According to the NCAA 2007-08 Race and Gender Demographics Member Institutions’ Personnel Report, 0.1% of assistant men’s basketball coaches and 0% of men’s basketball head coaches were female. Contrarily, in women’s collegiate basketball, 65.8% of assistant coaches and 57.4% of head coaches were female. This data reveals a sufficient representation of women in women’s collegiate basketball; however, a significant underrepresentation in men’s college basketball. Basketball is one of the few team sports in which the professional presence of women is widely marketed, publicized and watched outside of the Olympics. As McCabe (2008) points out, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) has inserted women into a male dominated arena. Despite the historical dominance of men in the sport, women have competitively participated in basketball for decades. In college basketball women and men participate under comparable rules, techniques, and equipment. While men routinely coach in the women’s game, women seem to be given much less access to coaching positions in the men’s game.

Although men and women’s basketball are arguably different sports (i.e., men’s basketball is played above the rim); this reasoning alone cannot explain the lack of female coaches in men’s basketball (Parker & Fink, 2008). Many successful men’s basketball coaches do not have the same athletic ability as the players they coach. An illustration of athletic ability or playing experience not being an excuse is case of Lawrence Frank, head coach of the New Jersey Nets. Frank is 5’8’, was repeatedly cut from his high school team, never played college basketball nor coached college basketball, yet was still given the opportunity to coach in the National Basketball Association (NBA) (Berkow, 2004).

In general, sports have been labeled as a male identified, male dominated and male controlled domain (Coakley, 2009). Women are continually given access to those positions which are marginalized to “pink-collar” positions or those which are deemed less valuable or important to the overall image of the organization (Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy, 2000). In college sports, the coaching positions which are most valuable to the image and financial success of the athletic department are men’s basketball and football. Women have successfully coached boys basketball teams at the youth level, however, are given significantly less opportunities at the collegiate and professional level to coach men.

Clearly differential opportunity structures exist for women coaching basketball in the fact that men have the opportunity to coach women, but women have fewer opportunities to coach men. However, to date, little to no literature has examined this phenomenon, which could provide a great deal of perspective of the status and treatment of women in coaching. The purpose of the study is to describe, through the perspectives of female college coaches, the lack of women coaching in men’s college basketball. Through the use of phenomenological inquiry we are looking to uncover descriptions, interpretations, and perceptions of female basketball coaches regarding the lack of women coaches in men’s college basketball. If a phenomenon truly exists, then the experiences of the individuals most closely related to it should add insight and understanding to the essence of the phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). According to Baumgartner and Hensley (2006) as well as Crotty (1998), the intent of phenomenological study is to describe the meaning or essence of an experience. This study is using the phenomenological ideology to explore the essence of why there is an underrepresentation of women coaching in men’s college basketball. It is no secret that men routinely have access to coaching opportunities in men’s and women’s sports. However, despite its blatancy, society seems to ignore the underrepresentation of women and their subsequent lack of opportunities in men’s sports (Cunningham, 2007).

This study consists of 10 individual semi-structured interviews with current and recently retired female women’s basketball coaches, who have coached college basketball. A pilot study was done to crystallize our interview questions for the main study. Our preliminary analysis of the pilot study reveals several themes that we expect to find present in our later interviews as well. Of the women interviewed, most feel that women should be able to coach men’s basketball because “basketball is basketball”. Second, the women spoke definitively of discriminatory barriers
and a lack of access to social networks within men’s college basketball, which inhibit them from entrance into men’s collegiate basketball. Overall, most women were optimistic of future opportunities for women in men’s collegiate basketball. As we review and analyze our data, we have been finding similar occurrences. We propose that after analyzing the complete sample, more obstacles to women coaches entering men's college basketball will be revealed. In addition, the role of women in men’s and women’s college basketball will be examined more closely in conjunction with the perceptions and experiences of women who have coached men’s college basketball. Results from these encounters are expected to provide further insight to the phenomenon.

There is an added urgency in researching this phenomenon due to the lack of attention paid to this area. Implications of this study could lead to changes in the stereotypical assertion that women can only coach female teams. Likewise, it is hoped that as more attention is brought to this issue, the opportunities and access for women to coach men's basketball as well increases. As we continue to inquire into this phenomenon, we will search for the underlying principles as to why women have not been able to break in the realm of men’s college basketball.