviews were conducted to gain more insight into the photos taken and what influences purchase behavior. Results show that the agents of consumer socialization for collegiate athletes were family, social media, and sponsorship and that they interpreted the sponsorship as gaining statuses. These ideas are explored through the lenses of intersectionality, false consciousness, and the culture industry.

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Introduction

Multicultural marketing was introduced to the world of marketing in the 1980s. This new marketing focus views the market as divided into segments and aims at gathering information regarding the customs, traditions, rituals, relationships, and identities of these segments of potential consumers. Three segments make up multicultural marketing: African Americans, Hispanics, and the general market, comprised of non-Hispanic whites. The African-American segment is pursued by top advertising agencies and by African American-owned advertising agencies, which have been around since the 1960s. This marketing focus has led to the newer development of ethnoconsumerism. Ethnoconsumerism is “the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of the study” (Vankatesh, 1995, p. 27). African American advertising agencies have received considerable attention in the recent wake of ethnoconsumerism as they engage in a fierce struggle with top advertising agencies to effectively reach the African-American market. African-American, as well as general market agencies, have increasingly come to define African American consumers as fundamentally distinct, and contribute to producing and reinforcing this distinctiveness.

Despite African Americans earning, on average, 71 percent less than whites, their market presence is known. Specifically, African Americans average earnings are \$37,000 per year, considerably less than the average income of whites at \$63,000. Further, African Americans have significantly less wealth than their white counterparts at \$95,261 versus \$678,737 (Jones, 2017; Wilson & Rodgers, 2016). However, even at lower income levels, African American spending exceeded the general market at \$531.5 billion in 2010 (Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau [CAB], 2012). This is nearly as much as the average spending for U.S. households. According to CAB, African American buying power is estimated to be \$1.307 trillion in 2017. Moreover, African

American consumers are more likely to make big ticket purchases in the next six months compared to other consumers (CAB, 2012; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Mazzocco et al., 2012).

The growth in spending and purchasing power is a direct reflection of African Americans' attitudes towards quality products (CAB, 2012). African Americans use quality products to define their image. This need for quality correlates with the high brand loyalty found in African American consumers. Compared to non-African Americans, African Americans are 17 percent more likely to agree that brand names are the "best indication of quality" (p. 12). It is also reported that "brand names not only ensure quality, but also make a statement about the person who buys them" (CAB, 2012, p. 12). More specifically, African American consumers look for products that strengthen and reflect their core cultural values: pride, legacy, perseverance, originality, independence, self-esteem, celebration of life and responsibility" (as cited in CAB, 2012, p.12). Meaning, the brand is a direct reflection of the self. However, the reliance on cultural values and consumer socialization may contribute to the high rate of conspicuous consumption seen in African American purchase behavior. African American adults view "having material possessions and a lot of money" as important aspirations to attain (CAB, 2012, p. 11; Clay, 2003).

Understanding these sentiments of the African American market could also help in understanding African American female consumption activity. For example, African-American women use brands to reinforce their self-esteem and enact social recognition (Armstrong, 2001; Bush et al., 2005). Armstrong (2001) reports that "black women are also active, thoughtful, and loyal consumers. For African-American women, respect by a company is key for support of that company. When they feel respected by a company or organization and view the company or organization's product as something that appreciates their ethnic uniqueness, they often respond favorably through their patronage" (p. 17).

African American athletes are another potential “market” to study. Within the sports industry, the female market has flourished considering Title IX, an amendment requiring that institutions receiving federal funds to ensure equal opportunity for attending men and women. Since the implementation of Title IX in 1972, more women than men have participated in intercollegiate sports (Lords, 2001). Moreover, African American consumption and participation in sports has also increased (Armstrong, 2001).

Nike is the largest provider of athletic shoes, apparel, and sports equipment. Generating \$32 billion in 2016, *Nike* proved to be the most popular athletic brand in the North American market, bringing in \$15 billion in revenue. In 2013, *Nike* spent 1.09 billion for the U.S. market alone. The center of these marketing campaigns are sponsorship agreements with celebrity athletes, professional teams, and college athletics. These groups are select users and promote *Nike*’s transforming and innovative technology and designs. In 2015, \$1.1 billion was spent on collegiate sports sponsorship (International Event Group, 2015). *Nike* was the leader, spending 43.2 times more than the average collegiate sponsor. *Nike*’s attention on the African American community has been successful. Armstrong (1999) suggests that *Nike* positioned itself beyond functionality in that it “endorses and celebrates nuances, emotion and interactions that occur within the African-American community” (p. 279). This attention to detail is appreciated by African American consumers, resulting in more African American consumption.

The emphasis on sports in the African-American community is far more common than in white communities. For some, athletic identity is taught early by family and the community in order to promote the possibility of a professional sports career, especially in low income areas (Beamon, 2010). The opportunity of economic stability and upward mobility also drives motivation to participate in sports (Ballie & Danish, 1992; Lyons & Jackson, 2001). Moreover,

the abundance of African American role models in sports very much outweighs those in other careers (Beamon, 2010; Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Seeing these role models endorsed by brands like *Nike*, and the praise of black athleticism only increase the desire to become a professional athlete (Hoberman, 1997). Young athletes commit to sports in which they will excel and possibly acquire college recruitment. This is their first exposure and experience with corporate sponsors. Consequently, this exposure could affect their consumer socialization and purchase behavior.

There has been general research on corporate sponsorship and its effects on fans, however little has been done to highlight the sponsorship's effects on athletes' consumer behaviors and socialization. Moreover, studies detailing African American women and their consumer socialization is scarce. Combining these two scarcities, I look to fill a gap in research by looking at corporate sponsorship in a university setting and the effect it has on African-American women athletes' consumer socialization through the use of photovoice and interviews with 15 African American women collegiate athletes.

The following section lays a theoretical foundation for the study. I then describe the methods and results of the study, followed by a discussion of the results.

Literature Review

In society, the other is “the construction of inferior peoples on which one’s own superior identity is predicated” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2016, p. 831). Under this lens of social life and interaction, an ideal self and other is established to create personal identity. The self is defined by the knowledge and power that it has over the other, while the other is an alien being, or opposite to the identity of the self. From this viewpoint, socially constructed identities are created and George Herbert Mead’s concept of the generalized other becomes apparent. The generalized other occurs when an individual accepts and takes on the norms and values established by their group or community (Kim, 2002). Ultimately, this process of role-taking develops the self and self-consciousness. These social identities, formed by social exchange, create a feeling of exclusivity within a society.

In Western society, race is a part of identity that can lead to social exclusion or inclusion. In the case of the other, non-white races and ethnicities have difficulty defining their identities in a predominately white culture. This difficulty of navigating two social systems is discussed by W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois (1903) centers his argument on subjective social perspectives regarding race, class, and the quest for identity. Du Bois (1903) brings the issue of African Americans’ quests for identity and inclusion stating that black Americans simply wish “to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows...” (p. 3). Even though emancipation had occurred, African Americans had yet to be persons, but more of a “problem” (DuBois, 1903, p. 2). In turn, this creates a veil, or social distance between black and white Americans that ultimately follows African Americans as they move through society. Thus, this veil creates a double consciousness, or the need to look at oneself through the eyes of white society. Du Bois (1903) states that double consciousness is this “sense of always looking at one’s

self through the eyes of others” and that black Americans often experience a feeling of “two-ness, an American, Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings...” (p. 3). As they try to find their self-identities, Du Bois (1903) asserts that the African American strives “to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (p. 3). Consequently, this double consciousness, or double aim, creates a conflict within African Americans due to the need to navigate through the black and white communities.

Du Bois (1920) goes on to assess the other side of the “veil” as he heavily discusses race and class, but highlights the lack of white consciousness as he explores white identity and the meaning of whiteness, asserting that whiteness is a social construct developed in the wake of colonialism. In turn, DuBois (1920) states that whites don’t have the racial awareness that is seen in African Americans, since they are the dominant class and race. Thus, whiteness is seen as the norm, and non-whiteness as the deviance from the norm. The implications that this idea has on marketing is apparent in the concept of multicultural marketing. As a discipline, multicultural marketing only studies African Americans, Hispanics, and the general market. In this case, the general market is understood to be occupied by much of the population: whites. This segmentation also communicates the thought that white normativity, or this in case purchase behavior, cannot be equal or similar to that of African Americans and Hispanics.

For African American women, hardships while navigating through social oppression does not end at double consciousness and the lack of white consciousness. African American women simultaneously face the world in terms of race, class, and gender. This complex yet complete look at oppressive factors is considered in Patricia Hill Collins’ (2000) concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality is “an analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which share

Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women" (p. 299). Intersectionality challenges the binary thought behind social oppressions and expands it to highlight the elements that make multiple identities residing in individuals unique. Rising consciousness of these social oppressions gives African American women a source of empowerment. Marketers that recognize these unique qualities are able to form appropriate marketing strategies to engage African American women consumers.

To further express identity and show unification with a group or community, one may turn to fashion. Fashion, in terms of social interaction, was first theorized by Georg Simmel. To Simmel (1904), fashion is "a form of imitation and social equalization" that can signal the same social class and define it from others (p. 130). Since fashion signals social class, it is continually changing in order for the upper classes to always set the new trend. Therefore, societal norms and ideas surrounding fashion evolve. This social relationship allows those who wish to conform to the demands of a group to do so. It also allows some to be individualistic by deviating from the fashion norms set by mass society.

Conspicuous Consumption

With a focus on double consciousness, intersectionality, and conformity, insights on consumerism and African American consumer behavior can be gained. In establishing an identity, support is needed, which is most commonly found in material items in consumer oriented societies, since "we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves" (Belk, 1988, p. 139). William James, who established the fundamentals for formations of self, indicated that "a man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his..." (Belk, 1988, p. 139). Ultimately, possessions, acquired through consumerism, guide individuals to further define their selves, or identity. This consumer behavior leads to conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption refers to consumers who buy

expensive items and luxuries to display wealth and enhance social prestige. However, the items consumed may only address the consumer's wants and not their actual needs (Veblen, 1899). Conspicuous consumption is particularly high among African American consumers (Charles et al., 2009). This may be attributed to African Americans' need to find balance between the American and black identities within them. It may also be attributed to the lower social standing that many African Americans face. Thus, by participating in conspicuous consumption, African Americans can signal status and indicate their conformity to society.

Ultimately, conspicuous consumption patterns are driven by the concept of consumer socialization. Driven by social learning theory, consumer socialization is explained as "the process by which people develop consumer related skills, knowledge, and attitudes, throughout their life cycle" (Singh, Kwon, & Pereira, 2003, p. 869). This process ultimately prepares individuals to meet society's expectations throughout various life stages including childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Moschis & Smith, 1985). These social expectations influence behavior associated with certain roles ultimately influencing consumer behavior. In turn, consumer socialization can be used to understand attitudes about the social significance of goods, explaining conspicuous consumption (Ward, 1974).

The progression of consumer socialization can be especially telling in regard to African-American consumption activity. The experience of racism pushes African Americans to acquire social membership and "signify and claim that they are full and equal members in their society" (Lamont & Molnar, 2001, p. 32). One way this is achieved is through exhibiting purchasing power that seems equal to their white counterparts to gain perceived equality, respect, acceptance, and status. Meaning, African American consumers are more likely to engage in spending more on premium and luxury items than whites are (CAB, 2012; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Mazzocco et al.,

2012). This leads to African Americans striving for the “finer things” in life that are more wants than needs, ultimately participating in “visible,” or conspicuous consumption (Charles et al., 2009; Podoshen, 2008). This includes diamond jewelry, expensive cars, and pricey clothing and shoe brands, such as *Nike*, that can be used as indicators of income status (Charles et al., 2009; Clay, 2003; Lyons & Jackson, 2003).

Research suggests that these consumption patterns form and maintain African Americans’ identities. The consumption of high status products and services contributes to the formation of “private and self-identity and one’s public image” (Hirschman, Belk, & Ruvio, 2014, p. 318). Psychological traits such as conformity, materialism, and uniqueness and sociological constructs such as social class, upward mobility, and status are used to explain consumer choices and patterns (Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Conspicuous consumption is used to enforce these sociological constructs, playing a significant role in how African Americans define and express their self-identity that is valued by all African Americans, producing a collective identity. Through this perspective, consumption allows African Americans to show their pride and distinctive cultural characteristics and leads to the confirmation of self-worth (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Lamont & Molnar, 2001). However, the potential negative effects of this have not been studied.

Consumer Socialization

Within consumer socialization there are two groups in which African Americans navigate through: the identifiable group and community at large. The community at large can be understood to be the general market, containing the majority. The identifiable group is cross-section of this. These two reference groups represent two different consumption patterns. With African Americans relying “more heavily on word of mouth information when purchasing big-ticket durable goods” than the community at large, an identifiable group acts as a reference group for African Americans

(Podoshen, 2008). This reference group includes African-American celebrities, culture, friends, and family, and ultimately influences African American purchase behavior (Podoshen, 2008; Singh et al., 2003).

Agents of Socialization

Early consumer socialization studies focused on the child development process. Focusing on African-American and white adolescents, Moschis and Moore (1985) found that white adolescents tended to observe their parental consumer behavior more than African-American participants (p. 527). It was also found that African-American adolescents are more likely to spend more time watching television and television ads for social reasons and consumer decisions than their white counterparts (Mochis & Moore, 1985). According to Bush (2005), African-American girls aged 13 to 18 consumed 25 hours of television per week, three times the amount of their white counterparts. Though not as much as whites, African-American adolescents also develop brand preferences from their parents, while whites develop more materialistic values than blacks, ultimately showing consumer orientations occur through parental and media driven socialization processes (Singh et al., 2003).

By extending consumer socialization to young adults, Singh et al. (2003) used the theory of interpersonal susceptibility and its normative (conformity to group norms) and informative (learn about products through observation) influences to classify consumer social influence. Looking across three ethnic groups, Singh et al. (2003) found that African-Americans showed high patterns of influence, such as high vulnerability to internet, peer informative, and media informative influences. Meanwhile, parental normative and media normative influences, found in children and adolescents, were the least important. Young adult consumers may outgrow their parents as socialization agents, turning to role models to influence consumer decisions and

behavior (Martin & Bush, 2000). Moreover, young African-American consumers are less likely to see their father as a role model, resulting in more vicarious role models, such as athletes or entertainers (Martin & Bush, 2000). Although consumer socialization has not been studied beyond adolescent individuals, these findings show that as individuals grow from childhood to adolescents, they move from normative to informative influences.

The hip-hop culture has had a big influence on the African-American community. This influence can determine consumer socialization, resulting in conspicuous consumption of goods (Podoshen, Andrezejewski, & Hunt, 2014). Researchers have found that listeners of hip hop “exhibit higher levels of materialistic attitudes” than those who are not primary listeners and that they also “exhibit higher levels of materialistic attitudes” compared to non-African Americans (Podoshen et al., 2014, p. 279). This ultimately leads to more conspicuous consumption of high-end designer products, signaling status (Hunter, 2011). For African American adolescents, high-end consumption establishes the boundaries of who is and is not popular, who gets the most support from peers, and who fulfills the idea of African-American identity within the high school setting (Clay, 2003). This supports the idea that name brands and conspicuous consumption increase the feeling of “self enhancement and upward mobility” (Lyons & Jackson, 2001, p. 97).

Advertising to the African-American Consumer

The need to signal status to dominant society has increased the African-American presence and purchasing power in the market since 1990 (Lyons & Jackson, 2001). In effect, firms increasingly find the need to strategically reach black consumers. Simpson et al. (2000) found that race in advertising does matter, especially when it comes to African-American consumers (p. 886). Seeing racial congruity within advertisements, African American consumers are highly influenced when it comes to purchase intent-- a firm's ultimate goal.

Yet, in American society, there are dominant, shared ideologies that lead to dominant groups sustaining and legitimizing power over another group (Bristor et al., 1995). In turn, racist ideology is widely distributed through mass media, ultimately communicating prejudice, stereotypes, and assumptions that negatively impact the African American community and purchase intent. Numerical representation of African Americans in advertisements can be an issue, but problematic role portrayals are most apparent. The biggest issue lies in the use of stereotypes in advertising. The main stereotypes most commonly highlighted is that of the African American athlete and low wage worker (Bristor et al., 1995; Lyons & Jackson, 2001). Meanwhile, many white roles within advertisements are mainly professional. These opposite portrayals ultimately reinforce black inferiority in society, stressing the status and power imbalance in advertisements.

Families depicted in advertisements are also an avenue for racist ideologies. Of 270 commercials watched, Bristor et al. (1995) only found two with full African American families, intensely less than white families depicted. Moreover, African American women alone with children are rare, while African American men with children are more common. Finally, African American cultural values are non-existent in advertisements, ultimately reflecting white cultural values. Advertisements viewed by Bristor et al. (1995) mostly contained lighter skinned models and African American women with straightened hair, fulfilling white standards of beauty. However, marketing specialists, specifically when African American, control the view of African Americans in marketing by producing material depicting African Americans as valuable consumers, moving away from stereotypes. In fact, Armstrong (1999) found that positive portrayals in media generate more sales and loyalty among African American women consumers. This strategic move ultimately helps in maintaining brand loyalty and consumer behavior and attitudes (Armstrong, 1999; 2001; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Podoshen, 2008).

Sport sponsorship and endorsement

As stated earlier, as adolescents grow and their tastes and purchases are less influenced by parents and more by peers. In finding one's own identity, young adults use activities to feel belonging, such as sports participation, which allows individuals to join a group or team. Through this team interaction, quality relationships are fortified and individuals' social identities become influenced (Martin et al., 2014). A key part of team interaction is cohesion. Cohesion is defined as "a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998, p. 213). Due to its performance based nature, team cohesion is achieved through task cohesion first. Carron and Brawley (2008) propose that the interpersonal interaction experienced during task cohesion, results in social cohesion (as cited in Martin et al. 2014, p. 89). Within this process, the social identity of individuals, or the "part of an individual's self-concept that derives from knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) ..." changes over time (Martin et al. 2014, p. 93). This idea has been studied in regard to sports fans, however, little has been explored regarding group influence on social identity from an athlete's perspective (Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Gwinner, 1999; Kelley & Tian, 2004; Marshall & Cook, 1991; Pracejus, 2004). With this said, one way cohesion may become successful is through the purchase of goods similar to teammates.

Corporate sponsorships have been growing since the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles (Slater & Lloyd, 2004). Since then, big companies such as *Nike* and *Adidas* use athletic sponsorships of athletes and teams to promote their latest clothing and shoes. This has become more prominent on college campuses, specifically in collegiate athletics. Through contractual agreements with universities, restrictions are set on what can and cannot be worn on the field by

coaches and players during a university related practice, game, or event. If found wearing brands outside of a sponsorship, the university could be penalized, which includes a possible loss of sponsorship. This ensures that corporations can seize large audiences by making sure that their logo is everywhere. From locker room walls to team apparel, the corporate sponsor makes sure that their product is visible. Most corporate objectives are image-based (Pope, 1998). Reaching the spectators and athletes, corporations associate their image with a successful team or athlete, causing brand awareness to increase. This causes consumers to purchase products of the corporate sponsor through association with a given team or athlete. This is a mechanism known as simple awareness (Pracejus, 2004).

Another mechanism driving sponsorship influence is affect transfer. Affect transfer occurs when positive feelings toward a certain event or team transfers to the sponsoring brand (Pracejus, 2004). The constant exposure to a brand's signage affects a consumer's brand perception of that brand causing an association of positive attitudes towards an event and sponsorship. This association may assist consumer purchase decision making. This process is similar to the mechanism of image transfer. Image transfer refers to the "abstract event associations to the brand," such as the personality, aura, and competence (Pracejus, 2004, p. 179). These transfer mechanisms allow for the brand to become top-of-mind, resulting in possible predictions of purchase behavior (Pracejus, 2004, p. 181). Next, sponsorships may activate the mechanism of affiliation, which becomes apparent when a consumer perceives that a brand "is for people like me" (Pracejus, 2004, p. 181). In turn, affiliation may result in the forming of affinity groups who "have high levels of social bonding and cohesiveness" (Pracejus, 2004, p. 182). Ultimately, consumer's shopping behavior can be determined from this level of social bonding. Lastly, reciprocity sends the message to consumers that "the sponsor supports events you care about, so

you should patronize the sponsor” (Pracejus, 2004, p. 185). Reciprocity drives a fan of an event to go out of their way to buy a sponsor’s product, even if there is an option for a closely priced competitor. In a sponsorship relationship, the more a consumer is involved with an event, the more likely the sponsorship is going to gain consumer reciprocity. Consequently, these mechanisms influence consumer behavior after an event. I posit that due to their closeness to the corporate sponsorship, an athlete can be viewed as a consumer and these psychological mechanisms can be applied to the athletes themselves. These mechanisms have only been studied in the context of spectators, but have yet to be applied to athletes, who can also be considered consumers if they purchase sport clothing with their own money for their personal use.

Eventually, sports participation at the collegiate level may lead an individual into contact with a corporate sponsorship. Corporate sponsorships provide brand access to the fans it is trying to reach (Slater & Lloyd, 2004). As with research on social identity, there has been extensive research on corporate sponsorships and their effects on fans, but little has been done to highlight the sponsorship’s effect on athletes’ consumer behaviors and socialization. In the present study, I intend to determine if corporate sponsorships at universities affect the consumer socialization of athletes, specifically, African American women athletes. This will fill gaps in the marketing and sociology literatures by focusing on athlete consumption through an intersectional lens that pays particular attention to race, class, and gender. The present study will also help in illustrating how consumer behavior, attitudes, and knowledge evolve.

Method

Photovoice

To achieve the objectives of this study, I used two qualitative methods. The first was a qualitative participatory methodology. In order to provide a grounded method where respondents were directly involved in data generation and its interpretation, I used photovoice. Wang (1997) defines photovoice as a method in which “individuals can record and reflect their community’s strength and concerns...promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through a large and small group discussion of photographs...and reach policymakers” (p. 369). Photovoice is a method that emerged from Paulo Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that ultimately encouraged the critical consciousness, the development of understanding, and willingness to act on the economic, social, and political forces that affect one’s life (Harper, 2012; Wang, 1997). As such, photovoice centers on the empowerment of subordinate groups and issues within their communities and allows participants to visually convey perceptions and share personal knowledge that may not be easily translated into words (Berg, 2004). Plainly, photovoice is a technique that allows participants to illustrate their world through photography as well as provide an opportunity for participants to verbally express interpretation of these images. For researchers, photovoice provides an avenue to properly assess an issue from the participants’ point of view. In turn, this creative, transparent approach opens new opportunity in terms of discourse about the issue in question. I also used a semi-structured interview as a follow-up to discuss the pictures (as described in the following section).

Sampling

As an African American woman, myself, I was able to establish a sense of rapport with other African American women. I am also a previous NCAA Division I athlete and thus was able

to both establish rapport and effectively understand the routines and processes associated with being an athlete and the corporate sponsor-university relationship.

From this, fifteen NCAA Division I African American women athletes were chosen through convenience sampling from the women's basketball, soccer, softball, and track teams at a southwestern university that is sponsored by *Nike*. As convenience sampling, these teams were specifically chosen due to the larger number of African American women athletes on their team. Information about prospective participants, such as name, classification, and sport, was obtained from the university's athletic website. Prospective participants were then contacted through email twice a week to explain the details of the study. Confirmed participants introduced more prospective athletes that fit the study's criteria, thus snowball sampling was also used. Coaches were also contacted to communicate reminders about participation. Lastly, practices were attended to reach potential respondents through face to face interaction.

Upon agreeing to join the study, participants completed a demographic survey that asked their age, race, years on a collegiate team, years at the university, and major. Each athlete was also asked to take two photos focusing on personal athletic clothing purchases made while being a collegiate athlete. A personal athletic clothing purchase was defined as items that are used outside of games or practice. To preserve confidentiality, the photographs taken by participants did not include people. Each participant used their own cameras. Each participant was given two weeks to take and submit photos through email (see Appendix A).

To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, a signed consent form was required from participants so that they understood why the photographs were taken. A photograph release form was also required so that participants were aware of what their photos were used for and that they

would be published. Lastly, pseudonyms were utilized to ensure the confidentiality of respondents in reporting the results.

The second phase of data collection involved semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted at various places on campus. Nine interviews were conducted in a campus conference room, while five were done at player's practice facilities. One interview was conducted over the phone. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interviewees were asked about the meaning of the items in the photographs as well as their thoughts regarding sponsorships and personal agents that may influence their consumer socialization (refer to Appendix B for interview guide).

Data were coded using a grounded theory approach. Using grounded theory offered the opportunity to understand the intricate experiences unique to respondents' accounts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A first reading of the interview manuscript was used to discover and note patterns in the data. Eight emergent categories were detected, and subsequently collapsed into two major themes in subsequent coding. These themes were: agents of consumer socialization in the collegiate athletic setting and the interpretation of the sponsorship as status. Conformity to family, media, and sponsorship developed as sub-themes of consumer socialization while status, in relation to class, athleticism, race, and gender, arose from the interpretation of sponsorship.

Participants

All respondents reported their race/ethnicity to be Black/African American. They were commonly from urban areas located in Texas, California, Missouri, New York, and Arizona. Nine respondents' ages ranged from 18 – 20, while the remaining six were 21 – 23. There were six freshmen, three sophomores, two juniors, one senior, and three red shirt seniors, defined as an athlete that is in their 5th year playing for the university due to medical issues, such as injury. Five

participants were transfers to the university. Lastly, 12 participants studied health sciences or communications, while only three studied criminal justice or business.

Results

In this section, I reveal consumer socialization's impact on the life experiences of the fifteen collegiate athletes who participated in this research, in that they revealed sponsorship influences when making personal athletic purchases. This revelation was first uncovered during the photovoice portion of the study. Five respondents selected items that represent the *Nike* brand only, while another eight included a mix of *Nike* and other brands in their photos. Lastly, the remaining two respondents selected items that were unbranded or did not include *Nike* apparel. The selections show the continuation of basic consumer socialization behaviors revealed in the interview data that they acquired from agents of socialization such as family and media while gaining a new one: sponsorship. Findings from the data also reveal the athletes' interpretations of the sponsorship as granting them new, or higher statuses.

Agents of Consumer Socialization in the Collegiate Athletic Setting

Family

Among the ten women who purchased items other than *Nike* items, price consciousness learned from family purchase patterns were key in recent purchase decisions. When asked what influenced them to buy brands other than *Nike*, these respondents turned to pricing for justification of their personal purchases, putting price before brand. Because price was a key influence of brand choice, early brand influence from their families results in purchasing a lesser known brand or a department store brand such as *Old Navy's Active*. Christiane was first introduced to the *Adidas* brand when she was younger and it's "been around since then." Christiane continued to explain her purchase of the *Adidas* shoes in Figure 1, "My family definitely influences me. I chose those *Adidas* because they were on sale. I was with my mom and she always encourages me to get good deals." For Christiane, she shopped for *Adidas* shoes with her mom, and her mom might have

bought those shoes, thus Christiane may have had less agency in her selection. On the other hand, Zen highlighted her *Under Armour* personal athletic selections pictured in Figure 2. For her, these selections fit her personal budget. “*Under Armour* was having sale and *Nike* [sales] aren’t as good. *Under Armour* was cheaper than *Nike*. Price matters to me more than the brand.”



Figure 1. Christiane's Old Navy Active leggings and Adidas shoes



Figure 2. Zen's Adidas sports bra and Under Armour leggings

There were similarities within this group. These respondents grew up in urban centers, which may indicate the availability and exposure to a variety of brands while growing up. Yet,

these respondents still went with the inexpensive brand choices. Another similarity that arose from the data was age. Most respondents in this group were freshman, ranging from 18 – 19 years old. When asked about team influence, some respondents mentioned that their teammates had little to no influence on their purchases. Only having completed one semester at the time of the study, these respondents have had less team socialization. These respondents often mentioned their family's brand preference or purchase behavior as a justification for past purchases.

Thus, perhaps as individuals grow, their family economic influence loses some influence on their purchase decisions as they are exposed to other agents of socialization more often. This was seen in Emily, a senior basketball player, who received her first pair of *Nike* shoes when she began playing basketball at a young age. However, her recent experiences strengthened her loyalty to *Nike* "My dad is the football coach at Texas A&M and they're sponsored by *Adidas*, so I get *Adidas* items from my parents. But I usually gravitate toward *Nike*. It's what I prefer."

Those who included *Nike* items in their photos sometimes sacrificed price and cost for the brand preference of *Nike*. Alexis described a time when she bought *Nike*, but price and family influence, particularly because her mom was making the purchase, determined the type of item bought:

I was with my mom and aunt and I tried on a pair of tights and shorts. My mom and aunt persuaded me to get the shorts because they thought tights were too tight. Also, my mom was paying for it and the shorts were way cheaper and that's how I ended up with shorts instead of tights. I come from a cheap family.

Catherine explained her price consciousness through budgeting, and when going to purchase *Nike* items on her own:

I don't mind spending on the price if I have to, but if I can get it on sale the it's better because I'm getting good quality for a cheaper price and I can also buy more than what I wanted to when I came in. If I only wanted to spend \$50 and I find shoes on sale for \$35, I can go buy a t-shirt to go with it...I'm more the kind of person that likes to find deals.

A need to find deals or sales on *Nike* brands was also key for this group, however, conforming to family purchase values and consumer knowledge by still buying *Nike* was more dominant. Anna, dressed head to toe in *Nike* items pictured in Figure 3, emphasized her love for *Nike* no matter where the item was purchased. Introduced to *Nike* as a child, her consumer behavior mimicked her mother's, who purchased Nike due to its rising popularity:

I've been wearing *Nike* stuff since I was a kid, honestly. My mom used to take us to Goodwill and get it. [Now] I could go to the mall and go straight to Nike. If I see a Nike Outlet, that's the best. If I find deals, I'll get stuff. I'm about name brand stuff at a cheap price. I'm all about finding a deal. I have stuff from *Nike* that I got from Goodwill, so I don't care about the price. I love deals and I care about the brand [Nike].



Figure 3. Anna's Nike shorts and tank top

Media

Another key consumer socialization agent is social media. An extension of media, social media platforms are to today as TV was to the 1960s. Tracking clicks, shares, comments, likes, and interests by a user gives way to an ever-changing experience on the user's social media feed. An example of this includes ads that are tailored to target audiences as a result of tracking of likes and interests. Another example is the use of Internet search history to give marketers a glimpse

into the consumer mindset. Data gathered by marketing firms by the social media platforms are translated into suggestions introduced to target users' feeds (Alhabash, Mundel, & Hussain, 2017; Slone, 2017). The use of internet search histories by marketers may indicate that social media is only a reactionary socialization agent to more direct agents, such as family and peers. Meaning, consumer knowledge and attitudes from family and peers are expanded by curiosity on the Internet that is noted and used to by marketers to advertise.

Respondents often saw targeted ads in the social media platform that they most frequently use, *Instagram*. Due to their frequent use and popularity of *Instagram*, users' exposure to the *Nike* brand, outside of practice and university events, seem inevitable. Both *Nike* wearers and non-*Nike* wearers used this platform to connect with their favorite brands. *Nike* wearer and track team member, Izzie, explained the process. "I see it every day and it's multiple times a day. Then *Instagram* realized I like shoes, all their ads are shoes or athletic gear, or track things. All the ads are geared towards things I like." This high frequency pushes consumers to want more of what they see, possibly resulting in the purchases of items that are wanted but not needed. Like some of the respondents in the present study, rather than making an impulse transaction or forgo the purchase altogether, Izzie opted to budget for the desired *Nike* items and buy them later, after saving money:

If I'm going to buy [Nike] shoes or athletic gear, it's usually really expensive so I have to plan for it. I'm not going to go to a mall and just decide to buy \$100 pair of shoes. It's more of an investment.

Moreover, these ads stretch the functionality of athletic clothing past exercising, as Armstrong (1999) suggests. Athletic clothing has become an option for casual clothing, offering style with the benefit of comfort. Most of the respondents mentioned using their personal purchase

for walking around campus or shopping in the mall. Anna admitted that *Nike* is much more than work out clothing:

It's a brand that is starting to be used for fashion. They come out with shoes that people don't even run in. They just wear them to look cute. I think they try to tie in their brand with what's in today, making it fashionable. I think people that aren't athletic will wear *Nike* just be in and fashionable.

Sponsorship

In the collegiate athletic setting, corporate sponsorship can act as a new consumer socialization agent. The sponsorship agreement is enforced by coaches. One respondent, Bailey, recalls a time in which a coach found her wearing a brand outside of the sponsorship:

I bought these *Adidas* tights once and I packed them in my bag to travel and wear one time and I got in trouble. If a *Nike* representative were to see me, the whole team would get in trouble. We're supposed show off *Nike* because we're sponsored by *Nike*. I got in trouble for it and I had to take them off. So now, if I want something I just get *Nike*.

As seen in her photos in Figure 4, Bailey gave up her *Adidas* pants and traded them in for *Nike*. Interestingly, her statement also reflects a shift in her thinking about *Nike*, where she is not “forced” to buy *Nike*, but now sees it as a personal preference, “I like *Nike*, they always have cute things. That's why I chose those [items].”



Figure 4. Bailey's Nike leggings, jacket, and Adidas shirt

Coaches are not only required to enforce these rules, but conform to them inside and outside their profession. One respondent, Kayla, discussed the great influence coaches have on her personal athletic clothing purchases. When asked what influences her to buy to brands pictured in Figure 5, she responded, “Other athletes like my teammates and my coaches. If I see them wearing something cute, I’ll be like ‘oh I’m going to buy some of those’ ...they dress really nice.” Serving as contractual brand ambassador of *Nike*, coaches and their purchases outside of the sponsorship encourages purchases by athletes also, resulting in conformity outside of the contractual agreement. This ultimately adds to the brand value of *Nike*, spreading the brand’s dominance.



Figure 5. Kayla's Nike leggings and hat

The enforcement of the sponsorship agreement is also strengthened by teammates. Not only do athletes see their fellow teammates wearing sponsorship clothing, but teammates take actions to reinforce this conformity. Many respondents mentioned shopping with other teammates for more personal *Nike* items. Catherine explained a teammate's influence on her purchase behavior:

It was my first or second week here and I went to the *Nike Outlet* with my teammate. We said we needed more *Nike* sports bras and spandex so we told each other 'It's on sale, get another one' and 'Oh, here's one in your size'. We probably had enough, but we made each other get more.

Bailey confirmed the sentiment, describing shopping trips with teammates that often result in the purchase of more *Nike* items because of their influence:

Every time we go shopping, they're like 'Buy that! It's cute, get it!' and it's so hard to say no to cute stuff. It's their fault I have so much *Nike* stuff. They influence me a lot. If you tell me to buy something and I know I shouldn't buy it, I'll buy it. You just gave me proof to buy it.

From these respondents, shopping is ultimately driven by conformity. Shopping for more *Nike* items does not only fulfill wants, it is done to conform to other athletes outside of university-related events.

In sum, these multiple agents of socialization are intensified through constant brand exposure and access through signage and the abundance of gear given. Kayla, a freshman softball player, didn't buy much *Nike* before advancing to the collegiate level. "I bought [Nike] less. I wasn't exposed to it as much as I am now. I was exposed to it in high school, but now I'm *really* exposed to it. It's everywhere."

Interpreting the Sponsorship as Status

Having outlined the various agents of consumer socialization, I now delve into how the female, African-American athletes interpret the exclusivity of the corporate sponsorship. Based on the analysis, the sponsorship evokes a feeling of status and an integration with self-identity. For example, Kayla had an elevated feeling associated with *Nike* as an avenue for self-expression and confidence: "I think wearing these brands lets me know I'm in style and a stylish person. It makes me feel confident."

Five respondents also mentioned quality and price as an attraction to the *Nike* brand outside of the sport to confer class status. For example, Emily detailed the excitement around the prestige of a *Nike* sponsorship, confirming her preferences as an independent consumer:

...It's like if you wear *Nike* it's kind of a big deal or you have money because it's more expensive. *Nike* is a luxury brand and everybody wants to be sponsored by *Nike*... We love being sponsored by *Nike*. It feels different.

To the respondents in the present study, the elements of price and quality represent an upper-class membership that may not be an actual depiction of their true economic status, given the multiple statements on price-consciousness in the above section where many of the athletes

communicate a desire to find deals or try to not purchase outside of a budget. This may be why Emily's quote above ends with, "It feels different," as an indicator that she is not normally used to feeling like she displays an upper-class membership.

Moreover, the exclusivity of the sponsorship and the connotation associated with *Nike* conferred a professional status to some of the athletes. Maria explained the significance of *Nike* in signaling athletic status to others: "*Nike* is the one brand that stands out over everything. I just think it's the universal athlete brand. *Nike* let's people know you're an athlete." This produces an athlete versus non-athlete duality that indicates a status hierarchy within the university student population (and the greater society given the status that many athletes are given), even though some athletes also acknowledge the functionality/ everyday use of *Nike*. For example, Emily stated, "[*Nike*] represents sports and athletes that are talented." Moreover, several women in the study often felt that they "earned" the right to wear their preferred athletic brand, as opposed to non-university sponsored athletes:

I don't know why, but I kind of get offended if I know you're not an athlete and you're wearing *Nike* from head to toes, I'm like, what are you doing? Why are you wearing that?... They don't know what we do to wear this stuff.

The proclaimed status by the student athletes answers a feeling of value for the athletes by the company, which connects to other significant social identities that these women hold: race and gender. For race, respondents often mentioned the satisfaction felt seeing other endorsed African-American athletes in TV ads and social media feeds. They almost always mentioned following African American women athletes. Alexis, a freshman soccer player, spoke about her connection with U.S. National soccer star, Sydney Leroux, who is one of the few African American national soccer stars. "Seeing her do all those *Nike* ads, now I want *Nike* everything...I want to be *Nike* everything. I feel like I'm twins with her when I wear *Nike*." Whereas Alexis' comment shows a

current connection that she feels with professional athletes, she also sees professional athletes as projections of future selves that she aspires to be. Alexis continues, “Sydney is very inspirational. I want to be like Sydney Leroux when I’m older. Hopefully, I can become as good as a professional athlete as she is and follow in her footsteps.”

Another way a brand may connect with female African-American athletes is through gender and the recognition of women in sports. None of the respondents mentioned following male athletes, and an appreciation and celebration of women’s bodies was a noted attraction to *Nike*. This confirms the effort *Nike* had put into promoting and highlighting nuances found in the athletic community (Armstrong, 1999). Alexis stated, “When I go shopping now, I will always try and find something *Nike*. Now that I wear it, I know that *Nike* is better fitted for women. It’s not loose and straight down, it’s fitted for all women’s shapes. It’s not baggy.”

Last, these statuses conferred to athletes through wearing *Nike* made them feel as though they were more relatable, also indicating a “new” feeling of status that they had not felt in the past. Eventually, a *Nike* culture is created. Anna explained, “It makes me feel good when I wear it [*Nike*]. It makes me feel like people can relate to it. Like, oh, she’s wearing *Nike*, I have *Nike* stuff too’ I’ve never seen anything like that before. It just makes me feel relatable.”

Discussion

Some of these results are similar to those found in previous literature on psychological mechanisms and exposure and access to sponsorships and sports fans (Meenaghan, 2001; Pracejus, 2004), yet my subject of this study is athletes. These studies emphasized the high exposure to sponsoring brands and the positive emotional reaction by high-involvement fans to the corporate sponsorship's image. In the end, these fans were "likely to be prime sales prospects for the sponsor's product" due to these mechanisms (p. 112). Whereas we do not know about other agents of socialization for sports fans, the present study reveals that exposure for collegiate athletes happens both inside and outside university-related activities and events. Exposure through family, media, and ultimately, the sponsorship itself through coaches, teammates, and receiving material items, increases the athlete's simple awareness about the brand sponsoring their specific university.

Moreover, the agents of socialization that these athletes have most daily contact with are the most influential. These agents serve as identifiable, or reference groups for athletes (Podoshen, 2008; Singh et al., 2003). For example, family influence seems most apparent for first-year students. Then, teammates become more important. This supports Martin et al.'s (2014) findings that team interaction influences individual identities as relationships mature. In my findings, one team influence is through sponsorship, which accounts for first-year students who had not bought as much *Nike* as their upper-class counterparts. Of note, student athletes are rarely around others who are not associated with their team (as opposed to high school or even possibly professional athletes). In fact, student athletes are often seen with their teammates outside of practice and games. Most days are spent doing activities with teammates ranging from eating to shopping, only to have teammates as roommates also. As such, there is little room for significant socialization to

alternative images from other agents. This constant contact results in frequent *Nike* purchases made due to the influence of teammates. Similar to Bush et al.'s (2005) findings, word of mouth for athletes are a key factor in purchase influence. Athletes get information about new items and sales from teammates and are also encouraged to spend. This, coupled with the fact that African American women consumers are "loyal" consumers, may help explain respondents' dedication to *Nike* and willingness to buy items regularly.

Social media complements this heightened brand awareness by feeding an image to a user (albeit perhaps after the athletes have performed certain internet searches). Here, a brand will try to personify itself by associating itself with attributes such as stylishness, comfortability, and trendiness. This presentation of versatility by *Nike* accomplishes marketing goals that have been proven successful (Armstrong, 1999). It also gives *Nike* the opportunity to capture more market share by presenting another use for athletic clothing to consumers. This personification causes an athlete to strive to embody this image outside of university events, becoming unpaid brand ambassadors and conforming to the image set by the company. This image transfer also communicates that level of status that can only be attained through wearing these branded items. This ultimately results in the feelings of reciprocity and the athlete going out to buy more of their sponsored brand even though they may not need it. This conspicuous consumption keeps the cyclical nature of the market going. In the case of the present study, this could possibly encourage sacrificing good economic decisions for unnecessary spending and purchases.

An example of the use of media by *Nike* is their use of celebrity endorsements. As also seen in respondents of the present study, athletes move from their parents and turn to celebrity role models (Martin & Bush, 2000). By using top African American women athletes, a connection is formed between the brand and consumer through intersecting social qualities (Armstrong, 1999;

Bristor et al., 1995). Because race and gender congruity are key to African American consumers, sales increase when brands achieve this inclusive marketing objective. Supporting past research, I found that respondents that identified with a celebrity sponsor through gender and race, felt compelled to purchase more *Nike* items when the chance arrived even when it did not make sense economically.

Similar to findings presented by the CAB (2012) that to African Americans, brand names ensure quality and reflect image, I found that athletes defined brand names as making a statement about themselves. This becomes a means of expression in order to convey their self-identity (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Additionally, African American women use brands to strengthen self-esteem. In this study, I found that respondents attributed confidence to the *Nike* brand, ultimately strengthening a connection the brand.

More specifically, although *Nike* items purchased by respondents made them feel that they had obtained class, professional, and higher race and gender statuses, the reality of this may prove otherwise. Turning to the theory, acquired statuses may be illusions that have more complex implications. Not only must African-American women navigate the world in the context of black versus white, but they must navigate within the context of men versus women. This concept is explored in Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) idea of intersectionality where multiple identities intersect and influence one individual. In this example, race and class intersect when African-American youth are pigeon-holed into the role of the "good athlete", resulting in playing an expected and accepted role in society. Society uses black athleticism as a praise, however it is a stereotypical role that is acceptable to the white majority (Bristor et al., 2005; Lyons & Jackson, 2001). This racist ideology is reinforced by elite audiences viewing black athleticism as a form of entertainment and less as an offense. Findings from Bristor et al. (1995) suggest that role portrayal

in advertisements bring racist ideology to life and defines what reality is acceptable. Fewer roles in intellectual fields communicates where (and where not) the elite view African Americans in society. This may even be compounded by female athletes, who have less social status (as women) and are dually regarded as less athletic than men (Carli, 1991).

Essentially, by equating status with a brand, there is a perceived earned status and pride by athletes as they compare themselves to non-athletes. This earned status of wearing *Nike* is validated by athletes' hard work and dedication to get to compete at the collegiate level. The brand is then worn as a symbol of success, much like a trophy. This was also seen in participants who included photos of unbranded clothing. However, these unbranded styles still contained the university's name or logo. Not only do these purchases show allegiance to the university where they play sports, but It may be another signal of status considering the intersecting oppressions faced by this group. By obtaining a higher education, these respondents have already gone beyond what is expected of them by society. This mirrors findings by Pracejus (2004) regarding affiliation in sports fans. By feeling a sense of social bonding through clothing, the feeling of earned status is elevated. Affiliation ultimately qualifies the status gained when wearing *Nike* or the university's logo.

All of these higher statuses may be why some athletes expressed a feeling of relatability while wearing the *Nike* brand. This behavior could be an indicator of the athlete's intersectional social reality. All respondents were African American women, and are probably aware of racism and sexism. Many respondents also mentioned having to be price conscious, but still purchased *Nike*. This economic level intersecting with their gender and racial oppressions, leads to seeking value to express status. Like findings in Charles et al. (2009), this status is found in brand name purchases, in this case *Nike*. For an African-American woman athlete wearing a top of mind brand,

a higher social membership or upward mobility is signaled to others (Charles et al., 2009; Clay, 2003, Lyons & Jackson, 2003), and thus a greater sense of relatability to the greater population.

This sponsorship does in fact grant these women a university education that they might not have been able to afford, which has the potential to ultimately elevate their class status. However, while at the university, their athletic status is primary, with academics as secondary, which may not elevate their statuses long-term given that very few university athletes make it into the professional world. These social elements confirm that tangible items may not be representative of the social standing set by the majority or elite.

This blindness to status reality promotes false consciousness. To Marx, false consciousness is the "systematic misrepresentation of dominant social relations in the consciousness of the subordinate class" (as cited in Little, 2016). False consciousness shields subordinate classes from the oppressive elements of reality. In the case of the athletes interviewed for this study, the prestige associated with the *Nike* brand conceals not only long-term status attainment as mentioned above, but also the consequences of conspicuous consumption. For example, athletes bought *Nike* products even when it was outside of their means. This pattern ultimately damages economic advancement and future stability. Also, following Marxist theory, these athletes wearing these brands fail to see themselves as commodities even though they are advertising for the corporate sponsor.

The Marxian theory of false consciousness is extended by the theory of culture industry, or "sectors involved in the creation and distribution of mass culture products." The consequences of conformity to the corporate sponsorship have major implications when considering consumption and race. Theodor Adorno (1991) discusses the culture industry's interest to preserve its affinity to the narrowing cycle of capital as its source of living. Adorno goes on to assert that

the public refrains from criticizing the media because they are dependent upon it. They need the culture industry in order to achieve pleasure and satisfaction and cannot imagine their lives without it. The culture industry preserves its power by presenting "the good life" as reality and through false conflicts that are traded for real ones (p. 104). The culture industry according to Adorno spreads false values and establishes the individual's willingness to be a part of society and to coordinate his interests with it, as they are portrayed by the culture industry. The culture industry takes advantage of the weaker classes by making its content shallow and widely appealing and thus demoting the value of culture.

Regarding African-American consumers, consumption can sustain oppressive measures, to which the culture industry also contributes. Mainstream society is comprised of American, or white, patterns of consumption. By consuming certain acceptable products, African-Americans in a white dominant space begin to adopt habits from the general market. Through aspiring to acquire the "good life" promoted in a culture industry, African-Americans find themselves purchasing outside their means to become an accepted group in society (CAB, 2012; Charles et al., 2009). As a result, African-Americans are targeted by the market to make purchases that validate a higher social membership. It is important to recognize that this type of consumption promoted by mass culture, and enforced by mass deception, puts African-American buyers at a disadvantage in the market place by leaving them stagnant economically. This low status inadvertently adds to the want for visible consumption. Thus, African American women athletes can be seen as an extension of this phenomenon. Their student and athlete statuses do not shield them from this; in fact, through corporate sponsorship, they continue with this cycle.

In summary, there has been general research on corporate sponsorship and its effects on fans, however little has been done to highlight the sponsorship's effects on athletes' consumer

behaviors and socialization. Moreover, studies detailing African American women and their consumer socialization is scarce. I found that athletes can be viewed as consumers and theories about consumer social psychological mechanisms can be applied to athletes. I also uncovered a consumer socialization evolution, where collegiate athletes are almost constantly exposed to corporate sponsorship.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Photovoice Submissions

Christiane



No Nike consumer: Consumer: *Old Navy Active* and *Adidas* Shoes

Zen



No Nike consumer: *Adidas* sports bra and *Under Armour* leggings

Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Bailey



Nike only consumer: Nike shirt, leggings, and jacket

Kayla



Nike only consumer: Nike hat and leggings

Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Anna



Nike only consumer: Nike tank top, shorts, and leggings

Sydney



Mixed consumer: Nike 1/4 zip pullover and Under Armour hat

Mariah



Mixed consumer: Under Armour jogging pants and Nike running shoes

Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Christine



Mixed consumer: *Nike* shoes, leggings, and pullover (grey). Target branded pullover (black).

Catherine



Nike only consumer: Nike flip flops, spandex, 1/4 zip pullover, and leggings

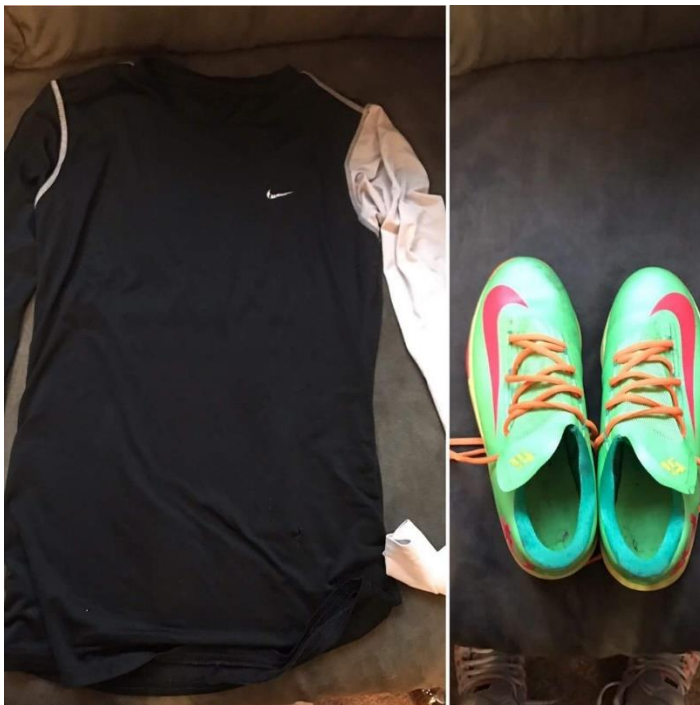
Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Maria



Mixed consumer: Macy's *Excursion* branded tank top and *Nike* running shoes

Jenzie



Nike only consumer: *Nike* shirt and shoes

Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Izzie



Mixed consumer: Unbranded t-shirt, *Pac-Sun* joggers, and *Nike* leggings and shirt

Taylor



Mixed consumer: *Nike* shirt and unbranded shirt

Appendix A (continued): Photovoice Submissions

Emily



Nike only consumer: Nike leggings and shoes

Alexis



Mixed consumer: Nike shoes and Puma leggings

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Demographic Survey Questions

1. Age?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. Where is your hometown?
4. How many years have you been on the team at UTEP?
5. How many years have you been a collegiate athlete?
 - a. If you transferred into UTEP, what was the name of your last school?
6. What is your major?

Interview Questions

1. Can you explain why you chose these items to photograph?
2. Where are you to most likely wear these items and why?
3. What does this symbol or brand mean to you?
4. What do you think that this brand or symbol represents?
5. How does this brand make you feel?
6. When you think of this brand, what are the first words that come to mind?
7. Who do you consider to be a competitor of this brand?
8. Why do you choose this brand over their competitors?
9. When were you introduced to this brand?
10. How often did you buy this brand before you were on a collegiate team?
11. How often do you shop for this brand now for non-team purposes?
12. Please, describe a situation when your sponsorship influenced you to purchase athletic clothing.
13. Please, describe a situation when your family influenced you to purchase personal athletic clothing.
14. Please, describe a situation when your teammates influenced your personal athletic clothing purchases.
15. Please, describe a situation when media influenced your personal athletic clothing purchases.
16. Which do you believe has more influence over your purchasing of personal athletic clothing: families, teammates, media, or sponsorships? Why?
17. Is there anything else that influences your athletic clothing purchases?

Table 1: Basic Demographics

Pseudonym	Classification	Age	Hometown	Years as Collegiate Athlete	Years at University	Major
Sydney	Sophomore	18	Moreno Valley, Calif.	2	2	Kinesiology
Maria	Freshman	18	Garland, Texas	< 1	< 1	Kinesiology
Zen	Freshman	18	Avondale, Arizona	< 1	< 1	Accounting
Taylor	Freshman	18	Gilbert, Arizona	< 1	< 1	Nursing
Mariah	Freshman	18	Dallas, Texas	< 1	< 1	Kinesiology
Alexis	Freshman	19	Mansfield, Texas	< 1	< 1	Kinesiology
Kayla	Freshman	19	Rialto, California	< 1	< 1	Nursing
Catherine	Sophomore	20	Kansas City, Missouri	2	< 1*	Communications
Anna	Junior	20	Yuma, Arizona	3	1*	Communications
Christiane	Senior	21	Dallas, Texas	4	4	Marketing
Christine	Junior	21	Tucson, Arizona	3	1*	Communications
Emily	Junior	21	Houston, Texas	3	3	Communications
Bailey	Redshirt Senior	22	Bronx, New York	4+	3*	Criminal Justice
Izzie	Redshirt Senior	23	Kingston, Jamaica	4+	3*	Journalism
Jenzie	Redshirt Senior	23	Houston, Texas	4 +	4 +	Criminal Justice

***indicates athletes that transferred**

Vita

Tahla M. Wade is a graduate student from Zion, Illinois. She received a Bachelor's of Arts in Business Administration and Marketing from UTEP in 2015 while being a team member of the university's softball program from 2012-2015. She went on to complete her Master's in Sociology in 2017.

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