

Kerry Marie Hassall, 2015

Chair: Dr. Simon Licen

Rowing race: A qualitative study of the effects of socialization, education and mass media on the rowing experiences of female racial minority rowers

Past research shows that student-athletes of racial minorities often experience specific challenges related to their academic, athletic, and social pursuits. Rowing is a curious sport that has historically been regarded as a “WASP” (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) activity, and has seldom been the subject of scholarly inquiry. This research study explores the experiences of seven racial minority female rowers. The participants identified their race as “Black,” “75% Black and 25% White,” “half Black and half White,” “African American/Black,” “Filipino/Spanish/German – Asian,” “Asian American,” and “Hispanic.” In-depth interviews were conducted to acquire insight into the effects of socialization, education and the mass media on their rowing and wider athletic experiences. The findings show that the interviewees were most commonly introduced to rowing in educational institutions; specifically, most of them did not find rowing until they attended university. Furthermore, socialization played a significant role, especially in assuring their continued participation in rowing. The participant’s parents were extremely supportive; in fact, some interviewees felt that their parents had placed a great deal of pressure on them to participate in the sport. When discussing factors that limit participation in rowing, high cost and lack of exposure to the sport often surfaced. When these limiting factors are viewed through Critical Race Theory (CRT), it becomes apparent that the stereotypical characterization of rowing as a “White sport” limits the likelihood that racial minority individuals will even consider participating in rowing. The findings of this study suggest the participants embraced feeling unique and different because they were participating in a lesser-

known sport. However, the interviewees also expressed feeling uncomfortable and uncertain about participating if another racial minority athlete was not on the team. The findings from this study should be used to improve the presentation of rowing as a sport appropriate for (and possibly even welcoming to) racial minority athletes and individuals.

Keywords: race, ethnicity, minority, diversity, participation, intercollegiate athletics, rowing, crew