WHERE ARE ALL OF THE BLACK WOMEN? THE UNDERREPRESENTATION AND EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC LEADERSHIP

by

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An applied dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2023

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ABSTRACT

CYNTHIA N. STONE. Where are all of the Black Women? The Underrepresentation and Experiences of Black Women in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership.
(Under the direction of DR. LISA MERRIWEATHER)

Higher education leadership demographics contrast sharply with formulaic narratives of college campuses filled with gender and racial diversity, especially in intercollegiate athletics. Black women occupy only 2% of athletic director positions at predominantly White institutions and are vastly underrepresented in other leadership roles (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). Often overlooked and underrepresented in current intercollegiate athletic literature, this qualitative, narrative inquiry aimed to provide an opportunity to both examine the experiences and magnify the voices of Black women within intercollegiate athletic leadership and explore how they access leadership opportunities. Ten in-depth, semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted with Black women representing all levels of administrative leadership within Division I, II, and III collegiate programs. Findings revealed the work experiences of these Black women in athletic leadership were impacted by their need to maintain their uniqueness/individuality as Black women, the devaluing of Black womanhood in college athletic workplaces, and their motivation for persistence/survival in the industry. Understanding the experiences of Black women who were successful in navigating the leadership hierarchy is useful for higher education leaders to examine and revise current hiring, training, and professional development programs to create a more diverse and inclusive environment in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To make it through this journey of four consecutive years of working full-time, expending an unimaginable level of mental, emotional, and physical energy to complete this dissertation, while taking on the challenge of college teaching, in addition to changing jobs, and enduring a pandemic, was a lot to handle. I could not have made this far on my own. I did not make it this far on my own. There are a lot of people who encouraged, inspired, motivated, pushed, pulled, carried, and walked beside me to get to this moment.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Merriweather. From the first moment when you initially hesitated to chair my dissertation, as you wanted me to be aware of your standard of excellence, I knew it would be a good fit. It was the same type of expectation I have for myself and I knew you would do everything within your control to help me succeed. Thank you for encouraging and believing in me when I was unsure if I could finish this endeavor.

Thank you Dr. Cathy Howell for always being kind, supportive, and the ultimate cheerleader for so many in our program. Thank you for teaching us the importance of students and colleagues respecting the letters in front of your name. What we endure to get these titles deserves respect. And thank you for introducing bell hooks into my life. She is singularly the most influential academic author I have ever read.

My sincere thanks to all of my professors in our Educational Leadership program: Dr. Mark D'Amico, Dr. Alan Mabe, Dr. Ryan Miller, Dr. Sandra Dika, Dr. Lisa Merriweather, Dr. Cathy Howell, Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Dr. Florence Martin, Dr. Leslie Zenk, and Dr. Beth Oyarzun. I am greatly appreciative of how all of you were understanding of my learning style—asking a lot of questions.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mozelle and Waymond Stone. This accomplishment means more to me than I can ever express, knowing that I am a direct descendant of two parents born in the Jim Crow south. This world tries to erase the part of our country's history that is uncomfortable for most people to discuss. By acknowledging my parents' upbringing in the context of this accomplishment, it adds value to the lives they lived, and their living was not in vain. I try to live my life in a way that I hope makes my parents proud and hopefully this is just the beginning. Daddy, thank you for giving me my appreciation for music, especially James Brown, and my love for the open water. I now understand why you loved to fish so much. Mommy, thank you for absolutely everything. I think about you every day and I miss you so much. You were the first person to believe in me and your belief never wavered. I would give anything to have just one more hug. It has been so hard not having you with me but on the days when I literally fall to my knees when the burdens become too much to bear, I am grateful that you taught me what to do while down there—pray.

Take care of Danny for me and tell him how much I love him and miss him. I'll take care of watching over Lisa, Sewell, London, and Josiah.

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GLOSSARY

Intersectionality   Used as a term to reference how racial and gender identities intersect to influence Black women's perspectives of their workplace experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

PWI   Predominantly White institution; a higher education institution in which White students account for 50% or greater of enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

Sense of belonging   A basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence human behavior, and is related to mattering; is relational and includes reciprocity within relationships which provides the sense of belonging; each individual benefits from membership within a particular group and the group benefits from the inclusion and contributions of each individual (Strayhorn, 2018, pp 4, 28-30).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Do you miss working in athletics?" Most people would assume this is the question I get asked most often when I reconnect with former colleagues; colleagues and friends who I once shared countless hours and experiences working alongside in college athletics. Surprisingly, the question is never asked, the topic rarely discussed; as it is the unspoken acknowledgment between those of us who have left the industry and have no desire to return; the college athletics behemoth is broken.

We all enter our first athletic jobs with unbridled enthusiasm. The buzzer-beaters, the last-second wins, the come-from-behind victories, the crowd, the unlikely heroes and heroines, the excitement, and the students; are what drew us all into the intoxicating world of intercollegiate athletics. We all wanted to be part of the action and believed our hard work and doing more with less would be rewarded. Unfortunately, most of us leave the industry utterly spent and exhausted. The long hours, the low pay, the moral compromises, the pressure to bend rules or look the other way, and the constant messaging by leaders that everyone is replaceable as if your contributions are unimportant; are the reasons why we chose to walk away. But for some of us, Black women, the decision to leave an industry we love and students we wanted to inspire through our shared racial and/or gendered connections, was both disappointing and hurtful. Walking away from the industry was necessary and a final act of peaceful resistance against an industry in which our membership is lacking.

I have countless stories from my time working in intercollegiate athletics that illuminate the "otherness" that women, particularly Black women, experience in the athletic industry which causes you to question not only the system and its values, but also those who are

overwhelmingly the leaders of intercollegiate athletics, at least statistically, White men (Lapchick, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). For instance, I vividly remember an incident with a supervisor occurring one late afternoon in November, during the time in the fall semester when both football and basketball seasons overlap. This transition between seasons is an exhausting time in athletics, as you are trying to wind down the fall sports season while ramping up your winter sports season in earnest, without a discernible break in between.

It was a late Saturday afternoon. There was a double-header scheduled, with a football game in the early afternoon followed by a men's basketball game that evening. I had left my staff halfway through the third quarter of the football game, expecting them to wrap up game operations and close down the stadium. I took the lead for my team in transitioning our operations between events by driving back to the campus arena to begin preparations for the basketball game that evening. As I drove back to the arena, I remember feeling exhausted, as it had already been more than an eight-hour day, and we still had to get through a basketball game that evening. I arrived at the arena, put my bags in my office, and began setting up for the basketball game. I was on auto-pilot, thankful for the routine of physical activity to drown out the negative atmosphere I left behind at the stadium, as the football team had been losing when I left in the third quarter, and sadly their losing was not an anomaly.

I turned on the power to the overhead scoreboards, rolled out the courtside scorer's tables, connected them, and powered them up. I set up the scoreboard consoles, tested the precision timing system (which connects the officials' whistles to the clock to start and stop game action), plugged in the possession arrow, and turned on the game lights in the arena. Keeping a frantic pace, I moved on to set up each chair for the team benches, set the courtside seats, and powered on the rest of the facility lights. I checked in with our equipment manager to

confirm the visiting team locker room was ready and that we had heat packs available for the game officials when they arrived. As I concluded my preparations in the arena, I talked with our concessions' supervisor to make sure he was prepped and staffed for the event, and then chatted with a few of our basketball coaches and athletes, who had started to enter the arena to get in an early warm-up before we were officially in game mode and ready to open the doors to the public.

It was non-stop action for more than an hour and finally I was making my way back to my office to gather the payments for the game officials, change from my outdoor football attire into my basketball clothes, and then sit for a moment to catch my breath before I needed to meet our contracted security staff and university police, while waiting for the arrival of the visiting team and game officials. I had just sat down on the couch in my office, preceding to take off my winter boots and sip from the Diet Coke I so desperately needed for a shot of caffeine, when my supervisor walked into my office. I looked up at him while sitting on the couch and untying my boots when he said to me sarcastically, "well, I'm glad some of us get to sit down and take a break." Before I could process what he said to me to formulate a response, he directed, "I need you to keep people out of the entrance near the athletic director's office. We're getting ready to fire some football coaches." And just like that, with an unnerving excitement in his voice, he walked out of my office. Momentarily stunned, I sat there on my couch unable to move.

In intercollegiate athletics, coaches are hired and fired constantly for a multitude of reasons. I was not shocked our football coaches were going to be released from their employment contracts—our team's win/loss record was terrible. However, what was shocking to me was the timing of the dismissals. The coaches were still gathered with their families after the football game and we were minutes away from welcoming fans into the arena for the basketball game. I tied my boots back on and preceded down the hall to the athletic director's office to

stand guard for approaching staff members. I would need to redirect them to another entrance into the facility. It is not lost on me, that I, the only Black woman at the time in a position of authority in the athletic department, was standing guard as the designated enforcer outside of the athletic director's office as each coach walked down the hall to find out the fate of their job. It is also not lost on me that the majority of the coaches who walked down the hallway that evening were Black. Each one looked me in the eye as they entered the office. Some even managed to utter polite greetings. No one made eye contact with me once they departed the office. I did not need to witness these men, these Black men, in such a humbling situation. I was not present when they were hired and I did not need to be there when they were fired. As uncomfortable as I felt, I did not have an option to decline this particular "other duty as assigned." Some people may say that I could have chosen not to perform this task. Unfortunately, that belief is an unrealistic assessment of the professional work environment for Black women. As a Black woman, by refusing to complete the task, I would have been labeled as uncooperative, "not a team player," or the ultimate death knell for my burgeoning career—angry. This experience is just one of many stories I share in this dissertation research study documenting the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

Problem Statement

My previous story is significant because it provides a glimpse into some of the inter-office dynamics occurring when so few Black women are present in college athletic departments overwhelmingly helmed by White men. When one of the only two Black women administrators in an athletic department has to stand witness to the firing of the few Black coaches employed in the department, I believe a major change in who leads college athletic departments is long overdue. However, I do not believe this change will happen soon, as a quick Google search

reveals the current landscape of athletic leadership, providing evidence of a long-standing pattern in intercollegiate athletic hiring in which university presidents and chancellors overwhelmingly select White men, and often recycle the same men, for the top leadership positions in college athletics.

Consider this, what do Josh Brooks (University of Georgia), Kyle Brennan (Illinois State University), and Zac Selmon (Mississippi State University) all have in common? All were named to top leadership positions in Division I athletics within the last few years; all are White, and all are men. As seen in Table 1, Terry Mohajir was hired as the athletic director at the University of Central Florida to replace Danny White, who was subsequently hired at the University of Tennessee (ClickOrlando.com, 2021). Dan Radokovich is the athletic director at the University of Miami (Jeyarajah & Sallee, 2021). Chris McIntosh was hired at the University of Wisconsin (Potrykus, 2022), while Michael Alford was hired at Florida State University, Scott Carr at Florida International University, and Travis Goff at University of Kansas. Disappointingly, even with recent athletic director openings at Western Michigan University and University of North Carolina Greensboro, where both athletic departments had previously been led by women, a rarity in itself, both vacancies were filled by White men, Dan Bartholomae and Brian Mackin respectively (Davis, 2021; Wooten, 2021).

In keeping with the trend of hiring men, Martin Jarmond (University of California, Los Angeles) and Randale Richmond (Kent State University) were also hired to top athletic leadership positions. In addition, Derrick Gragg (Northwestern University), Alan Haller (Michigan State University), Marcus Blossom (Creighton University), and Joe Manhertz (Saint Bonaventure University) recently filled athletic director vacancies, and all are Black men,

perhaps signaling a new willingness of presidents and chancellors to racially diversify the top leadership positions in athletics.

Within the last few years, there were more than 20 Division I athletic directors hired and very few of those positions were filled by women, let alone women of color. Christina Roybal, Nina King, Desiree Reed-Francois, and Jaime Boggs are all women of color hired for athletic director positions at Division I predominantly White institutions (PWIs). King was hired as the athletic director at Duke University, joining only two other Black women, Dr. Candice Storey Lee at Vanderbilt University and Carla Williams at the University of Virginia, at the top realm of athletic leadership at Power 5 institutions—institutions in which the most power, influence, and financial resources are centered in intercollegiate athletics (Duke Today Staff, 2021; Phillips, 2021). Reed-Francois was also hired at the University of Missouri as the athletic director, departing a similar role held at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and was previously the first Hispanic and woman of color hired at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution (Miller, 2021). Roybal was hired at Northern Kentucky, joining the small group of Hispanic women serving as athletic directors across the country (Weber, 2022). Joining an equally small group of Asian-American women of color in athletic leadership, Boggs was named the athletic director at Grand Canyon University, after serving as the interim since 2019 (Wilhelm, 2022). While there were not as many White women hired in comparison to their White male colleagues, White women currently account for 11% of Division I athletic directors, far outpacing other racial and ethnic groups of women (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). As of this writing, there are a total of five Black women currently employed as athletic directors at Division I PWIs (Lapchick, 2023).

Table 1

Sample Demographics of Recent Division I Athletic Director Hires

Men				Women			
Year	Name	Organization	Race	Year	Name	Organization	Race
2023	Andrew Gavin	SIU Edwardsville	White	2023	Kelly Barsky	UC Santa Barbara	White
2023	Michael Oblinger	UNC Wilmington	White	2022	Nikki Moore	Cornell	White
2023	John Hartwell	Louisiana-Monroe	White	2022	Hannah Bazemore	Campbell	White
2023	Richard Sander	East Tennessee State	White	2022	Allison Rich	New Hampshire	White
2023	Zac Selmon	Mississippi State	White	2022	Stephanie Rempe	Nevada	White
2023	Jude Killy	Maine	White	2022	Christina Roybal	Northern Kentucky	Hispanic
2021	Josh Brooks	Georgia	White	2021	Jamie Boggs	Grand Canyon	Asian
2021	Brian Mackin	University of North Carolina Greensboro	White	2021	Grace Calhoun	Brown	White
2021	Jim Phillips	Atlantic Coast Conference	White	2021	Amy Folan	Central Michigan	White
2021	Terry Mohajir	Central Florida	White	2021	Nina King	Duke	Black
2021	Danny White	Tennessee	White	2021	Desiree Reed-Francois	Missouri	Hispanic
2021	Dan Radokovich	Miami	White	2021	Maisha Kelly	Drexel	Black
2021	Chris McIntosh	Wisconsin	White	2021	Alanna Shanahan	Penn	White
2021	Michael Alford	Florida State	White				
2021	Scott Carr	Florida International	White				
2021	Travis Goff	Kansas	White				
2021	Dan Bartholomae	Western Michigan	White				
2021	Randale Richmond	Kent State University	Black				
2021	Derrick Gragg	Northwestern	Black				

Men				Women			
Year	Name	Organization	Race	Year	Name	Organization	Race
2021	Alan Haller	Michigan State	Black				
2021	Marcus Blossom	Creighton	Black				
2021	Joe Manhertz	Saint Bonaventure	Black				
2020	Kyle Brennan	Illinois State	White				
2020	Martin Jarmond	University of California, Los Angeles	Black				
Note. Adapted from "Division I Athletic Director Changes Tracker", by Athleticdirectoru.com. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2023 from https://athleticdirectoru.com/di-ad-changes-tracker/							

Lack of Racial and Gender Diversity

Unfortunately, the lack of racial and gender diversity in intercollegiate athletics hiring is not an anomaly and is all too often commonplace. Most women employed in intercollegiate athletics are hired into positions such as academic advisors or life-skill coordinators, while the number of women in senior leadership roles is small and not representative of the racial and gender diversity of the athletes these positions oversee (Chester & Mondello, 2012; Hancock et al., 2018; Hancock & Hums, 2016). For example, when examining data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) encompassing all Division I athletes, women comprise 44% of all student athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021a). In addition, data from the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021a) reveals that in the high-profile sports of Division I football and men's and women's basketball, excluding historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the racial demographics of student-athletes are as follows: 45% Black (football), 52% Black (men's basketball), and 40% Black (women's basketball).

As the data exhibits, intercollegiate athletic leadership is not reflective of the student-athletes responsible for generating a disproportionate amount of the revenue produced for the NCAA. Of the $1.1 billion in revenue generated by the NCAA in 2021, $870 million was generated from March Madness—the men's basketball championship tournament—and $613 million of that revenue was dispersed back to college campuses (Crowe LLP, 2021). As athletic departments lack true employee diversity, there is a major discrepancy between the racial and gender demographics of those who generate the bulk of money and those who decide how the money is spent.

In Division I athletic administration, the percentage of women of color in athletic director positions and other leadership roles are not reflective of the percentage of racial minorities (more than 30%) in the United States (Lapchick, 2021a, 2022; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). In my own experience working within intercollegiate athletics, during a span of 10 years at one specific university, I was one of only three Black women administrators hired in the athletic department over the course of a decade. There was never a time where all three of us were employed simultaneously, and I served the longest tenure of the group. Even at institutions where I was employed outside of athletics but still interacted with the department leadership, there were never more than a handful of Black women administrators in athletics. As a result of similar workplace dynamics across the country, intercollegiate athletics earned an overall grade of "D+" in the most recent reports issued by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES) for racial and gender hiring practices at FBS institutions (Lapchick, 2022, 2023).

According to the just-released TIDES report for 2022, the demographics of intercollegiate athletic leadership have remained stagnantly homogenous (Lapchick, 2023). Over 77% of athletic directors identify as White, 7.6% are women with women of color representing

only four out of 131 positions at the FBS level (Lapchick, 2021a, 2023). The percentage of Black women at the FBS level improved slightly to 2.3% over the last year (Lapchick, 2023), but when including all Division I institutions (excluding HBCUs), the percentage of Black women athletic directors remains at 2% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). However, it should not be assumed the lack of Black women in top leadership roles is exclusive to Division I. Throughout all NCAA Divisions (I-III), including HBCUs, Black women account for 3% of athletic director positions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). As Black women enter and matriculate through the athletic leadership hierarchy during their careers, opportunities to see themselves reflected in the penultimate leadership positions are rare in the collegiate ranks.

Black women are more likely to be represented in entry or mid-level intercollegiate athletic positions. Even then, their representation remains low in comparison to White women. For example, White women are reflected in over 79% of Division I senior woman administrator positions (SWA), a designation for the top athletic woman administrator, while Black women occupy only 15% of these positions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). At the associate and assistant athletic director level, often considered a leadership pipeline for advancement opportunities, Black women occupy 5% and 3% respectively, in comparison to White women at 26% and 25% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). Black women are better represented in entry-level positions such as an academic advisor/counselor (9%) or life skills coordinator (15%), positions lower on the organizational hierarchy and with lower levels of responsibility (Lapchick, 2021b; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). However, even in the academic advisor and life skills coordinator positions, Black women are vastly

outnumbered by White women who occupy these roles at 43% and 49% respectively (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b).

Though limited in leadership representation, Black women have thrived in bringing a unique voice and life experience to the workplace, succeeding in enhancing athletic department culture while simultaneously trying to work from within the system to challenge racial and gender inequities—a herculean task for the few Black women in athletic leadership (Armstrong, 2007). This inordinate task is exacerbated by both the NCAA—the governing body of college athletics—and higher education institutions, who have both failed to explicitly address the lack of diversity and equity in leadership, and/or issues of racism and sexism within leadership (Cooper et al., 2017).

Over time, the NCAA has adopted policies and procedures with an emphasis on promoting its commitment to diversity, which diverts attention away from issues of systemic racism and discrimination woven into its organizational culture since its founding in 1906 by a group of Ivy League presidents, all White and male (Cooper et al., 2017; National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Though an emphasis on diversity is not inherently wrong, the NCAA has effectively relegated all people of color into one homogenous category. As such, issues regarding the intersection of race and gender have been historically underemphasized or ignored within the organizational culture of intercollegiate athletics.

The college athletic organizational culture, which provides the standards and norms of behavior in which employees are expected to assimilate, in addition to molding employees into a reflection of the organization (Ballenger, 2010; Schein, 1990), often mirrors the personalities and characteristics of the predominant demographic in athletic leadership, White men. Black women, who subscribe to multiple minoritized identities, are effectively marginalized when universities,

and subsequently athletic departments, fail to acknowledge differences in experiences at the intersection of race and gender. Due to low representation within the upper ranks of intercollegiate athletic leadership, Black women are forced to navigate an organizational culture with few opportunities to attain cultural and social capital, along with a reduced ability to cultivate a sense of belonging within the industry (Abney & Richey, 1991; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; McDowell et al., 2009; Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

While current literature provides multiple explanations as to why women are continually marginalized in intercollegiate athletics, painting a bleak picture of the athletic landscape and the role of Black women within it, the overwhelming majority of research is focused on the experiences of all women as a monolithic group, as opposed to examining the individual experiences of Black women (Bruening, 2005; Whisenant et al., 2002). The consequence of not foregrounding and publicizing the stories and experiences of Black women allows university presidents and chancellors to assume the "Black box" is checked by the hiring of Black men, and the gender box is checked when White women are hired. Little intercollegiate athletic research has focused on the unique positionality of Black women, nor has been conducted from a Black feminist epistemology, emphasizing the powerful voices of Black women in research.

Black women cannot assume Black men or White women will advocate for their unique positionalities in conducting research or in hiring practices (Bruening, 2005). Therefore, Black women need to advocate for Black women in both research and employment. Current research reflects a gap, neglect of the intersectionality of race and gender, failing to consider that the experiences of Black women may be different from those of White women, White men, Black men, or other racial groups. My research study addresses this gap through the use of a Black

feminist thought (BFT) theoretical framework. Thus, my study will seek to fill a deficit in existing research.

Purpose of the Study

Providing an opportunity to magnify the voices of Black women whose life experiences are often silenced or overlooked in current research literature, the purpose of my present study is to examine the experiences of Black women within intercollegiate athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities in intercollegiate athletics.

Research Questions

My research study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the intersectionality of race and gender in the predominantly White male culture of intercollegiate athletics impacted Black women administrators' leadership journey?

2. How has the intersectionality of racial and gender identity affected Black women's sense of belonging within intercollegiate athletic organizational culture?

3. What are the strategies utilized by Black women administrators to access and navigate the intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy?

Theoretical Framework

Black feminist thought was selected as the theoretical framework for my research study, as it is a framework of ideas produced by Black women to elucidate the viewpoints and life experiences of Black women for Black women, which simultaneously benefits all women, and humanity in general (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000; Davis & Brown, 2017; hooks, 1981). Utilizing BFT as the framework for my study moves the experiences of Black women, and their subjugated knowledge—frequently gained and shared amongst one another as a means of

strategy and survival in the workplace (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000)—away from the margins of intercollegiate athletic leadership and centers them into the forefront of the academic discourse on women in leadership positions. The utilization of BFT in my study validates and privileges the stories of Black women in their own words.

BFT assumes there are both similarities of experiences and perspectives of Black women as a group, due to the intersectionality of their racial and gendered identities, while also discouraging the perception of Black women as solely a homogenous group, due to differences in age, class, sexual orientation, formal education-levels, and region (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000). For my research study, I assumed my findings would point to similarities in workplace experiences for some of the participants while also illuminating a variety of perceptions and experiences due to the variability of job responsibilities, location of employment, and educational backgrounds.

Overview of Research Methodology

As the purpose of my study was to examine the experiences of Black women within athletic leadership, and provide an opportunity to magnify the voices of these women (along with their knowledge), the research design aligned with a focus on sharing their specific stories of experience. Using the tenets of BFT, my research is used to theorize and validate the experiences of Black women while providing clarity and practical knowledge for other Black women in similar intercollegiate athletic work environments (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2000). As such, I conducted a narrative inquiry, allowing for the assignment of meaning to life experiences through the construction and sharing of stories (Foste & Jones, 2020).

Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon to be studied and a research process used to collect, describe, and tell the stories of the lived experiences of individuals, along with the

meanings of those narrated experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The use of narrative inquiry as a methodology provided an opportunity for the interweaving of my theoretical framework throughout the research, as a means of creating a conversation between the theory and the stories elicited from the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both the theory and the participant narratives informed and volleyed off of one another, allowing for a greater blend of BFT within the dissertation.

For my dissertation study, data collection consisted of one semi-structured interview, ranging in length from 60-75 minutes, with a total of 10 Black women administrators. These women were at different stages in their athletic careers which allowed a broader perspective of the types of access to leadership opportunities and experiences within intercollegiate athletics. As I did not assume organizational experiences were similar for Black women across the leadership spectrum, due to variances in institutional commitments to athletics, it was important to interview Black women at various stages of their career and who have different job responsibilities, from entry-level positions to senior-level positions. Interviewing a broad range of participants allowed for data collection from individuals currently or recently employed in senior leadership positions and those seeking to advance within leadership.

Before and after the first interview with each participant, I reflected on and documented my own experiences with the research topic in a reflective journal, as my reflections were key to the narrative inquiry process, becoming a part of data collection (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). After transcription of each interview, data analysis consisted of thematic narrative analysis with narrative coding used to ascertain themes present in the stories, followed by a comparison and contrast with existent themes in the current research literature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in Chapter 5.

Significance of the Study

FUBU- For Us, By Us

—Daymond John, Keith Perrin, J. Alexander Martin, Carl Brown

The tag line, "For us, by us", for the clothing line, FUBU, resonated with young Black men and women in the early 1990s, as it fulfilled a need within the retail industry to close the gap of clothing made by and marketed to an urban demographic (Fubu.com, n.d.). Similarly, a need to create research "For us, by us" is also apparent within the existing literature on the underrepresentation of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership. There are three rationales as to the significance of my study: (a) to add to Black feminist literature by a Black woman conducting research about other Black women and their experiences, (b) to draw attention to inequitable leadership opportunities for Black women, leading to fewer occasions to impart their unique perspectives both on college campuses and nationally within intercollegiate athletics; and (c) to provide a compelling case for the importance of continued study of this research topic.

Researching how Black women access and experience intercollegiate athletic leadership is important for the ability to position this topic at the forefront of current issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education–a topic germane for all constituents of higher education but especially for Black women. As posited by Collins (1986, 2000), a key tenet of BFT is the production of knowledge by Black women for Black women, which benefits all oppressed groups, therefore my research adds to existing Black feminist literature. By recording the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership, I assisted with the cultivation of knowledge procured through the navigation of athletic culture, and I will disseminate it freely

so other Black women can benefit from this insider information as they embark on or continue their careers in intercollegiate athletics.

My study is significant because it has the potential to educate those in positions of authority in higher education administration, and its gatekeepers, on the workplace challenges faced by Black women, which in turn provides an opportunity for minimizing or eliminating these hurdles. It is vital to inform higher education leaders of where they are missing the mark in creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for Black women, along with actionable steps leaders can take to diversify the athletic leadership landscape. A lack of meaningful action by higher education leaders serves to further extend systems of oppression by publicly extolling the needs of a diverse campus community but failing to privately change current employment practices (Collins, 2000). My study informs policy around hiring decisions by disrupting the majoritarian narrative that positions White men as normative and natural leaders in intercollegiate athletics.

As the nation and college campuses continue to grapple with issues of race, privilege, and social justice, there has been a recent uptick in the hiring of Black men as college athletic directors. In light of this recent hiring trend, the experiences of Black women who aspire to top leadership positions are being ignored, as it should not be assumed Black men and Black women experience intercollegiate athletic workplace culture in the same manner. My narrative inquiry was intended to provide enhanced meaning and significance as to why the issue of underrepresentation of Black women in athletic leadership is important and why it should be a research topic studied intently (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Delimitations

While there are multiple variables involved when researching the experiences of Black women administrators in college athletics, I identified the following delimitations for my study.

First, I intentionally focused on the experiences of Black women who have previously been or are currently employed at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). While Black women are also marginalized in athletic leadership at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the overwhelming evidence of underrepresentation of Black women leaders is at PWIs (Abney & Richey, 1991; Lapchick, 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023). Second, my initial intention was to only select participants with previous or current working experience in Division I athletics. As my intercollegiate athletic work experience has only been in Division I, and Division I is where the bulk of financial resources and power are concentrated, this was the subset of the NCAA in which I wanted to focus my study. However, in order to garner enough research participants for my study, I expanded my criteria to include Division I and Division II.

Assumptions

As I embarked on my dissertation study, there were a few assumptions regarding my research journey prior to commencement. One assumption was that I, as the researcher, was working *in the midst*, a narrative inquiry concept which entails conducting and concluding the research, while simultaneously living and retelling life experiences in the context in which they occur (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I conducted my research study, I was operating in the midst of a national social context in which diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI) are a focus on many college campuses after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the attacks on DEI policies and procedures at higher education institutions, and multiple instances of continuous racial unrest (The New York Times, 2021). I assumed my conversations with participants would carry more significance due to the racial climate present on college campuses and the resultant increased focus on diversifying the employee ranks in higher education.

My intentions were to use narrative inquiry to understand and share the experiences of Black women, along with the interconnectedness of BFT, and how BFT may be revealed in their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While I did not assume all Black women employed in intercollegiate athletics have the same experiences, BFT posits there are collective experiences Black women share, and I assumed this notion would be present in my findings. Another assumption for my study was I, as a Black woman interviewing other Black women, anticipated participants would be more comfortable sharing intimate details of their work experiences with me, due to our shared racial and gender identities. Thus, I assumed participant honesty and these women would not simply tell me what they presumed I wanted to hear about their experiences in order to benefit the research study. Openly sharing my own workplace experiences allowed for a more intimate and vulnerable conversation between the participants and me, thereby encouraging a richer and descriptive revealing of the participants' life experiences (Coles, 1989 as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Definition of Terms

- **Black versus African-American**: The terms "Black" and "African-American" are often used interchangeably when identifying the race of people of African descent. In reference to my positionality on racial identifiers, I prefer the term Black, as opposed to African-American. Reared in a household heavily influenced by the music and politics of James Brown– "Say it loud-I'm Black and I'm proud" (Brown & Ellis, 1968), my parents exhibited pride in embodying Blackness, thus my preference for this term. Unless referring to specific language used by researchers cited in my study, or language used by my participants, the use of the term Black is dominant in the dissertation document.

- **Intersectionality**: In this dissertation, intersectionality is used as a term to reference how racial and gender identities intersect to influence Black women's perspectives of their workplace experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

- **PWI**: Predominantly White institution; a higher education institution in which White students account for 50% or greater of enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

- **Sense of belonging**: A basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence human behavior, and is related to mattering; is relational and includes reciprocity within relationships which provides the sense of belonging; each individual benefits from membership within a particular group and the group benefits from the inclusion and contributions of each individual (Strayhorn, 2018, pp 4, 28-30).

Summary

In this opening chapter, I have provided an introduction as to the problem of underrepresentation of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership, how the organizational culture of athletic departments limits the procurement of social and cultural capital by Black women, and ignores or minimizes the raced and gendered realities of Black women in athletic leadership. Subsequent chapters detail a summary of themes found in the literature and the theoretical framework (BFT), a chapter focused on the research methodology (including an overview of narrative inquiry and data collection methods), my research findings, and finally a discussion of the findings with subsequent conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

You give Black women an opportunity. Bring them in, interview them. If you don't hire

them, let them know why. So we can continue to work on perfecting our craft and our

profession. There are a lot of people out there who aren't getting the opportunities they

should. Because this is exactly what can happen when you give a Black woman an

opportunity. (Voepel, 2021, para. 12-13)

When you give Black women an opportunity, the chance for excellency in action

increases. This is the sentiment University of South Carolina Head Women's Basketball Coach

Dawn Staley was referring to as she spoke to the media regarding the impact of the historic

moment of having two Black women head coaches (Staley and Adia Barnes) represented in the

Women's Final Four for the first time in history in 2021 (Voepel, 2021). Although Staley was

referring to the positive outcomes of giving Black women an opportunity to become head

coaches, her message is apropos to all leadership opportunities for Black women in higher

education. Representation of Black women in leadership matters in intercollegiate athletics, as

well as in higher education overall.

Current literature focuses on either the marginalization of women in athletic leadership or

the marginalization of Black people in athletic leadership—rarely do the two intersect. Most

extant literature specific to the plight of Black people in leadership typically focuses on the

experiences of Black men. The literature regarding women provides a variety of reasons for their

continued marginalization in athletic leadership, though the majority of research focuses on the

experiences of all women as a monolithic group. The majority of extant research neglects to

account for the differences in experience between racial groups. This research gap fails to address the intersectionality of race and gender by assuming the experiences of White women are similar to the experiences of Black women or other racial minorities. Although it is likely that most women experience barriers to employment and advancement in intercollegiate athletics, the low number of Black women in leadership roles signifies reasons to examine this subset specifically to add to the research literature.

The purpose for my research study is to examine the experiences of Black women within intercollegiate athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities in intercollegiate athletics, using Black feminist thought as the conceptual framework for the study. To gain perspective on the organizational dynamics Black women encounter in intercollegiate athletics, it was important to review relevant literature on the current and historical status of Black women overall in higher education leadership. Within those parameters, I reviewed specific research on the underrepresentation of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership. The review of literature provides insight into the unique experiences encountered by Black women, as a result of their race and gender, as they attempt to access leadership positions and once seated in leadership positions. The literature review also provided the rationale for selecting Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework for my study, to best acknowledge the worldviews of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to understand the influence of race and its proliferation in higher education leadership. Examining how Black women experience and access higher education leadership using a critical race theoretical (CRT) framework allows for a deeper analysis of how White culture is privileged through systemic structures to keep power concentrated in Whiteness, while

marginalizing people of color and their racial identities (Patton et al., 2016). CRT emphasizes the importance of people of color having an opportunity to tell their stories, utilizing their voices as a means of combating racism, and counteracting the narratives of the dominant group in power (Johnson, 2015; Patton et al., 2016).

While CRT is an adequate and acceptable lens in which to view the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership, CRT is not expansive enough to fully address the nuances of the intersectionality of the racial and gender identities held by Black women. Occupying space in multiple identity groups gives Black women a unique perspective and worldview of the higher education landscape and it is this voice I emphasize in my research. For my study, I use this perspective to foreground their voices and legitimatize the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership. The best manner in which to accomplish this task is with a Black feminist thought theoretical framework.

BFT is constructed from a perspective of Black women not succumbing to the victimhood of discrimination but instead valuing self-definition. BFT involves Black women empowering themselves by the creation of positive self-images utilized to combat the negative stereotypes, images, and myths of Black femininity imposed by others (Collins, 1989, 2000; hooks, 1981; Taylor, 1998a). It is used as a resource by Black women to both reimagine and reestablish a broad range of positive self-imagery, as opposed to dominant culturally-imposed images such as the jezebel, the matriarch, the mammy, or the all-encompassing angry Black woman—all created to lump and reduce Black women into one massive group (Collins, 1986; Davis & Brown, 2017; hooks, 1981). These labels are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins, 2000, p. 77). BFT acknowledges that the unique experiences of Black

women lead to shared commonalities and instances of communal knowledge, while avowing that Black women are also a richly diverse group with a wide-ranging response to oppression and means of resistance (Collins, 1986, 2000; Johnson, 2015). BFT therefore emphasizes the importance of the totality of the culture of Black womanhood as a means of confronting and resisting systems of oppression by combining intellectual thought with activism (Collins, 1986)

BFT is necessary as a means to acknowledge how socially constructed tenets of race, gender, and class are used to devalue and disregard the contributions of Black women to the world (Taylor, 1998b). As a counternarrative, BFT accounts for the subjugated knowledge of Black women and uses this knowledge to validate the experiences of Black women while creating a distinctive point of view (Collins, 1989). For example, in my experience, knowledge is often shared amongst Black women in intercollegiate athletics regarding tips on how to best access entry-level positions. The shared knowledge between Black women procured through trial and error provides insight into which entry-level positions are easier to obtain, such as in academics or community-based roles; whereas positions in fundraising or football operations are more difficult to access (Lapchick, 2021b; McDowell et al., 2009).

BFT also embraces the knowledge accumulated by Black women occupying an outsider-within status, i.e., having an intimate understanding of the dominant White culture while simultaneously marginalized from said culture (Collins, 1986). This knowledge, acquired through wisdom procured through the everyday life experiences of navigating race, gender, and class dynamics, is used to fight the exclusion of Black women from positions of authority, and for survival (Collins, 1989). As such, BFT is especially useful for framing the experiences of Black women administrators in higher education, especially those working at PWIs, in which the dominant culture of leadership is rooted in Whiteness.

The environments on many college campuses are populated by dominant cultures not socialized to, or aware of, the uniqueness of Black women's positionality (Davis & Brown, 2017). BFT helps explain how being Black and a woman may increase experiences of racial and gender discrimination in environments in which Black women are not well-represented, such as in higher education institutions. Black women who are present are frequently "under a microscope" (Lloyd-Jones, 2009, p. 611). For instance, in Lloyd-Jones' (2009) qualitative case study of a Black woman administrator at a PWI, the participant described feeling highly visible on her campus, which invited an increased level of scrutiny due to being Black in a predominantly White environment, while also being a woman in a culture dominated by men.

In addition, Collins (2000) described the feeling of growing "smaller" as a Black woman within workplace settings, due to not fitting into the dominant culture, often as a result of being "the first, the only, or one of a few" Black women in an organization (p. vii). Collins (2000) details a phenomenon that resonates deeply for me, as I, too, have experienced the pressure to hide my authentic self in the workplace and to make my physical and vocal stature appear smaller as a comfort to those in positions of authority. In every higher education institution in which I have been employed, I have often been the only Black woman in my department, the first Black woman to occupy my specific position, or only one of a few Black women overall, with the exception of service employees. hooks (1994) expressed that in higher education, the majority of students will never be taught by, or see a Black woman at the head of a classroom. In my role as an educator, hooks' (1994) assertion has profoundly influenced my motivation to teach at the university level. Similarly, as an administrator, I realize most of the staff I have worked with have never had or seen a Black woman supervisor prior to me, and likely will not after my departure. As such, there is tremendous pressure to positively represent not only your

race and your gender, but to create opportunities so you are not the last Black woman in your specific position of authority.

As our positionalities are unique, Lloyd-Jones (2009) posits it is not an anomaly for Black women to utilize BFT as an epistemology when conducting research on issues germane to the experiences of Black women. Due to the frequent devaluing of Black femininity in our patriarchal society, Collins (1986, 1989) concludes that Black women tend to draw from their own life experiences, or from those in which they frequently interact, when selecting research topics and methodologies. In essence, living life as a Black woman is a necessary component of producing, being accountable for, and contributing to the knowledge base of BFT (Collins, 1989, 2000). In using BFT as a theoretical framework for my research study, I am contributing to existing research by examining how Black women access and experience leadership opportunities in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

Overview of Higher Education Leadership

The literature review illuminates how Black women are situated in the landscape of higher education, if and when they access leadership. First, the literature reveals a composite profile of higher education leadership attributes, including ideas of what constitutes a leadership position, along with the demographic profile of leadership within higher education generally, and athletics specifically. Second, the literature reveals the importance of further understanding how Black women gain access and obtain entry into each institution's leadership hierarchy. Themes found from the literature review include the multiple success strategies Black women use to position themselves for leadership opportunities including: networking and mentorship, the significance of building social capital, the role of support systems, the need for continued professional development, and the suggested success strategies not useful to Black women.

Higher Education Leadership Profile

When discussing leadership, there are a variety of interpretations and definitions as to what constitutes a leadership position in higher education overall, and in intercollegiate athletics specifically. As leadership responsibilities can be found in numerous job descriptions in higher education, for this study, I have narrowed my scope to specific types of positions. I frame leadership within the confines of positions of authority which encompasses decision-making and budgeting responsibilities, policy and procedure establishment or revision, and/or personnel management and supervision. In university administration, these positions include, but are not limited to, presidents/chancellors, provosts, deans, department chairs, and directors, including the subsequent associate and assistant titles connected to these positions. For the most senior leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics, these positions include, but are not limited to, athletic directors, senior women administrators, associate and assistant athletic directors, budget/finance administrators, and fundraising administrators.

Leadership Demographics

Both historical and current government data are significant to my study because statistics provide concrete evidence as to the spaces Black women occupy in higher education. Demographical data highlights the lack of Black women on college campuses available to move into leadership positions in comparison to their White colleagues. For instance, in fall 1999, Black women held 5% of staff positions (excluding service labor positions) at colleges and universities (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Disappointedly, in recent government data available for the academic years of 2019 and 2020, Black women accounted for approximately 6% of all employment at colleges and universities–very little growth in 20 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, 2020). Although it is noted that Black women who are higher education

administrators outpace other marginalized groups, Black women still lag far behind the number of White men and women in overall employment, and in leadership positions (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, 2020; West, 2020).

When considering presidents and chancellors at institutions across the country, the top leaders of these organizations do not reflect the diversity of the student body. Consider, over 70% presidents are men, over 80% are White, and only 8% are Black (American Council on Education Center for Policy Research and Strategy, 2017). The presidential data in this study is not broken down into gender categories for each race. In comparison, in data released for Fall 2020, the demographic breakdown of student enrollment at 4-year institutions is as follows: 55.5% White, 12.8% Black, and 18.5% Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). For faculty, as of Fall 2020, over 67% are White, 5.6% are Black, and Black women account for 3.3% of all faculty positions (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). Interestingly, while Black women outpace Black men in overall faculty numbers, including at the assistant and associate professor level, Black men (2.2%) outnumber Black women (1.7%) as full professors (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a).

In student affairs divisions across universities and colleges, the area most accountable for the co-curricular development of students, Black women comprise only 7% of chief student affairs officers, an area of leadership, in comparison to 38% for White women and 39% for White men, continuing a trend of underrepresentation in senior-level positions and overpopulation in mid-level positions (West, 2020). In my experience, drawing from the subjugated knowledge shared amongst Black women in higher education, Black women are most often represented in student-facing positions focused specifically on diversity or cultural matters. If Black women are employed in other non-diversity-based positions, they are often singularly

represented or one of a small group of Black women (Collins, 2000). As more students of color enroll at institutions of higher education, it is important for these students to see themselves reflected in university administration. Black students seeing people of color in leadership positions allows Black students to believe they can be successful in higher education and other industries (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). As Black women enroll in college in larger numbers than Black men, they deserve to see Black women in positions of authority (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). However, when Black women are underrepresented in leadership, it reinforces the idea of men in leadership as normative.

Similarly, in intercollegiate athletics, the demographics of leadership are skewed White and male. Black women are disproportionately underrepresented in athletic director positions and other leadership roles in comparison to the demographic makeup of racial minorities in the United States (Lapchick, 2022, 2023; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Though there are slight nuances between Division I, II, and III, at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), White men and White women are still employed in the vast majority of all athletic director positions, the top leadership position in college athletics (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). As of 2022, more than 77.1% of Division I Football Bowl subdivision (FBS) institutions had athletic directors who were White, 92.4% were men, and 7.6% were women (Lapchick, 2023). Black women represented 2.3% of FBS athletic directors (Lapchick, 2023) and 2% of all Division I athletic directors at PWIs (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b).

At Division II PWIs, the demographics of athletic directors are also disappointing. Though the number of White male athletic directors are lower compared to Division I, White men still comprise 68% of all athletic directors compared to Black men (4%), White women (23%), and Black women (1%) (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). In Division

III, the percentage of Black women in the top leadership position is at the highest level (4%) across divisions, and equal to Black men (4%), but the percentage still pales in comparison to White women (29%) and White men (61%) (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). Even at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Black women are underrepresented in the top athletic leadership positions. Spanning divisions, Black men account for 78% of HBCU athletic directors and Black women only occupy 16% of these positions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). These statistics affirm the necessity of using BFT as the theoretical framework for my study, as it shows the interconnection of racism and sexism (Patton et al., 2016) encountered by Black women in higher education regardless of employment at a PWI or an HBCU.

One reason which may explain the paucity of Black women's overall employment in intercollegiate athletics is the low number of Black women who are students in undergraduate and graduate sport management programs, a key pipeline for future sport administrators and leaders. Based on their representative survey of sport management student alumni, Schwab et al. (2015) found the respondent demographics skewed predominately male, mimicking those observed in the intercollegiate athletic industry. Barnhill et al. (2018) provided a demographic snapshot of sport management students enrolled at institutions on the eastern portion of the United States. Their research findings showed more than 60% of enrolled students were male and more than 65% of students identified as White, whereas 25% of students identified as Black (Barnhill et al., 2018). However, it should be noted their study did not further analyze if the Black students were men or women. This fact is important, as the study does not provide a clear synopsis of the quantity of Black women students entering the pipeline to pursue potential careers in sport. For increased representation of Black women in athletic leadership positions, it

requires a viable pool of candidates to select from, which is severely limited if there are not enough candidates entering the pipeline for future employment.

Access to Higher Education Leadership

As discussed in the previous section, the literature review reveals where Black women are situated in leadership and the types of positions they are most likely to occupy. A review of the literature also unveiled overarching themes related to how Black women access higher education leadership. Themes found in the literature include the need for Black women to cultivate strategies for successful entry and survival in the industry such as procuring a robust network and the importance of mentorship, developing social capital, a reliance on support systems, and continued professional development. The literature also provides a few strategies that are unhelpful for Black women when utilized.

Networking Opportunities and Mentorship

For Black women, extant research in higher education identifies common barriers they encounter while trying to access leadership opportunities including, but not limited to, unequal access to networking opportunities and the availability of mentorship. Women of color have noted the importance of building networks, as relationships determine who is informed of available opportunities, who gets recommended for leadership positions, and who rises to the top of candidate searches (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gray, 2018). Informal and formal networking opportunities are critical for developing relationships to expose Black women to career advancement opportunities as oftentimes leadership positions, and who they are available to, are predetermined prior to the official application process. As such, establishing a network is important not only to procure information regarding potential career opportunities but also in gaining insight into organizational politics that hinder career advancement (Davis & Maldonado,

2015). Therefore, it is imperative for Black women to build coalitions and as many network connections as possible to increase the odds of uncovering information which may lead to leadership opportunities (Jernigan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, research has shown Black women in academia and in administration on college campuses grapple with a less exposure to mentoring and networking opportunities (Truehill, 2021).

The importance of mentorship as a tool for Black women to access leadership cannot be overstated. Mentorship of Black women by other Black women leaders is a useful strategy in opposing discrimination in higher education's organizational structures (Jernigan et al., 2020). In Johnson and Fournillier (2022), Black women in senior-level administrative positions emphasized the importance of mentorship as a means of establishing community within the academy with other Black women, but also as a strategy intertwined with collaboration and increasing exposure to other disciplines and functional areas for enhanced professional development. These strategies were recommended as a way for the academy to embrace transformative leadership by increasing opportunities for Black women in higher education leadership (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). Mentorship also provides opportunities for senior leaders to enhance their mentoring skills, effectively increasing their leadership efficacy, and solidifying their status in leadership positions (Jernigan et al., 2020).

Mentorship is also a tangible expression of BFT, as it allows aspiring leaders access to the subjugated knowledge gleaned from the experiences of current Black women leaders (Collins, 1989). In Davis et al. (2011), Black women faculty members sought and valued mentorship, especially from other Black women, for the knowledge gained on how to navigate a predominantly White culture in higher education and insight into the unwritten rules on pursuing promotion and tenure (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). As one participant expressed, the mentoring

received from other Black women was part of a transformation of "feeling like an outsider, to feeling like a valued member of the academic community" (Davis et al., 2011, p. 174). In Thacker and Freeman Jr. (2021), when discussing the value of mentorship for Black women seated as provosts, participants noted how Black mentors aided in navigating complex social and professional environments unique to minoritized leaders, such as the pressure to constantly prove their competence as leaders.

Black women mentors provide a safe space and nurturing environment for aspiring leaders. Black women mentors provide experiential learning opportunities, access to organizational resources, and exposure to constructive feedback for professional growth—a valuable opportunity enhanced by self-reflection (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Davis et al., 2012; Jernigan et al., 2020; Selzer & Robles, 2019). Good mentorship provides career planning assistance and increased visibility for mentees on campus, as they seek increased exposure to leadership experiences (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022; Selzer & Robles, 2019). Black women mentors also provide hope to aspiring Black women leaders. Seeing women in leadership positions who share the same racial and gender identities sends a message that there is space for Black women in the realm of higher education leadership (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Johnson & Fournillier, 2022).

Though same-race mentorship is valued, mentorship overall is important for helping Black women and Black men aspire to higher goals and envision opportunities in leadership, short-term and long-term (Thacker & Freeman Jr., 2021). In my own experience, an influential mentor, and an informal network, provided an opportunity for my initial entry into my first full-time position in intercollegiate athletic leadership. After acquiring an internship at a professional sports venue, and due to my insatiable appetite for learning a variety of roles within the industry,

my supervisor became an important mentor and ally for me in the athletic industry. This mentor, a White male, and I forged a strong and lasting bond working together during countless long days and nights covering a variety of events. We established a trusting relationship through talking openly about ways to navigate organizational cultures not friendly to Black women.

My mentor encouraged me to embrace the uniqueness I have as one of a few Black women with substantial organizational experience in professional and college sports, in addition to higher education in general. In witnessing the positive relationship between my mentor and I, and unbeknownst to me, a vice president in the organization at the time recommended me for an athletic leadership position at a nearby university. By benefitting from the relationship with my mentor, and by way of my informal network, I was given an opportunity to acquire my first full-time position in intercollegiate athletics, while also transitioning from an intern at the professional sports venue into a part-time employee for the next 10 years. Both opportunities positively impacted my leadership trajectory and became the impetus of my journey in higher education. While the most influential mentor for me at that time was a White male, research supports the importance of Black women as mentors.

Professional relationships for Black women are more difficult to establish if they are subjected to an unwelcoming organizational culture. Current campus leaders decide which employees are exposed to a variety of campus experiences that prepare individuals for future leadership roles. Committee membership, strategic planning, campus-wide initiatives, etc., are all examples of professional growth opportunities afforded to a chosen few in the campus community. Black women must be top of mind and visible to receive exposure to a variety of professional development experiences (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). Therefore, if the majority of current campus leaders, along with trustees and regents, are White men, then White men are

more likely to benefit from enhanced development afforded by networking and mentoring relationships. That is, White men leaders are more likely to give professional opportunities to and hire other White men—a key component of *homologous reproduction*—thereby limiting opportunities for Black women and other women of color (Gray, 2018).

When seeking leadership opportunities, Logan and Scott Dudley (2019) posit Black women are not looking for preferential treatment but are instead looking for equality, equity, and the recognition and acknowledgement of their strong leadership. To accomplish this, Black women must be able to bring their whole selves, their authentic selves, to the workplace (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). Until they are able to do so, Black women will continue to put their head down and focus on work output, effectively subscribing to the notion that Black women need to work exponentially harder than their White colleagues to overcome racial and gender discrimination. Prioritizing work productivity exclusively over the building of workplace relationships exacerbates the already minimal opportunities for networking and mentoring which provides a pathway to leadership opportunities—the continuation of a vicious cycle of underrepresentation of Black women in leadership (Hruby, 2021; Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019).

Networking and mentorship are tools used by Black women to access and climb the leadership hierarchy. However, these strategies may also imply that the solution to acquiring leadership positions in higher education falls squarely on Black women. This simplistic approach to examining underrepresentation in leadership is similar to the notion that simply getting more people of color into the pipeline solves the lack of diversity in higher education leadership (Whitford, 2020). The problem is more complex. Networking and mentorship are a few tools in the toolkit. Effective mentors also need positional power within the organization or industry to

exert influence on hiring decisions. Meeting the qualifications of leadership are necessary but Black women cannot hire themselves.

Social Capital

As networks are built, so are the chances for Black women to increase social capital. Building and investing in social relationships with expected returns, i.e., social capital, is a key asset for all women to acquire, and specifically Black women in sports, as a means to improve opportunities for leadership (Lin et al., 2017). One component of social capital is network building; an effective network provides opportunities for increased interaction with important stakeholders in the athletic industry (Burton & Parker, 2010). Though the building of formal/informal networks overall is important, the relationships within the networks are critical, as there is a relational nature of leadership through the building of social capital (Hancock & Hums, 2016). If social capital is high, and the relationships in the network are strong, it improves the chances of obtaining a leadership position for women, though it does not guarantee success (Hancock & Hums, 2016).

Using a questionnaire to gather data from NCAA Division I athletic administrators, Sagas and Cunningham (2004) explored gender differences and their impact on components of career success, obtaining data as to how administrators can better achieve success. Sagas and Cunningham (2004) found no significant difference between genders in regards to their social capital investment but male administrators were more likely to reap the benefits of their investments. The more men invested in their networks and relationships, the more likely they were to receive promotions and other career opportunities. For women administrators, women who invested little in social capital received as many career advancement opportunities as those

with high investment (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Their findings suggest that social capital development is key for advancement but it is not the only strategy necessary for success.

According to Abney and Richey (1991), support groups and/or membership in professional organizations may increase social capital among peers but not necessarily with those who are responsible for hiring. Additional strategies suggested by Abney and Richey (1991) for Black women to access leadership include: displaying confidence, being competent, having the ability to persevere, and increasing interest in the sport industry for other Black women. These suggested strategies seem adequate on the surface; however, they again embody the approach that Black women are solely responsible for the lack of diversity in leadership. The idea assumes Black women need to be more appealing to employers or are not meeting qualifications, placing the onus on Black women to improve, which is a deficit perspective. Instead, there should be increased focus on the unwillingness of athletic administrators in positions of power to address the changes necessary for revamping athletic culture to increase employment opportunities for Black women.

As Collins (1986) asserts that Black women are subject to an outsider-within status in most organizations, the organizational culture of athletics can become untenable for Black women looking to establish and build relationships (Price et al., 2017). For example, Bower et al. (2015) found women in intercollegiate athletics recalled not feeling welcomed by male coaches or male administrators to participate in formal/informal networking opportunities, leaving many treated as outsiders in their own organizations. Women were unable to build adequate social capital, as they were rarely invited by men to social activities (lunches, golf outings, etc.), preventing bonding opportunities with mentors or sponsors who provide information and/or support for advancement opportunities (Bower et al., 2015).

In addition, Price et al. (2017) found Black women consistently perceived departmental social interactions perpetuated privileges for White women over Black women, as they felt pressure to change their tone of voice or to straighten their hair to appear more like White women (Price et al., 2017). As Black women felt ostracized, isolated, and unsure of which identity to blame for their feelings of oppression, they felt discouraged from pursuit of top leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics (Price et al., 2017). When Black women are discouraged from leadership, their low representation leads to less mentoring and network opportunities for Black women, resulting in low social capital and reinforcing homologous reproduction of White male leadership in intercollegiate athletics (Huberty et al., 2016; Price et al., 2017).

Support Systems

One method for Black women to counteract feelings of isolation and marginalization within athletic work environments is through the cultivation of an extensive support system. Support systems are another resource for Black women in administrative roles, particularly at predominantly White institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). To navigate cultural norms often found in higher education, Black women often look to support systems external to the workplace, e.g., family, friends, religion/spirituality, and self-care techniques (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). Coping skills, strong personal relationships, a sense of humor, and strong religious beliefs, were identified by Black women in faculty and staff positions as successful strategies to navigate instances of harassment, isolation, and alienation in the higher education work place (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Black women also rely on membership in professional organizations and in their peer networks for support in navigating life in higher education (Davis et al, 2012; Thacker & Freeman Jr., 2021). When these

support systems are rooted within relationships between individuals who hold similar racial and gender identities, it creates and nurtures safe spaces for Black women by Black women (Collins, 2000, as cited in Armstrong, 2007).

In one study, Armstrong (2007), using a BFT epistemological foundation, studied the experiences of Black women leaders in recreational sports. Participants emphasized the value of relationships between Black women as safe spaces, providing them the internal fortitude to resist hegemonic cultures and the *'old boys network'* present in sports (Armstrong, 2007). In another study evidencing value of support systems, Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) found Black women employed in mid-level student affairs positions at PWIs relied heavily on praying, belief systems, church-going, and Bible knowledge, to survive workplace obstacles. Social relationships, particularly those outside of work, were valuable systems of support, allowing for opportunities to talk, seek guidance, and receive affirmation from those with whom Black women had a high level of trust (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). None of the Black women identified coworkers as a primary component of their support structure, perhaps due to the isolation and racial and gender marginalization experienced at work (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007).

When dealing with hostile environments within their institutions, Patitu and Hinton's (2003) research participants chose to embody the spirit of "work harder and smarter" (p.84) or would extricate themselves from the situation by leaving the institution. Such experiences support extant research in which Black women are forced to move from job to job, become withdrawn, or express less and less of their individual personalities to survive within the athletic organizational culture. Higher education loses the true benefit of a diverse workforce if Black

women are afraid to show up authentically or choose to leave the institution prematurely (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Professional Development

Another success strategy for Black women is the continued development and utilization of leadership skills, as a result of participation in a variety of athletic professional experiences. Quarterman et al. (2006) used survey results from women athletic directors across NCAA divisions to ascertain challenges these women identified in the workplace. The top challenge identified by the participants were budget and finance issues (Quarterman et al., 2006). Effective navigation of budget issues is individualized not only to the organizational culture of each university but also reflects the depth of experience women need as they prepare for senior-level athletic leadership positions. It is imperative for women to obtain relevant experience by developing professionally in positions with budget responsibilities, contract management and negotiation, and/or establishing relationships with companies and donors who financially supplement organizational budgets (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Lumpkin et al., 2014).

Budget experience also lends a nuanced perspective on how women can advocate for alternative solutions on how to effectively navigate Title IX issues at their institutions. Proposing ideas on how to combat Title IX issues such as gender/pay equity, scholarship equity, and sport participation, without having to cut sport programs or lose rising women administrators to other better paying industries, is an effective leadership skill for women. Subsequently, as athletic leadership positions require increased levels of business-focused skillsets to navigate the increased monetization of intercollegiate athletics, fewer athletic directors choose to interact with students and lower-level members of their staff on a daily basis, thus the importance of business acumen becomes more advanced (Hardin et al., 2013; Veraldo & Ruihley, 2017).

Strategies Influenced by Stereotypes

Multiple success strategies (building social capital, mentorship, professional development) are inherent to the career advancement of Black women in higher education. However, in the literature review for their study, it was noteworthy that Jackson and Harris (2007) included success strategies which reinforce racial and gender stereotypes. According to Jackson and Harris (2007), to overcome barriers in intercollegiate athletics, Black women should develop "a cooperative spirit" (p. 123) and be open to listening to ideas from others. These strategies suggest Black women are uncooperative, belligerent, and are unwilling to listen to the opinions of others—again reinforcing negative racial tropes of Black women as angry, stern, and having negative dispositions.

Additionally, other recommended tactics included the ability of Black women to speak assertively (Madsen, 1998, as cited in Jackson & Harris, 2007), in addition to an emphasis on health, fitness, and good nutrition (Clay, 2005, as cited in Jackson & Harris, 2007). These recommendations implore Black women to embody debilitating racial and gender stereotypes as part of the solution for overcoming racial and gender discrimination. As Black women try to access athletic leadership, it is falsely assumed that Black women do not already speak with confidence or have good fitness, health, and eating habits. It is unlikely that good nutritional habits are the deciding factor when determining whether a Black woman, or anyone, is qualified for leadership. Studies such as those conducted by Jackson and Harris (2007) provide another rationale for the utilization of BFT as the theoretical framework for my dissertation research. BFT provides the space for Black women to reframe persistent negative images imposed on them by others in order to present themselves in a more positive light, to control their own narratives,

and to provide counternarratives regarding their experiences within intercollegiate athletic leadership (Collins, 2000).

Intercollegiate Athletic Organizational Dynamics

Providing an overall narrative on the organizational dynamics Black women experience in intercollegiate athletic administration, the literature opens a window into the innerworkings of intercollegiate athletics. For the few Black women who enter the industry and access leadership, they encounter college athletic organizations viewed by some as both progressive and inclusive, and by others as dysfunctional and homogenous. The competing viewpoints are determined by the perspectives in which college athletics is framed by both those internal and external to the industry. To better capture the variety of organizational dynamics Black women may encounter in the industry, Bolman and Deal's (2017) framework model is useful for examining and understanding the multiple realities present in college athletic organizations.

Characteristics of the prototypical college athletic department are exemplified by the following organizational perspectives or frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2017). These frames help make sense of the various paradigms present within athletic organizations. In addition, a review of literature provides additional insight into the innerworkings of college athletic organizations such as the relationship to sense of belonging, the overwhelming influence of gender on higher education leadership roles including hegemonic masculinity–a predominance of male culture perceived as superior to femininity (Connell, 1987 as cited in Whisenant et al., 2002)–and its impact on all women, in addition to its specific impact on Black women within athletic leadership.   All of these themes combine to construct a narrative of the college athletic organizational environment and specifically how Black women experience leadership within its confines.

Structural Frame

A structural lens is used to typify organizations focused on strategies, policies, hierarchies, and procedures thought necessary to develop the environment which allows employees to achieve the organization's overarching vision and goals, most often through a formulaic process (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In intercollegiate athletics, structure is often exhibited by an adherence to strategic plans, an ever-present facility or fundraising plan, and/or a reliance on the organizational chart. All athletic departments are also bound by the rules and policies of the NCAA, as a condition of membership in its organization. A strict adherence to firm hierarchies or overreliance on positional authority, is the development of a rigid and/or inflexible college athletic working environment. Most institutions, and especially typified by the NCAA, are so beholden to maintaining structure that employee creativity and innovation is effectively discouraged, especially if those employees are on the lower rungs of the organizational chart. There are fewer innovative ideas due to this allegiance.

One byproduct of athletic organizations' overreliance on structure is the inability of more programs willing to become standard-bearers or to operate differently from their peers. There is often a "follow the leader" mentality before major changes occur across the college athletic landscape. As an example, during the COVID pandemic, Power 5 schools were often the leaders in setting COVID guidelines for athletic participation and other schools followed suit (Dinich, 2021). Unfortunately, these schools were often the leaders in dismantling COVID guidelines prematurely, in the interest of increasing fan attendance in stadiums and arenas. Subsequently, other institutions chose to follow their example as well (Vera & Dotson, 2021). When organizations do not model acceptance of alternative ways of operating, it also sets the tone for the othering of employees who differ from the standards of athletic leadership. For Black women

aspiring to leadership in these institutions, they are often cast aside due to not fitting the stereotypical picture (and structure) of traditional (White male) leadership. Their presence is automatically disruptive to the dominant cultural norms of leadership present in a more structured organization.

Human Resource Frame

Intercollegiate athletic departments often characterize their organizations as families; a place where parents can send their students to play for coaches who will treat their sons and daughters as if they were their own. This sentiment is typical of the human resource frame, where the college athletic organization is viewed as an extension of family for employees and student athletes, and the athletic director may embody characteristics of a servant leader (Bolman & Deal, 2017). These athletic departments aim to exemplify a culture of care by investing time and resources into their employees, encouraging employee empowerment, and promoting diversity and equality as important values of the organization. However, the development of a caring atmosphere, or family-first environment, in college athletics is often evidenced in words but not deeds.

For instance, many college athletic departments have sought to solidify their commitment to these values by adopting the NCAA's pledge and commitment to promoting diversity and gender equity within intercollegiate athletics (Lapchick, 2022). Unfortunately, this pledge has proven to be performative in nature, as intercollegiate athletic leadership continues to be overtly homogenous in its leadership (Lapchick, 2022, 2023). In addition, by invoking a likening to the organization as a family, employees may perceive only certain individuals are welcomed into the family, meaning they have to know someone already inside in order to gain admittance into the family structure. In typifying a family dynamic, there is a distinct separation between the favorite

sibling (White men) and the family outcast (everyone else) in athletic organizations and leadership (Lapchick, 2022, 2023). As such, it is not unimaginable when Black women are not made to feel part of the "family" in intercollegiate athletic organizations, they often withdraw from organizations prematurely or fail to enter the industry altogether.

Political Frame

College athletic departments can also be described as embodying characteristics of a political arena, or jungle—an ultra-competitive environment where employees are vying for scarce opportunities for advancement, leadership, prestige, and most importantly power, in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The goal of any athletic contest is to win, so it is not surprising that characteristics embodied in the playing arena (win at all costs, eliminate the competition, take no prisoners) are also transferred over to and accepted in the office environment. The scarcity of opportunities available to a wide swath of employees creates an ultra-competitive workplace dynamic where there is a continuing cycle of one-upmanship, pitting employee versus employee. As the demand for jobs in college athletic administration far outpaces the supply, it creates an athletic environment where employees are seen as dispensable because there are usually multiple people waiting to take ownership of any pending available positions.

A college athletic organization steeped in politics may explain why athletic workplaces are not welcoming to women, by men or other women. Taylor et al. (2017) found women in graduate assistant positions did not have formal relationships with any women in leadership in their athletic departments despite desiring formal mentoring relationships. Bower et al. (2015) noted the effect of the Queen Bee syndrome in intercollegiate athletics–the phenomenon of a woman leader who has achieved success but is unwilling to assist, or directly prohibiting, other

women from achieving success in order to maintain their exclusive status in the organization–as a challenge that younger women face from women with more experience or length of time in the organization. If the organization only permits room for a few women in intercollegiate athletic leadership, Black women are often pushed out to the margins of leadership, as their racial and gender identities are farther away from the White male norms of athletic leadership.

Symbolic Frame

Mascots, logos, unique brands, pep rallies, and fight songs are synonymous with intercollegiate athletics, and universities in general, and are characteristics of an organization steeped in symbolism (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Viewing intercollegiate athletics through a symbolic lens helps to understand why traditions, myths, rituals, and other emblems are integral to athletic organizations. The symbolic frame also helps to understand how integral organizational culture is to the overall identity of college athletic organizations. Culture is thought of as the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior of a specific group of people (Rieger, 2022). Inherent to culture is that the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes are taught to new members of the group and passed down from generation to generation. There are multiple types of culture ranging from religious to identity-based cultures. One type of culture, organizational culture, can be found within an organization, institution, or work environment.

Organizational culture encompasses an institution's goals, values, artifacts, and common language–effectively establishing the norms and standards for employees to follow (Schein, 1990). It also shapes employees into a reflection and embodiment of the organization as a whole (Kanter, as cited in Ballenger, 2010). College athletic culture is vast and complex, varying by division, institution, region, conference, and by individual sport. Though college athletic culture can be experienced differently across demographics, the literature provides insight into common

components found frequently withing college athletic organizations and influences athletic employees. As Black women enter into the industry and access athletic leadership positions, it is necessary to understand the culture of the complex organizations in which they are joining.

There are multiple examples of rituals, traditions, and other symbols synonymous with intercollegiate athletic culture. For example, one ritual that a vast majority of college athletic organizations follow is the annual tradition of Midnight Madness, a long-standing athletic pep rally full of students, giveaways, and performances that serve as the unofficial beginning of college basketball season (Rill, 2021). Similarly, March Madness, the term for Division I basketball tournament season, has turned into a national tradition not only in intercollegiate athletics but also in other areas of life, evidenced by sitting United States presidents participating in bracket challenges (Allen, 2019). In an extreme example of athletic branding, The Ohio State University has trademarked the word "The" in an effort to distinguish the university and its brand from other institutions and athletic departments, to the tune of over $12.5 million in annual licensing revenue (Simonson, 2022). While increasing revenue streams through athletic symbolism is indeed helpful to programs overall, these athletic traditions and symbols are not necessarily inclusive.

For instance, while March Madness has become synonymous with college basketball, it had previously been used exclusively as a major marketing brand for men's college basketball. Despite the fact that one of the most recognizable brands in all of sports is managed by the same entity responsible for operating both tournaments, the women's tournament was previously prohibited from using the March Madness brand (Macur & Blinder, 2021). Individual institutions, along with the NCAA, were complicit in perpetuating a culture reinforcing traditions in which women are not given equal treatment, and this notion was exemplified after gender

inequities were exposed on a national stage during the 2021 men's and women's basketball tournaments (Macur & Blinder, 2021). Only after receiving a large outpouring of negative media attention, and commissioning a third-party investigation, did the NCAA agree to establish policies allowing for the use of March Madness for women's college basketball and to provide more equitable resources for both basketball tournaments. When traditions such as March Madness continually devalue women's basketball, in which the predominate demographic are Black women (40%), it sends a message that Black women (and all women) are not valued on the court or in other areas of intercollegiate athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). By university leaders ignoring this unequal treatment for decades, they are complicit in affirming a culture of inequality, and perhaps there is symbolism in this narrative as well.

Another aspect of symbolism in athletic workplace culture is in the established and expected dress code for athletic employees, a tradition passed down to new employees. In nearly every athletic department, spanning all NCAA divisions, on game days, you will see athletic employees almost robotically dressed in the unofficial athletic uniform–a polo shirt (with the appropriate athletic school logo) and khakis (pants or shorts). While there is a logical need for employees to have a uniform appearance during events for ease of identification, particularly regarding issues of safety and customer service, this unofficial dress code also stifles individuality, femininity, and non-traditional expressions of gender.

While women are certainly not prohibited from wearing alternate attire, it is a rarity to see women (or men) wearing khaki skirts or dresses on game days. For me personally, as a result of this almost cult-like adherence to the "athletic uniform," once I was comfortably established in an athletic leadership position, my act of resistance against this tenet of athletic organizational culture was to predominantly wear dresses on game days, when feasible. Even after transitioning

out of intercollegiate athletics, I continue to almost exclusively wear dresses in the workplace, to provide a physical counter-narrative to the norming of only men (and their attire) as representative of leadership in higher education.

Application of the Frameworks

When assessing the multiple perspectives in which to view intercollegiate athletic organizations-structural, human resource, political, and symbolic, and how cultures are established, one may assume that each institution neatly fits into a singular frame. However, most athletic departments can be viewed from multiple lenses, and as a result, are complex organizations for Black women to navigate and to try to cultivate a sense of belonging. Black women administrators must have the fortitude to exist and thrive in organizations fixated on rigid policies and procedures that discourage creativity and innovation and those organizations in which employees may be regarded as part of the "family," even though Black women are unlikely to have a seat at the leadership table. Black women leaders need to have grit and resilience to compete for limited advancement opportunities and to follow all of the assorted rituals and traditions inherent to intercollegiate athletics. All perspectives are useful to understand the anomaly of Black women in athletic leadership roles and how their experiences are unique due to their gender and their race.

The organizational culture experienced by Black women in higher education and in intercollegiate athletics, sets the tone for Black women to either feel accepted or ostracized in the workplace. If Black women are consistently subjected to low numbers of representation in leadership and/or racial and gender stereotypes, they are more likely to experience marginalization as a result of a pernicious organizational culture (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). As such, the political climate formed as a result of a harmful organizational environment is not

outwardly embracive to the social status of Black women (Davis & Brown, 2017), and directly impacts their sense of belonging. As a result, Black women may preemptively withdraw from seeking leadership opportunities and/or continue to experience marginalization in the workplace.

Influence of Gender and Race in Intercollegiate Athletic Organizations

The lack of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership positions warrants a deeper dive into their lived experiences to analyze factors impacting their workplace environment and career advancement opportunities. A review of the literature found the influence of gender and race is germane to the experience of Black women in higher education, particularly in athletics. Gender related issues such as hegemonic masculinity impacts the experiences of all women in leadership, including Black women, while the duality of racial and gender identity—the double-bind phenomenon—specifically impacts Black women (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019; Truehill, 2021).

Gendered and Racial Experiences

At post-secondary institutions, the majority of leadership roles are held by men (gender), and if women are in a leadership capacity, they are most likely White (race) (Bruening, 2005). Few studies have focused on the intersectionality of race and gender identities and how they shape the leadership development and experiences of Black women (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). This, identifying as a Black woman can subject Black women to experiences of marginality and oppression, a *double-bind* or *double-whammy* in the workplace due to both racism and sexism (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). hooks (1981) shares that Black women are rarely viewed outside of a reference to Black men or are considered part of the large humanity of women. Thus, when referring to Black people, the topic usually reflects the considerations of Black men and when discussing women, the focus is on White women (hooks, 1981).

One study evident of the double-bind faced by Black women in athletics was conducted by Abney and Richey (1991). Abney and Richey (1991) surveyed and interviewed Black women who were administrators and coaches (10 from PWIs and 10 from HBCUs), identifying barriers to success. According to Abney and Richey (1991), most women face inequality in the sports industry due to gender constraints but Black women face barriers more extreme or severe. For Black women, their positionality creates another barrier, as aggressive and masculine traits, akin to successful leadership, are often viewed from a stereotypical racial lens. When Black women are labeled as aggressive, it is often used to pigeon-hole Black women into the racial stereotype of the *angry Black woman* (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). In addition, athletic departments have streamlined women of color into areas such as academic advising or areas with less decision-making responsibilities, due to the belief that women would relate better to athletes of the same race or gender (Suggs, 2005). Other barriers identified by participants included sexism, supervisors prescribing to lowered expectations of job performance by Black women, facing resentment as women in leadership positions, a lack of support from peers and superiors, and being funneled into jobs with low advancement opportunities (Abney & Richey, 1991).

Price et al. (2017), using a Black feminist theoretical framework, studied how Black women leaders perceive how race and gender color their leadership experiences amidst the hegemonic culture of athletics. When Black women enter leadership, they are often framed by three criteria: their gendered status, their racial identity, and their ability to contribute to the organization (Price et al., 2017). These criteria allow for advantages of Black women's intersectionality while simultaneously confirming their presence as outsiders in the dominate White male demographic of athletic leadership, thereby occupying an outsider-within status in athletics (Collins, 1986). For example, some participants found their identities were at times

beneficial, i.e., being asked to give their nuanced perspectives on different topics because they offered a unique perspective from both a gender and racial aspect, but other times were limiting, as being asked to assist only minority student-athletes (Price et al., 2017). Due to the influence of gender and racial stereotypes, the participants were often relegated to "motherly" or supportive roles—akin to the mammy (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price et al., 2017). Black women serving as role models exclusively for racial minorities absolves Whites of the responsibility of learning how to build relationships with student-athletes from other cultures (Price et al., 2017). These situations serve as examples of the "othering" of Black women that both distinguish and also disadvantage their athletic leadership experiences from White men, White women, and Black men (Price et al., 2017).

Despite the double-bind phenomenon, Black women are able to obtain leadership positions in higher education and in intercollegiate athletics, though in disproportionately smaller numbers. Higher education institutions must do more to recognize the value and experiences of Black women leaders, and provide inclusive and equitable work environments to support Black women. Institutions must work to dismantle systems of White male hegemony, oppression, and discrimination, along with lessening instances of isolation, invisibility, and unfair treatment often experienced by Black women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Ultimately, learning how to navigate successfully around multiple negative experiences involves more than determination from Black women—it necessitates a willingness from institutions to transform their organizational culture to lessen, and eventually render ineffective, the consequences of the double-bind phenomenon. Transformation would also lessen the influence of hegemonic masculinity which contributes to the magnitude of the double-bind Black women experience in the workplace.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The lack of representation of women in athletic leadership positions is akin to the lack of representation in leadership positions in non-sport organizations–sport is a microcosm of society at its best and worst (Huberty et al., 2016). When women enter the athletic industry, they are met with an organizational culture that prioritizes the role of men in leadership and lacks substantial racial diversity. As leadership positions in all industries are primarily made up of White males (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007), prescribed gender roles impact the ability of women to obtain leadership positions and reinforces the impact of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is a concept in which some social groups have more power and authority over others, and in the institution of sport, the dominant group are men (Whisenant et al., 2002). Hegemonic masculinity prioritizes a culture of manhood, its perceived superiority to femininity, and its characteristics—aggressiveness, dominance, heterosexuality, strength—which by default places women in a lower social hierarchy (Connell, 1987 as cited in Whisenant et al., 2002). Hegemonic masculinity is evidenced in sport by observing the predominance of men, specifically White men, in leadership positions, to where their authority and power is normalized as inherent to the culture of sport (Walker & Bopp, 2011). The predominance of hegemonic masculinity is so vast that when women are denied equal opportunity to access and power, it is often unquestioned by both men and women alike (Buzuvis, 2015).

In sport, men in leadership positions are more likely to hire and promote people who fit the style (beliefs, values) of the organizational culture—a style modeled by the leader of the organization—thus leading to a physical and social replication of those in power, i.e., homologous or homosocial reproduction (Stangl & Kane, 1991). As a concept, homologous reproduction is not limited to one specific race or gender but its ramifications are more

pronounced in college athletics. Homologous reproduction minimizes the opportunities for women to obtain leadership positions and positions Black women to the outskirts of intercollegiate athletics, as they are further removed from the norms of gender (male) and race (White), therefore having twice as many barriers to overcome in the workplace (Buzuvis, 2015; Grappendorf et al., 2004; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). In evidenced support of homologous reproduction in Division I-III institutions, White chancellors/presidents (82%) predominantly hire White athletic directors (86%), White athletic directors typically hire White head coaches (85%), White senior women administrators (86%), White associate athletic directors (84%), and White assistant athletic directors (84%), or recommend them for other leadership opportunities (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b).

A tangible consequence of homologous reproduction, especially when men hire other men in athletics, is how it is manifested in the physical appearance of those in leadership, and its impact on organizational culture. Price et al. (2017) found Black women often felt the need for identity negotiation as a means of surviving the dominant White male culture of intercollegiate athletics. Their identity negotiation consisted of hiding or lessening expressions of their cultural and racial identity characteristics such as hairstyle, clothing, language, and/or demeanor. As a result, Black women perceived they were judged more critically for their physical appearance in comparison to their peers (Price et al., 2017).

As seen in Thacker and Freeman Jr's (2021) study of Black provosts, similarly participants in Price et al.'s (2017) study expressed the pressure of proving to others they were qualified for their leadership positions by becoming more efficient, competent, and effective in all areas–operating under an unrealistic expectation of perfectionism and unfairly expected to be exemplars of their race and gender (Abney & Richey, 1991; McDowell & Carter-Francique,

2017; Price et al., 2017). Individuals baring similarity to those in leadership rarely have their professional credentials questioned, whereas those who are of difference (race, gender, sexuality) are more likely pressured to prove their competence and qualifications (Stangl & Kane, 1991). This pressure is often experienced by Black athletic women administrators (Abney & Richey, 1991). As such, Black women can feel a dissonance between working to stand out from their peers while simultaneously trying to fit in and conform to the dominant culture, to best position themselves for advancement opportunities.

The Role of Football.

Another byproduct of hegemonic masculinity in college athletics is the perception that women are unable to supervise football programs due to a lack of football sport participation. Women are judged more harshly than men for having minimal football playing experience, though many male athletic directors have never played college football or have supervised football programs, yet are provided opportunities to lead intercollegiate athletic programs that support Division I football (Lumpkin et al., 2014; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Hence, there is a perception that women athletic directors and other women administrators will be more successful leaders at institutions with either lower-level football or schools without football because financial responsibilities and expectations are lowered at these institutions (Lumpkin et al., 2014; Suggs, 2005; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). This notion may also explain the larger quantity of women athletic directors in Division II and Division III (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b).

Whisenant et al. (2002) discovered women who were in senior level positions were found to be relegated to institutions with less esteem or in Division II or III institutions, i.e., institutions with fewer financial resources (Whisenant et al., 2002), and thus less power and authority.

However, for Black women, even if they choose to pursue leadership opportunities at Division II or Division III institutions, they are not represented in proportion to the student-athletes at these schools. Exclusive of HBCUs, White people account for 91% of Division II athletic directors and 90% of Division III athletic directors, with Black women holding 1% and 4% of Division II and Division III athletic director positions respectively (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b). In comparison, Black student-athletes account for 16% of athletes in Division II and 9% of athletes in Division III (National Collegiate Athletic Association 2022a).

Football is a key financial driver of intercollegiate athletics due to the proliferation of television contracts, ticket sales, and media interest. The power and authority of leadership in intercollegiate athletics tends to be centered around or through football programs because money is the driving force (Forde, 2020). The characteristics of football—aggressiveness, strength, toughness—are closely aligned to prescribed gender norms of masculinity, placing women at a competitive disadvantage to their male counterparts in the hiring process, especially when university presidents, who usually hire athletic directors, are most likely to be men (Lapchick, 2021a, 2022, 2023; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002), resulting in a limited number of women being hired as athletic directors. To combat this, in Grappendorf and Lough's (2006) survey of women athletic directors, participants advised women aspiring to become athletic directors to obtain as much experience as possible in football program operations.

Hegemonic masculinity influences the gender norms present in intercollegiate athletics as women are often judged as lacking leadership qualities—qualities traditionally characterized as masculine. Leadership characteristics are often prescribed to agentic roles of masculinity (strength, aggressiveness, decisiveness, confidence), which is contradictory to the relational and communal stereotypes of women as caregivers and supporters, best suited for roles that

emphasize planning, organizing, consulting, communication skills, etc. (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Burton & Parker, 2010). Thus, when hiring senior-level positions in intercollegiate athletics, women are evaluated against a standard of skills inherently favoring men (Burton et al., 2009).

Women in leadership at Division I, II, and III institutions are well represented in assistant or associate athletic director positions in academics, counseling, compliance, marketing, and life skills—positions that require relational or soft skills—and are prescribed as traditional feminine gender roles (Lumpkin et al., 2014; Ott & Beaumont, 2020; Whisenant et al., 2002). In fact, women hold 62% of Division I academic advisor positions and 71% of life skills coordinator positions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022b).

Despite gender constraints imposed on women in intercollegiate athletics, there are a few leadership success stories. One area of success noted by Taylor et al. (2018) is in the area of intercollegiate athletic conference office leadership. Women have historically had better representation as conference officers, and therefore advancing to conference leadership positions, due to the lack of involvement of influential donors in the hiring process and from being further removed from the spotlight and expectations of high-profile athletic programs (Taylor et al., 2018). However, there is a false sense of victory for women in this sub-section of intercollegiate athletics. While women have attained leadership positions at the conference level, they rarely occupy the conference commissioner position in Division I (Lapchick, 2022). Encompassing all 30 Division I conferences in 2021, 26 of 30 commissioners were White and there were a total of 10 women represented (Lapchick, 2022). As for Black women, their representation is non-existent—there are no Black women commissioners in Division I athletics outside of conferences specific to HBCUs (Lapchick, 2021b). The acceptance of Black women as full-fledged members

throughout the athletic leadership hierarchy is also correlational to their feelings of belongingness, directly impacted by gendered and racial barriers in athletic culture.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is a concept worthy of exploration by itself in a research study focused singularly on the impact of this phenomenon on employees in higher education. For my study, I have limited sense of belonging to providing context of its role in contributing to the experiences of Black women within athletic culture. While there are multiple definitions to describe a sense of belonging, its premise relies on the concept of all humans having an innate motivation to be a part of a group or particular environment to experience feelings of connectedness and acceptance (Maslow, 1962; McLeod, 2007; Strayhorn, 2018) Belongingness is most noticeable when it is not present, as feelings of isolation, loneliness, and marginalization contribute to the lack of emotional well-being experienced by those not accepted as part of the group in which they desire inclusion (Strayhorn, 2018). The majority of research on sense of belonging in higher education is focused on the experiences of college students, followed by lesser amounts centered on faculty and staff. When examining the literature on intercollegiate athletics and belonging, again the primary focus is on student-athletes and their experiences of belonging. There is very little research in which athletic administrators are the axis of the research, outside of racially minoritized coaches.

Extant literature on the experience of racially minoritized college athletic administrators covers a variety of subject areas such as networking, mentoring, department culture, sexuality, and topics contributing to their overall experiences in the workplace. Sense of belonging is usually most likely found in the interpretation and analysis of a particular study's research findings, not necessarily as a concept studied on its own. However, the information procured

from a review of the literature tends to lead credence to the impact of gendered and raced experiences in college athletic culture and how these experiences influence a sense of belonging amongst Black women in athletic administration.

In a study on the experiences of Black athletic administrators at Division I FBS institutions, participants in Howe and Rockhill (2020) couched their belonging in direct correlation to being one of few the Black people in their department and having to prove they were worthy of their positions. As Black administrators, participants recounted stories of feeling frustrated by often being the only person of color in rooms full of White male leaders due to the practice of hiring from convenience or similarity (Howe & Rockhill, 2020). The lack of diversity was perceived as allowing leaders to have the power to create policies without input from a variety of staff because most of the staff bear similarity to the leader of the organization. Exclusion from the decision-making processes in the operation of the department caused Black administrators to feel devalued and ignored.

In addition, participants believed their racial identities led to experiences and feelings that their While peers do not have (Howe & Rockhill, 2020). The responsibility of serving as exemplars of their race was a key issue for participants, as they were often singularly represented in their departments. Keeping a guard up at all times was crucial, as Black administrators felt judged for their appearance and were always mindful of potential racist and discriminatory behaviors from other members of the athletic community, such as having to reintroduce themselves multiple times despite to the same people, despite being the only person of color (Howe & Rockhill, 2020). These issues caused a decrease of belongingness within their athletic organizations. As a result, despite facing adverse treatment in their institutions, participants felt holding administrative roles was a privilege for them (Howe & Rockhill, 2020). This privilege

served a dual function, as it allowed Black administrators to take pride in their athletic positions, while simultaneously reinforcing their positioning as others within athletic culture, needing to express gratitude for occupying the space as their White colleagues.

In examining the career experience of ethnic women athletic directors, Welch et al. (2021) found participants were keenly aware of their place and positionality within their athletic departments. Belongingness was impacted by constant reminders of the differences in racial identities between them as athletic directors and their institution's predominant alumni base, donors, and coaches. Their racial and gender identities prompted continuous questioning of their competence as leaders, causing the women to constantly prove they belonged in their roles. As such, some participants believed their opportunities for leadership had been compromised, as they had to settle for jobs at institutions with less esteem, where they were believed to be a better fit, or belong (Welch et al, 2021).

Similarly, organizational fit and acceptance were key issues for athletic employees in Walker and Melton (2015). Employees expressed feeling more comfortable in organizations where colleagues were apt to use inclusive language and where organizational policies explicitly encouraged inclusion of diverse identities and perceptions. When employees perceived college athletic organizations had failed to reinforce values of diversity, these women were forced to choose between lessening expression of their identities to increase belonging or lean openly into their identities within the workplace, which was perceived to be adverse to their career progression (Walker & Melton, 2015). As a result of this difficult decision, 10 of the 15 participants in the study chose to walk away from athletics or were actively pursuing positions outside of college sports (Walker & Melton, 2015).

While the aforementioned studies addressed the impact of race and gender on a sense of belonging for Black people within athletic administration, each study failed to examine the specific experiences of Black women administrators. Howe and Rockhill (2020) focused on the experiences of Black administrators as one monolithic group, though Black women were included in their research. Welch et al. (2021) studied ethnic minority women athletic directors which also included Black women and their perspectives. Both studies reinforce the idea that the experiences of Black women are similar to other minoritized groups due to shared racial or gender identities. Finally, Walker and Melton (2015) broadened their participant sample to include both administrators and coaches, in addition to the inclusion of sexual orientation as central to their research. Once more, while Black women were participants in their study, the addition of sexual orientation adds another layer of complexity to feelings of inclusion or exclusion in college athletic culture, in addition to the intricacies of athletic administration versus coaching environments. Both provide extra nuance to experiencing a sense of belonging in athletic culture.

Summary

By failing to place the burden of change on institutions and the individuals responsible for the organizational culture in higher education and intercollegiate athletics, Black women continue to be blamed for problems they did not create, yet are expected to solve. It is certainly necessary for Black women, or anyone, to adequately prepare themselves for leadership by utilizing strategies for success (building social capital, assembling a robust network, obtaining mentorship, relying on support systems, and continuing to develop professionally). However, the suggested solutions often reflect a deficit perspective, assuming Black women are automatically unqualified for leadership. Thus, the onus is placed on Black women alone to solve the problem

of their underrepresentation in athletic leadership, as opposed to examining the systemic schemes in place that hinder access to leadership opportunities and impact their experiences of acceptance and belonging in athletic organizations. Further, White men and women also must acknowledge and confront sexism and racism inherent to intercollegiate athletic organizational culture. Until meaningful and actionable steps are taken by institutional leaders, Black women will continue to be underrepresented in intercollegiate athletic leadership and in higher education overall. Consequently, it is important to forefront Black women's nuanced experiences and provide opportunities to share their narratives through research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For so long we've [Black women] all been talented, that hasn't been a question. We've been talented, but in this field [sic] ADs hire people they're familiar with. If we're not in those circles, we don't get chosen (Hurd, 2021, Diane Richardson section).

Athletic directors hire head coaches with whom they are most familiar which oftentimes excludes Black women, according to Temple University head women's basketball coach Diane Richardson (Hurd, 2021). Unfortunately, her sentiment is also applicable for Black women being hired in other positions of authority in athletic leadership. Upon examination of the leadership demographics in higher education, and specifically intercollegiate athletics, the statistics tell a story of a homogenous work environment, contradicting the narrative often presented on university websites of campuses filled with gender and racial diversity. The reality is at PWIs, board of trustees and search committees often hire White men as university chancellors and presidents, and these men employ other White men as athletic directors–the top leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics (Lapchick, 2021a, 2022, 2023; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). As a result, Black women are often pushed to the margins of, or are excluded from, intercollegiate athletic leadership.

The purpose of my study was to examine the experiences of Black women within intercollegiate athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities, while also providing an opportunity to magnify the voices of Black women often silenced or overlooked in current research literature. My research study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the intersectionality of race and gender in the predominantly White male culture of intercollegiate athletics impacted Black women's leadership journey?

2. How has the intersectionality of racial and gender identity affected Black women's sense of belonging within intercollegiate athletic organizational culture?

3. What are the strategies utilized by Black women administrators to access and navigate the intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy?

Research Design

The purpose of my study was to examine how Black women administrators within intercollegiate athletic departments experience and access leadership opportunities. In order to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Black women leaders in college athletics, my study required a research approach designed to elicit a detailed description of the phenomenon of Black women in athletic leadership and how they make sense of the intercollegiate athletic environment. As such, the best research approach for my study was qualitative research.

Qualitative research provides an in-depth examination of a particular setting, phenomenon, or program, and allows the observer to use research methods to interpret and assign meaning to the world (Mertens, 2020). For my research study, a qualitative research design was useful for providing depth and context (Mertens, 2020) for the statistical data that highlights the underrepresentation of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership positions (Lapchick, 2022, 2023). Whereas quantitative information on my research topic is readily available, the gap in the research literature points to a need for qualitative research, through the inclusion of the voices, perspectives, and experiences of Black women. I aimed to help close this gap by using qualitative research to explore the complexity of this phenomenon, the diversity of the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership, and to expose higher

education administrators to the realities experienced by Black women as they navigate athletic organizational culture.

Methodology

It is important to highlight the experiences of Black women in higher education, and subsequently in intercollegiate athletics, as Black women have been historically marginalized in the obtainment of leadership positions in higher education (West, 2020). Capturing and understanding the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership through qualitative research required providing the space and capacity for Black women to share their stories and perspectives. One method of achieving this goal was through the use of narrative inquiry—a research methodology in which stories are used to understand and interpret human experiences in the world and assign meanings to those experiences (Kim, 2016).

Providing an opportunity for Black women's voices and experiences to be centered in current research on women in intercollegiate athletic leadership required that: (a) Black women were currently or previously employed in athletic leadership positions, even if underrepresented (the living), (b) Black women shared their experiences (the telling), (c) the researcher conducted inquiries into Black women's unique experiences (the retelling), and (d) the researcher reexamines their personal life experiences after hearing participants' stories (the reliving) (Clandinin, 2016). All four components–living, telling, retelling, and reliving–are central characteristics of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016).

Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is viewed as both a phenomenon undergoing analysis and a methodology used to capture, describe, and share the lived experiences of individuals and groups through stories, in addition to the assignment of meanings to these stories (Clandinin & Caine,

2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Foste & Jones, 2020; Kim, 2016). Stories are the composite narrative events occurring in a person's life, organized by some form of structure through time (Kim, 2016). Narratives are the culmination of stories of participants' lived experiences and their expression of self (Kim, 2016). Narratives are also the knowledge produced and constructed from stories and are the data collected and analyzed by researchers.

Narratives are primarily elicited from interviews and conversations between the researcher and the participant. However, narratives can also be obtained through biographies, songs, photos, videos, organizational documents, or artwork (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Any platform which captures the story of a human experience may be considered narrative. Narratives may be descriptive (describing a life experience) or explanatory (explaining the connection of life events) and serve multiple purposes (persuasion, justification, remembrance, engagement) for those who share and interpret lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Narratives are born from the individual or from groups, but most importantly involve both personal and social experiences (Dewey, 1938, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Riesmann, 2008).

Riessman (2008) posits narrative inquiry focuses on the particulars of an experience and is respectful of the context in which the story is lived, shared, and retold. Narrative inquiry honors and respects lived experiences while also creating a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The significance of my research study was to utilize narratives to highlight the importance of the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

As a research methodology, narrative inquiry is a collaboration between researcher and participant to co-create knowledge, stimulate growth and learning for both, and increase

understanding of lived experiences (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016). Participants tell their stories and researchers construct stories from data or field texts (Riessman, 2008). In narrative inquiry the researcher becomes deeply invested in all aspects of the inquiry (Kim, 2016). Therefore, the researcher's experiences are central to narrative inquiry and cannot be bracketed (or removed) out of the research design, as they are in relation to the topic studied, how the topic and narratives are experienced, and how the research data is interpreted (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Researchers and participants are both in the midst of narrative inquiry, i.e., experiencing the living, telling, reliving, and retelling of stories at one particular moment in time; thus, narrative research is conducted while people, time, and conditions are constantly changing (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative inquiry occurs in the middle of this change. In addition, narrative inquiry has three material characteristics the researcher must consider during the research process: three-dimensional space, justifications, and analysis.

Three-Dimensional Space. Narratives are believed to occur in a three-dimensional space: personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuum), and place (situation) (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The components of the three-dimensional space may also be referred to as commonplaces (or occurrences) in narrative inquiry. For example, temporality is a commonplace in which narrative is occurring over time, while social is a commonplace in which personal experiences converge with social experiences, thus striking a balance between personal feelings and social conditions (Clandinin, 2016; Kim, 2016). Place is the locale is which the narrative occurs (location and/or context) and may also effect the inquiry (Clandinin, 2016; Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry occurs at the intersection of all three dimensions or commonplaces.

For my research study, participants shared their personal intercollegiate athletic workplace stories in relation to relevant social influences (interaction) such as the changing landscape of athletics due to name, image, and likeness (NIL) implementation. My participant narratives involved past, present, and/or future life experiences in intercollegiate athletics (continuum or temporality) when they discussed navigating athletic culture and their future plans for athletic leadership. Finally, my participant narratives were situated in a specific location (athletic organization) and/or context (societal or historical). All three dimensions influenced the data (narratives) procured in narrative inquiry and my research questions were designed to assist in data collection by eliciting rich stories (Kim, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) surmise narrative inquiry assists in creating new meaning and significance for a particular research topic through a focused examination of an individual's or group's life experiences. In using narrative inquiry, I aimed to attach more significance to the under-researched topic of Black women and their experiences in accessing intercollegiate athletic leadership opportunities.

Justifications. There are three specific justifications that should be contemplated before embarking upon a narrative inquiry: personal, practical, and social (Clandinin, 2016). The personal justification explores how a research topic is interwoven within my own life experiences. BFT posits Black women often select research topics drawn from or germane to their life experiences (Collins, 1986; Collins, 1989; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). The experience of Black women in intercollegiate athletics is a personal topic for me, as I have a professional background in college athletics and once held a leadership position, along with aspirations of becoming an athletic director. I chose to leave a career in intercollegiate athletics because I did not experience a sense of belonging within the aggressive, hyper-masculine, and predominantly White culture of athletics. I did not want to continue a career in an industry which was often in direct conflict with

my values. Though I no longer work in the athletic industry, I still have a vested interest in understanding how Black women can ascend the organizational hierarchy of intercollegiate athletic departments. Exploration of this topic is particularly important, as Black women are continually overlooked for leadership positions in college athletics (Hruby, 2021).

Practical application, the importance of uncovering information which may shift or change practices, systems, etc., is another justification for using narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). By examining the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic workplaces, my research study reveals challenges experienced by Black women that higher education leaders could use to implement practices for more inclusive workplaces. Conversely, my participants also revealed strategies recommended from peers which help Black women access leadership opportunities, and as such, these practices may be applicable to other women in athletic organizations, as well as other industries in which Black women leaders are underrepresented.

Lastly, social justification, or the ability of the research study to add to existing theoretical knowledge and/or actions for social change, is another rationale for narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). BFT, interacting with narrative inquiry, provided an opportunity to produce counter-narratives of the realities of Black women working in intercollegiate athletics. The narratives of my participants diverged from the established "truth" of sports, and in essence higher education, as an exemplar of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hruby, 2021; Phillips, 2021; Suggs, 2000). Therefore, narrative inquiry was essential to provide another version of truth and reality experienced by Black women (Riessman, 2008). My findings contribute to the BFT knowledge base.

Analysis. The final characteristic of narrative inquiry are the types of analysis used to interpret the data collected. Riessman (2008) advocates for using any of the three types of

narrative analysis for better interpretation of the data–thematic, structural, or dialogic. Thematic analysis focuses on the content of the narratives, or what is said by the participants, and is organized around a particular theme (Riessman, 2008). This type of analysis does not focus necessarily on specific words, but instead focuses on prolonged sequences or entire stories. Structural analysis focuses on the "telling" of the narrative or how the story is told (Riessman, 2008). This type of analysis examines how the participant uses language, tone, and pitch of voice during the narrative, as well as the order in which the story is told, to communicate a life experience.

Dialogic analysis pays close attention to the context of the setting and social circumstances in which the narrative is produced and interpreted (Riessman, 2008). This type of analysis focuses on "whom" the narrative is directed to, "when," "why," and for "what purpose" (Riessman, 2008). BFT assists in dialogic analysis, as it provides the historical and cultural context during interpretation of the narrative. Dialogic analysis also views narrative as a performance; analyzing sounds, repetitive words/phrases, body language, and asides present during the telling of the story (Riessman, 2008).

Regardless of type of analysis chosen in narrative inquiry, Kim (2016) offers that narrative analysis should be completed from a perspective of an *interpretation of faith* and an *interpretation of suspicion*. Narrative researchers should assume participant stories are true and meaningful, i.e., an interpretation of faith (Kim, 2016). Though stories are assumed to be true, researchers should still delve deeper into data analysis in order to uncover hidden meanings in the data which may go unnoticed on the surface, i.e., the need to interpret the data with suspicion (Kim, 2016).

Strengths and Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

One strength of using narrative inquiry for my research methodology is it allowed for the honoring and respecting of Black women intercollegiate athletic administrators and their lived experiences through the telling and retelling of their stories. Narrative inquiry intimately explores the social and cultural aspects of stories, how those stories are expressed, and how they are shaped in relation to the world (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Utilizing a narrative methodology also created a conversation between theory (BFT) and the life experiences of the participants, as well as the researcher, throughout the research design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The conversation between participant and researcher stories is where the creation of knowledge occurs (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry accounts for a deeper exploration of a group of people. In my research, the group was Black women, who are often overlooked in current intercollegiate athletic research. They not only shared their stories but were also the embodiment of their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Some researchers suggest that one possible limitation of narrative inquiry, for both the researcher and the audience, is the need to construct research findings and discussions along the framework of a "Hollywood plot" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As narratives are constructed from stories, there are expectations that all stories should have a point, characters, plot (with or without a twist), emotion, and a resolution (Labov, 1972, as cited in Riessman, 2008). While narratives are stories, they are the stories of people occurring within a changing time and social context. Not all life experiences can be expected to have a nice and neat resolution. Thus, a false expectation for a narrative research design is to provide absolute answers to the research questions guiding the study. My research questions elicited both answers and additional questions necessitating further exploration (Kim, 2016).

While I am hopeful my research findings will provide practical steps for creating more leadership opportunities for Black women through a better understanding of their workplace experiences, it is impractical to believe my findings are the sole solution to the inequalities in athletic leadership. The participant stories elicited during my research study provide the individual pieces of the research puzzle while also encouraging readers to interrogate current intercollegiate athletics organizational practices with respect to the continued homogeneity of the demographics of higher education leadership (Clandinin, 2016).

Participant Sampling

Using BFT as a reference, an assumption of my study was that organizational experiences vary for Black women across the career spectrum, as Black women represent various age groups, sexual orientations, religions, regions, and other identities in the workplace. Therefore, the ideal group of participants to represent Black women administrators were at various stages of their intercollegiate athletics career with varied job titles. The selection criteria was intended to recruit a diversified sample of Black women at various stages of their athletic careers to elicit detailed narratives spanning a range of experiences. My anticipated sample size was six to 10 participants. The initial selection criteria was as follows:

- Those who identify as a woman.

- Those who identify as Black.

- Those who have previous or current Division I-III administrative leadership experience (amended criteria).

Table 2 lists the women I interviewed for my dissertation.

Table 2

Research Participants

Name	Background
Ebony	Mid-level administrator; former NCAA student-athlete; master's degree
Tamika	Entry-level administrator; master's degree
Imani	Mid-level administrator; former NCAA student-athlete; earned doctorate; no longer employed in intercollegiate athletics
Trinity	Entry-level administrator; master's degree
Michelle	Senior-level administrator; former NCAA student-athlete; earned doctorate
Ashleigh	Senior-level administrator; master's degree
Gabrielle	Senior-level administrator; former NCAA student-athlete; earned doctorate
Laila	Senior-level administrator; former NCAA student-athlete; master's degree
Nia	Senior-level administrator; master's degree
Jada	Senior-level administrator; former NCAA coach; master's degree; doctoral candidate

Purposive sampling is a selection strategy used to identify key individuals or cases that are more likely to elicit a depth of research data or provide a unique perspective on the research topic studied (Collins, 2010, as in Mertens, 2020). When key individuals are identified, the researcher may use snowball sampling (a type of purposeful sampling) to ask the initial informants to recommend others who may meet the selection criteria and are likely to be well-versed on the topic of inquiry (Mertens, 2020). Through an existing professional and personal relationship, I conducted a pilot study with one participant (Destiny) utilizing a purposeful, convenient sampling approach. Convenience sampling is used to select participants who are readily available for participation in a research study (Mertens, 2020). Destiny embodied the selection criteria for my pending dissertation study and was readily accessible for participation.

Destiny had extensive leadership experience in multiple divisions of intercollegiate athletics, allowing for a nuanced range of athletic work experiences. Embodying characteristics

of BFT, Destiny also used her career to improve positive images of Black women in athletics through successful leadership skills, serving as an exemplar for aspiring Black women leaders. Her connection to other insiders within the community of Black women leaders through her peer network, in addition to her membership within professional athletic organizations, allowed her to serve as a key informant for soliciting other research participants (snowball sampling). By participating in my pilot study, Destiny allowed me an opportunity to test out and refine my interview protocol. Destiny was also instrumental in the recruitment of Black women administrators for my study and I owe her a debt of gratitude for her contributions.

I initially intended to only recruit participants who had current or previous experience in Division I athletics through the utilization of both snowball and stratified sampling in recruitment of participants who were acquaintances of Destiny. Stratified sampling is a type of purposeful sampling used to slot participants into subgroups based on specific criteria, and for this study, the specific criteria was the level of leadership (Mertens, 2020). Stratified sampling allowed for a wider representation of Black women who met the selection criteria, who were at various stages of their athletic careers, and who held a variety of athletic titles. This sampling strategy was utilized to try to maximize a variety of participants in each category, as opposed to oversaturation in any particular level of leadership.

However, after not having success recruiting enough women for my sample, the initial selection criteria was expanded to include Black women from multiple divisions of intercollegiate athletics. I amended my research protocol to recruit Black women from Division I, II, or III. Once my amendment was approved by UNC Charlotte's institutional review board, I was able to expand recruitment, meet my desired sample size, and reach data saturation. It

proved valuable to have a mixture of Black women with experience in Division I, II, and/or III athletic organizations for the procurement of more in-depth data collection.

Destiny identified a group of four to five Black women leaders who fit the initial selection criteria (Division I) for my study, in addition to women who fit the expanded criteria (Division II and III). Recruitment ensued with an initial email to potential participants explaining the purpose of my study, criteria for participation, the expected time commitment, and my contact information. For each participant who agreed to participate, I researched their work biographies to verify their professional experience, e.g., if they were in an entry-level, mid-level, or senior-level leadership position. In intercollegiate athletics, entry-level positions can be jobs such as academic advisors, program coordinators, or marketing assistants. Examples of mid-level positions range from assistant or associate directors of athletics to managers or directors of specific units within an athletic department. Senior-level positions include conference commissioners, athletic directors, and executive positions within an individual athletic organization.

As I interviewed each woman, at the end of each conversation, I asked each person to recommend other individuals who they believed would fit the selection criterion and would be willing to participate in the study. Some participants offered recommendations and others reached out to their network of peers to tell them about my research study. Those women either agreed to participate, or were already on my list of interviewees. As additional participants were identified, I repeated the process of researching participant work biographies to determine where each Black woman was situated on the leadership hierarchy. This process was necessary in order to divide participants into subgroups based on leadership levels.

My goal was to interview a minimum of one participant in each leadership category, for a total of six to 10 Black women spanning a range of leadership experiences. In large part to the efforts of my research participants to share the purpose of my study with their peer network, I was able to interview 10 athletic administrators spanning all levels of the leadership hierarchy (entry, mid-level, and senior). I allowed for the flexibility to adjust my sample size for both quality and quantity of interviews until data saturation was reached (Kim, 2016). Data saturation occurs when both depth and breadth of information has been reached, i.e., there were consistent themes found in the transcripts and no significant information was procured from each additional participant to help answer the research questions guiding the study (Kim 2016; Mertens, 2020). To better determine if I was approaching data saturation, I analyzed each transcript after each interview was completed.

All participant interviews occurred via Google or Zoom virtual platforms, allowing for the convenience of both audio and video recording necessary for data collection, transcription files, and data analysis. As a back-up measure, I also audio-recorded each interview using a digital recording device. This additional step proved to be fruitful. I was able to accurately capture each interview transcript via the digital recording device even when the recording mechanisms on Google and Zoom were inconsistent.

Data Collection

A commonly used method for data collection in qualitative research designs are interviews (Mertens, 2020) and for narrative inquiry, narrative interviews (Riessman, 2008). According to Riessman (2008), narrative interviews elicit detailed accounts of experiences from participants (field texts) and are viewed more as a conversation as opposed to an interview. Kim (2016) posits there are two iterative phases of narrative interviews—the narration phase and the

conversation phase. The narration phase allows the narrative researcher to assume the position of both an active listener and observer (Kim, 2016). This phase encourages the participant to share uninterrupted stories while the researcher fosters free-flowing communication, while simultaneously keenly observing dialogical cues such as sounds, body language, repetitive phrases, etc. A strategy I used during each interview to encourage participants to open up and share their story was asking them to tell me how they got to their current position. Even though I had researched each participant's background, I wanted them to recount their leadership journey in their own words.

During the conversation phase, the interview reverts to a more traditional approach of semi-structured questions and responses (Kim, 2016). Though the narration phase and conversation phase have separate purposes, they do not necessarily occur in two distinct phases. During the interview, the researcher must remain attentive in order to ascertain when the interview may need to revert back to the narration phase, to allow and encourage the participant to share rich stories, or needs to revert to the conversation phase to ask specific questions related to the purpose of the study. While conducting narrative interviews, I, as the researcher, was more engaged during the conversation, emotionally attentive, and followed the participant's lead, instead of following the interview protocol verbatim (Riessman, 2008). My interview strategy of asking participants to discuss the path to their current roles eliminated the need to ask too many questions during the interview, which allowed for more rich stories from participants. This technique resulted in a shifting in the power imbalance often present in traditional interviews and helped assist the process of co-creating knowledge when moving from composing the field texts to writing the research texts (Clandinin, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016).

In addition to participant narratives, I also collected public biographies and other information available for each participant, including an article written about Imani (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Publicly available biographies, often found on institutional websites, provide background information on participants (personal and professional), and helped with establishing rapport with participants before narrative interviewing began. Public biographies also tell a story if there was not one available on an institution's website for specific job titles, or if the information was inaccurate. As athletic department websites are usually maintained by a sports information unit within the athletic department, and is a direct responsibility of its employees, it is telling when website information is lacking. As shared by Ebony during her interview, she was responsible for writing her own biography for inclusion on the athletic department website, which forebode her shorth length of stay in that institution's athletic department.

Additional documents collected for contextual data included current reports providing information on athletic administrator demographics. Prior to all interviews, informed consent documents were emailed to each participant to get their written consent for participation in the study. During the scheduled interview, prior to the audio and video recording, each participant was asked for verbal confirmation to proceed with the interview and informed of their ability to stop the interview at any time.

Another important aspect of the data collection process was my reflective journal. As stated previously, the retelling and reliving of my workplace experiences upon listening to the stories of participants, are key elements of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). The journal served as a reflective tool and as a source of information as I documented my reactions to participant narratives, formulated

initial themes, and prepared to author research texts from a personal standpoint (writing from "I"), a narrative writing technique (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The reflective journal was critical to gathering my thoughts and processing my emotions after each interview. A key component of narrative inquiry is the personal investment of the researcher into all aspects of the inquiry (Kim, 2016). I used my reflective journal to strike a balance between objectively analyzing the stories and being rightfully emotional when participants shared disturbing instances of unprofessional behavior displayed by supervisors and other leaders in intercollegiate athletics.

All initial interviews with participants (one interview per participant) during the data collection phase were semi-structured, consisting of questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix), along with following the lead on topics discussed by the participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 2008). Follow-up interviews for further clarity as needed was part of the initial research design but no additional interviews were required, as I was able to take good notes during each interview to assist with future data analysis.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed by first composing warm-up questions intended to ease the participant into a relaxed conversation and to establish rapport. Additional questions were developed around major themes found in the literature and to assist in eliciting information to address the research questions guiding the study. Sections of the interview protocol included the narration phase (open-ended), conversation phase (direct), and follow-up questions. All questions were intended to elicit rich details to answer the research questions and to provide new insight into Black women's experiences in athletics which are not currently present in the research literature. After the first two interviews, and subsequent analysis of the transcripts, I adjusted my protocol (see Appendix B) further to better ease each participant

into the interview session. Interviews were initially set to be at least 60-90 minutes in length; however, as participants were hesitant to commit to a 90-minute interview, I also adjusted my protocol to allow for a one-hour interview length. Flexibility in time allotted was ideal to remain sensitive to participant work schedules and availability, along with judging by feel when a conversation needed to be extended or was approaching a natural conclusion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Unless the participant was in the middle of sharing a story, most interviews lasted one hour, with a few interviews ranging up to 75 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

Data analysis during the research study consisted of multiple components, including transcription, member-checking, narrative analysis, and narrative coding, all while incorporating characteristics of BFT during the process. First, after each interview, I noted in my reflective journal my initial impressions and takeaways from the interview, along with preliminary themes and statements from each participant that stood out as significant. Reflective journaling assisted with the precoding process (Saldana, 2021). I also documented my emotional reactions to participant stories and recalled my own experiences that were similar to stories heard during interviews. Second, all interviews were transcribed using a transcription service (TEMI). I then reviewed each transcript at least three times and compared them to the audio recordings of the interviews. Reviewing transcripts multiple times was necessary for ensuring accuracy of the field texts and becoming intimate with the data before in-depth analysis began. In addition, my jotted notes from the interviews, recorded actions, happenings, and narrative expressions, assisted in establishing credibility of the research findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mertens, 2020). As the interviews were not video recorded due to problems with the virtual platforms, during data

collection I was intentional to note body language and other physical expressions of significance throughout the interviews.

In addition to multiple readings of the transcripts, I included participant biographies and demographic reports collected during the research study for additional context. For example, during my dissertation study, another annual release of Lapchick's (2021a, 2022, 2023) college racial and gender report cards occurred, along with updated demographic reports produced by the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022a, 2022b). These reports informed the study by showing the latest statistics on the number of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership in contrast to both their peers and the current demographics of student-athletes. I also analyzed participant biographies available on institutional websites to see if they told a story, such as a participant's journey to leadership positions, personal information (marital status, children), the depth of the biography, etc.

My method of narrative analysis of the transcripts was guided by Riessman's (2008) approach on using three types of narrative analysis–thematic, structural, or dialogic. Although each type can be used independently to extensively analyze the data, for my study I focused primarily on one type of analysis (thematic), while also incorporating elements of both structural and dialogic. Thematic analysis focuses on the content of the narratives and is organized around specific themes (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis was also useful for incorporating BFT for interpretation of the narrative, mining the data for concepts indicative of BFT. I was also attentive to the context of time and location in relation to the narratives (Riessman, 2008).

Although I did not conduct a comprehensive structural or dialogic analysis of the transcripts, I made note of significant structural elements (tone of voice and inflection) and dialogic expressions observed during the interview (long sighs, pauses, repetitive phrases,

demonstrative body language, and when answers to questions were evasive). In addition, dialogic analysis focuses on whom the narrative is directed toward (Riessman, 2008). I found significance in certain language used by some of the participants, as it was noteworthy for the cultural references shared between Black people. Examples included participants using language such as "us versus them" when referencing Black people versus White people, sharing details regarding hairstyles, or discussing moments in our (assumed) collective history such as the civil rights movement.

During data analysis, I began to narratively code each transcript. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative coding is used to dissect the field texts (narratives) by items of significance including, but not limited to, places, characters within the text, and experiences. Incorporating tools of narrative coding, I utilized first and second cycle coding, based on the work of Saldana (2021), to analyze transcripts. First cycle coding was the initial attempt to break down and analyze large pieces of data from the transcripts into smaller portions in order to begin assigning meaning and attributes to the data, and also for better understanding of the data (Saldana, 2021). During first cycle coding, I looked for units of narrative to compose generic codes, such as attributes (basic descriptive information), structural (concepts related to the research questions), descriptive (topics and/or short phrases), and In Vivo codes (using the participant's own words) (Saldana, 2021). Using In Vivo codes distinguish participant narratives as research by increasing fidelity, or the trustworthiness of the stories (Kim, 2016).

As I completed first cycle coding for each transcript, I made note of similar themes identified across participants and how they compared and contrasted to themes found in existing literature. I initially intended to use NVivo (a coding software) to generate a visual interpretation of the first cycle codes, to induce more insight into the codes and deeper analysis, as induction is

an example of interpretative suspicion (Kim, 2016). However, it was easier for me to manipulate the transcripts using Microsoft software. Thus, to procure another perspective on my coding strategies, I shared a coded redacted transcript with a peer and with my dissertation chair. They both provided feedback on my initial coding and offered suggestions for future coding cycles. I then used this information to proceed to the second cycle of coding. Second cycle coding is used to synthesize and conceptualize data from first cycle coding, looking for patterns in the first cycle codes to establish more focused codes (the most frequent and significant) across transcripts and to establish themes from the data (Saldana, 2021).

During the process of coding, I continued the practice of reflective journaling and sharing data with my dissertation chair and peers for review. The most salient themes found after a thematic analysis of the data are presented in the research findings in chapter four. A comparison of the salient themes, emergent themes, and divergent themes found during data analysis is discussed in chapter five, in addition to how BFT corresponds to the themes.

Trustworthiness

There were multiple ways to establish trustworthiness in my research study. First, as stated earlier, fidelity of participant narratives was increased through the use of In Vivo codes (Kim, 2016). Fidelity was enhanced by using excerpts from participant narratives, and vernacular language, in the research findings to better engage the audience (Kim, 2016). Riessman (2008) expresses trustworthiness in narrative inquiry is demonstrated by showing data that is genuine, and analysis that is plausible, reasonable, and convincing to the audience. The genuineness of my data is evidenced by keeping accurate documentation of data collection and interpretation through the use of my reflective journal, field notes, and detailed transcription.

Second, trustworthiness was demonstrated through research findings that are pragmatic and have practical use (Riessman, 2008). I aim to use the findings from my research study to aid in practical application of improving the workplace experiences of Black women administrators in intercollegiate athletic leadership, and in higher education leadership overall. Third, after reviewing transcripts for accuracy, I used member-checking to increase credibility by offering to review transcripts with participants (Mertens, 2020). As all participants did not choose to review their transcripts, trustworthiness was demonstrated by selecting a sample of transcripts for peer review of my narrative coding, analysis, and preliminary findings. This process establishes trustworthiness, especially when reviews are completed by peers without a personal or professional connection to my research topic (Kim, 2016; Mertens, 2020).

Next, detailed documentation of the process of determining themes and narrative codes was also a measurement of trustworthiness by showing how data was linked and meaning was attached to each story. Equally important was using excerpts from the narrative to support themes found in the data and to support the theoretical framework (Riessman, 2008). In addition, the reporting of findings that provided an opposing or nuanced viewpoint of themes found in the literature was also key for highlighting the trustworthiness of the data.

One criticism of qualitative research is the belief that research findings, and therefore narrative inquiry findings, have a lack of generalizability to a larger population (Mertens, 2020). While my research findings are not generalizable, qualitative research does have transferability. Transferability involves the researcher providing an in-depth and detailed thick description of the research findings in order for the reader to draw their own conclusions about the applicability of my research findings to other research settings (Mertens, 2020). The depth of my research

findings are directly correlated to transferability and also supports the trustworthiness of my study.

In addition, influenced by the perspective of Bent Flyvbjerg, Riessman (2008) argues transferability in narrative inquiry should not be easily dismissed. The value of an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon, or case study, is that it provides evidence for broad application of a theoretical or conceptual hypothesis, often used in generating knowledge in medical and social sciences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiries examine stories and identity formation of everyday people in everyday life experiences, and the knowledge gained from this research methodology is valuable. In application to my research topic, the knowledge obtained from Black women administrators in intercollegiate athletics contributes to deeper understanding of Black feminist thought, and while perhaps not applicable to all Black women in intercollegiate athletics, is still useful for extending theory.

Limitations

An assumed initial limitation of my study was that the Black women who volunteered to participate may have preconceived notions regarding why Black women are underrepresented in intercollegiate athletic leadership; therefore, only divulging negative experiences they had encountered. As a result, their narratives would possibly only reinforce themes found in the literature. However, since Black women are often neglected in current athletic research literature, my participants' narratives offered another perspective or expansion of the themes found in the literature. Thus, I assumed any recounting of negative experiences was valid. One method employed to counteract this limitation and procure more data was to specifically ask about positive experiences and successes participants had achieved during their career.

Positionality

When conducting narrative inquiry, Clandinin (2016) posits researchers should examine their role or "Who am I?" during the research process. This examination is the narrative beginning of the research study and leads to the justifications for embarking upon a narrative inquiry into a research topic (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). My positionality was an important influence on my choice of research topic and I want to use the narratives from my study to engage the audience on the importance of increasing representation of Black women in college athletic leadership positions.

As a Black woman, I embody the racial and gender identities held by my participants, in addition to my previous work experience in mid-level leadership in intercollegiate athletics. During my intercollegiate athletic career, I also experienced the phenomena identified in existent literature such as the double-bind (Abney & Richey, 1991; Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019), hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant et al., 2002), and a lack of social capital (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Price et al., 2017); thereby, choosing to seek a career in other areas of higher education administration and academia to escape these challenges. However, marginalization occurs for Black women in multiple disciplines in higher education, as evidenced by the literature, and I can also attest to the validity of those experiences as well.

As I have direct working experience within college athletics, my research participants may have viewed me as an insider, thus a positive advantage of my positionality and allowing for the establishment of a relational research design—key for narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). However, prior to commencing my study, I acknowledged some participants could possibly view me with trepidation as an outsider, as I willingly chose to leave the profession, thereby distancing myself from the current athletic work environment in which they occupy. Fortunately, this notion

proved to be unfounded. I believe the Black women I interviewed shared intimate details of their work experiences because of our cultural connection as Black women and because they saw and expressed the value of the research topic. In addition, as ascribed to a tenet of BFT which posits that Black women often help each other achieve success, these women openly shared their desire to participate in my study as a means of helping me obtain my doctoral degree (Collins, 2000).

I am emotionally and professionally invested in researching and sharing the stories of Black women administrators employed in an athletic industry in which their thoughts, ideas, and voices are continually undervalued or dismissed, as evidenced by their underrepresentation in athletic leadership (Lapchick, 2021a, 2022, 2023). I selected BFT as the theoretical framework for my study as an intentional means of combatting the negative images and stereotypes often used to describe and demean Black women. BFT serves to counteract these depictions with stories of resilience and other counternarratives (Collins, 1989, 2000). Instead of attempting to bracket my positionality, I embraced the tenets of narrative inquiry to examine my relationship to the research topic and to participants' experiences (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As such, it was vital during data collection, analysis, and the reporting of my findings to be aware of my positionality throughout the research process. To manage my biases, I kept a reflective journal during the research study (particularly important during narrative analysis), along with soliciting peer debriefers who work outside of athletics (Kim, 2016; Mertens, 2020).

Ethics

In narrative inquiry, Kim (2016) advocates for the development and utilization of *phronesis* by narrative researchers. Phronesis is the ethical practice of acting wisely, being prudent, and doing the right thing, the right way, and at the right time, as a way of honoring both the participant and the research topic (Kim, 2016). Phronesis can be developed by implementing

caring reflexivity throughout the research design as much as possible (Kim, 2016). Caring reflexivity provides a critical reflection on the researcher's role during the research process, along with examining the honor and integrity present in the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Kim, 2016). For the Black women who decided to take part in my research study, care was shown to minimize risks from participation. In interviews with participants, there was a chance that questions about racial and/or gendered experiences in the workplace could cause painful or uncomfortable recounting of memories. As a result, there was the potential for emotional risk while participating in the study. To minimize risk, participants were informed they were free to not answer any questions which may cause emotional discomfort. Some participants became emotional when recounting experiences of discrimination or frustration with being "othered" in the workplace. Care was shown to give the women the space to pause during the interview to collect themselves and I also changed the immediate topic to pivot to another issue.

There is also a potential risk of ostracism within the organization if participants are identified and connected to an unflattering portrayal of the athletic culture at their institution. To minimize this risk, pseudonyms were used for each participant, as well as redacting all university and/or college names that were in the transcripts shared during peer review. As there are so few Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership positions, even with pseudonyms, there is still a possibility of participant identification. For example, data might be collected from a senior women's administrator at a school in the South. As the list of Black women employed in these positions are not exhaustive, it is feasible to narrow the pool of Black women to a manageable number for identification. Thus, extreme care was taken to remove as many identifiers from the research study as possible. As seen in Table 2, I did not identify the women by school,

organization, or NCAA division. In addition, I refrained from intentionally using both first and last names during recorded interviews, all transcripts use pseudonyms, and the list of pseudonyms and other identifiers are kept in Google Drive files stored on my university's cloud storage. These files are only accessible to the researcher and will be deleted after completion of the research study.

While there are a few risks of participating in my research study, there are also benefits. One benefit is the opportunity for participants to share and validate the experiences of Black women administrators in intercollegiate athletic leadership through their narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As there are so few studies specifically focused on the workplace experiences of this group of women, it is valuable to add the perspectives of Black women to existing research literature. The knowledge gained from my narrative inquiry expands current Black feminist literature and hopefully encourages practitioners to engage in difficult dialogues and conversations necessary for both addressing and changing the underrepresentation of Black women leaders in athletics (Riessman, 2008; Taylor, 1998).

Summary

The purpose of my study was to examine how Black women administrators within intercollegiate athletics experience and access leadership opportunities, while providing an opportunity to magnify the voices of Black women often silenced or overlooked in current research literature. Accomplishing this task required an intentional and in-depth focus on the stories and life experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership. Thus, narrative inquiry—a methodology used to capture, describe, and share the lived experiences of individuals and groups through stories—in addition to the assignment of meanings to these stories, was the chosen research design for my study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Foste & Jones, 2020). Data

collection for my study included narrative interviews, along with contextual data including organizational documents, participant biographies, and the researcher's jotted notes and narratives. Data analysis methods included transcription, thematic narrative analysis, narrative coding, and peer reviews. Finally, all components of the research methodology incorporated a Black feminist theoretical framework. Research findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I have a lot of people in my corner. Um, and just because it doesn't look like what other people felt like it should look like now, but they see the steps that I've made...So it, it's okay. You don't have to see it. It's not for you to see. It's for me to know that I'm living and walking in my purpose every day.

—Imani

Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership deserve an opportunity to have their voices magnified, as they are often silenced or neglected in current research literature. As such, the purpose of my study was to examine the experiences of Black women within college athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities in intercollegiate athletics. My research design, qualitative research, was chosen to facilitate sharing the specific stories of Black women leaders in athletics. Qualitative research emphasizes the life experiences of my research participants, in addition to my own life experiences in higher education, as a means to gain and provide knowledge for other Black women, and ultimately all women in similar college athletic work spaces.

Employing narrative inquiry as the research methodology achieved my goal of providing a safe space and an opportunity for Black women athletic administrators to tell their stories, in their own words, and to find meanings in their experiences. Alongside utilizing a Black feminist thought theoretical framework to illuminate the life experiences and perspectives of Black women, my research study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the intersectionality of race and gender in the predominantly White male culture of intercollegiate athletics impacted Black women administrators' leadership journey?

2. How has the intersectionality of racial and gender identity affected Black women's sense of belonging within intercollegiate athletic organizational culture?

3. What are the strategies utilized by Black women administrators to access and navigate the intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy?

Narrative analysis (including thematic, structural, and dialogic analysis) of the interview transcripts, the audio recordings, participant biographies, and my reflective journal, led to the most salient themes synthesized from the data. Themes consisted of both emergent ideas and topics consistent with current research literature, though nuanced. At the conclusion of narrative analysis, the following themes were consolidated from the data: uniqueness/individuality, the (de)valuing of Black women in the workplace, and persistence/survival. The following sections, along with sub-themes present in specific findings, use participant stories to present the overall narrative of the experiences of these Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership.

Uniqueness/Individuality

The story of my research participants begins with understanding how uniqueness and individuality were important leadership attributes for the Black women in this study. Instead of privileging sense of belonging in the traditional sense in which assimilation is often required, their stories described how acceptance of their uniqueness and individuality were barometers for belonging in their individual organizations. Additionally, this theme explores three other sub-themes: acceptance not assimilation, unique employees require uncommon leaders, and one size does not fit all.

Acceptance Not Assimilation

During my interviews, and subsequently during data analysis, a theme emerged suggesting that Black women leaders are not necessarily pursuing assimilation into the organizational culture, but instead are pursuing acceptance. Some of the participants placed more emphasis on their ability to have their uniqueness and individuality as Black women, and their skill sets, accepted and regarded in the work place, as opposed to assimilating into the departmental culture. These women desired organizations with values reflecting the importance of the uniqueness and individuality of its employees.

Based on the stories shared in this study, being genuinely accepted and appreciated as unique individuals due to their racial and gender identities were paramount to Black women's sense of belonging. Asking them to assimilate by adopting to the norms of college leadership in order to become members of the collective intercollegiate athletic family, was antithetical to their sense of belonging and inclusion in each individual organization.

One norm of college athletic leadership is the practice of schools with more financial resources and/or name recognition, as in the Power 5 conferences, setting the ideals and standards in intercollegiate athletics. Often other institutions try to emulate the business practices of these standard-bearers in hopes of achieving the perceived financial success and esteem of these Power 5 schools. Schools are constantly chasing the leaders without examining if their business strategies are sound or are a good fit for their individual institutions. A major example of this in college athletics is the preponderance of conference realignment occurring on an almost annual basis (Gibbons, 2023). Subsequently, individuality is not valued over uniformity when organizations are aiming to emulate a small subset of athletic organizations.

This norm impacted the women in my study, as there were multiple examples of participants who placed high value on people and organizations with the ability to not conform and to "think outside of the box." For instance, when discussing the current college athletic landscape, Nia explains what she sees as a pervasive problem in college athletics and how she can provide a solution.

> Uh, if we would just think outside the box. Too many times people are pointing to the who's, who's the big name that did it first. It, it doesn't even gotta be well, right. Who's the big name that did it first?

In this quote, Nia expressed her frustration with the copycat syndrome she perceived as pervasive in college athletics, stifling innovation. She commented, "So, for example, coming up in a business, it's like, oh, very few institutions are profitable. And I'm like, so why the hell are [y'all] doing all this?" An adherence to the norm of uniformity caused Nia's dismay with athletic organizations utilizing business practices which are not successfully performed but are nevertheless adopted because another big-name program had done it first. Due to her unwillingness to accept the status quo in college athletics, Nia goes on to elaborate,

> So, one of the reasons being, I think the business model needs to change, and I think you need strong leaders at the table to be able to say, 'I'm not afraid to do this thing differently at my institution. And this is what we're doing. This is how we're doing it. This is the why…behind what we're doing.' And I feel like I'm one of those people, like, I'm not afraid to be like, okay, this does not work. Let's find something that does.

Expressing her desire to go against the grain and assert her unique ability as an innovative leader in college athletics, Nia felt her fearless personality is the key to changing the current business

model in intercollegiate athletics. She did not want to assimilate into what she perceives is an industry lacking innovation.

The need to lessen their individual personalities and unique attributes to become more like the dominant demographic of college athletic leadership—White and male—was not an undertaking the participants wanted to pursue for acceptance within the industry. For example, When proffering advice she would give to aspiring Black women leaders, Ebony shared,

> "Be you." I think a lot of people, when they feel like they want to go into leadership, they have to change who they are because they feel like they may not be received when they have the big personality. I mean, God gave us a personality for, he gave every one of us a unique personality. And if the people that, if the senior administration that you're trying to get into doesn't accept that, then they're basically not accepting you. So, continue to be you, cuz someone's gonna want you. Continue to be who you, who you are and **do not (emphasis)** compromise your integrity, cuz it's easy to do.

Ebony and others were steadfast in their belief that Black women need to authentically maintain their individuality while in the workplace. There should not be a need to tone down big personalities for fear of reprisal of being labeled with the stereotypes often attributed to outspoken Black women, such as angry, domineering, or emasculating. The compromising of their integrity as Black women by becoming inauthentically demure and deferent to those in leadership was not an acceptable tradeoff for acceptance within the college athletic industry.

Unique Employees Require Uncommon Leaders

In continuing to tell the story of the importance of uniqueness/individuality for the Black women in my study, data analysis shows these unique employees require uncommon leaders. Participants expressed a desire to work for, or with, other athletic leaders willing to stand out as

autonomous individuals. For example, Imani, who is no longer employed in college athletics, was asked if she would consider returning to a position in intercollegiate athletics. She answered,

> As far as going back to college athletics, um, it's not a hard "no" …there's a lot of factors that would have to be in place. There are very few, for me, it's about the, the type of leader that I would get to work for. At this point, there's like a very few leaders that I would work for in the industry. And I have a lot of insight on a lot of different people. And so that's why I can kind of arguably say that. Um, I am someone who really believes in like inclusive excellence. So, [a leader] who doesn't have a whole staff that looks exact same **<laugh>**…Also want someone who's like transformational and like a visionary. So, can see like where we're moving and not be what "we've always done it like this" type of person.

Sharing a similar sentiment to Nia, Imani also valued uncommon leaders. Imani preferred to interact with athletic leaders willing to be innovators, visionaries, and open to transforming the athletic landscape.

The need to maintain individuality is so important that Imani would only consider returning to college athletics if her professional skillsets and unique talents were prioritized by uncommon leaders, in roles tailored to her specific leadership capabilities. She described an exemplary leader as,

> …someone who just provides me with, um, the ability to be autonomous, um, because like, I, I will never be hired for a specific role. Like a role will be created for me. And that's how it's been throughout my career. Like while I may have walked into a, a particular position, like every single place has been, it's been, I transformed it into something completely different than what it ever was. And so, if I don't have the space to

like truly and authentically be me and like use the gifts that I have to positively impact an

organization, then it's not gonna be a good fit for us because I'm not one of those people

where… I can't like be a caged animal **\<laugh\>** in a system. Like I, I just said, that's not

who I am. It's not who I'll ever be.

Here Imani compared her inability to present herself authentically in the college athletic

landscape to feeling as trapped as a "caged animal." There is an overwhelming need to not

conform to a rigid organizational system she believes is pervasive in intercollegiate athletics.

Thus, the opportunity to work for a visionary leader who embraces her unique skills is the only

option for returning to intercollegiate athletic employment.

Participants also shared another important aspect of visionary leadership. Uncommon

leaders have a multi-cultural and multi-gendered staff, who are not reflective of the prototypical

college athletic leader, i.e., a White male. Achieving excellence in the competitive arena should

not be the singular focus of athletic departments. Rather, participants valued organizations that

were standard-bearers for inclusivity, creating environments where employees with multiple

identities were accepted as whole beings into the organization and encouraged to be themselves.

This is the true barometer for organizational excellence. As such, Gabrielle valued working in an

athletic organization where the leadership prioritized inclusive excellence, which in turn allowed

her the comfort to show up authentically in the work place. She stated,

I'll also say my most recent athletic director that I worked for at **(college)** is like a true

champion. So, he is a White male, 60, maybe 58, 59, but gets it. Like his last three

Associate AD's were Black women. Like he just understands it. Um, not only did I feel

like I could just authentically be me, right. Without him being like, "Oh, here we go.

Another Black woman." Right. **\<laugh\>** …I learned a lot from him. Like he's very

patient, he's very thorough. Um, and I've learned a lot and based some of my

philosophical ... um, viewpoints as I manage people and manage budgets and think about

equity long-term based on what he's done. And some of the things he's doing is kind of

like out of the box.

Here, Gabrielle expressed the importance of working in an atmosphere that values her

authenticity and individuality, in addition to an organization that prioritizes thinking outside of

the box. Working for or with leaders willing to embrace diversity was the preferred work

atmosphere for participants..

One Size Does Not Fit All

The final component of the theme of uniqueness/individuality was the focus on Black

women not wanting to follow one prescribed path to success in obtaining intercollegiate athletic

leadership positions. Participant stories provided insight into the desire for Black women to craft

an individual path to leadership and in developing their skills. They did not believe it was ideal

to follow a prescribed track to leadership as it again reinforces uniformity. Imani expounded on

this sentiment.

I think just industrywide there, there's like this, this, this track you're supposed to follow.

You come in as a graduate assistant and then you become, you know, you get your full-

time [position] and you're supposed to specialize in certain areas. And I am not that

person. Um, I am very multi-passionate…The decision I made was that I'm gonna do and

be really, really great at all of these areas. Um, and that you *can* be great.

In this quote, Imani detailed the typical path athletic employees follow to climb the leadership

hierarchy. This pathway has often resulted in employees specializing in only one aspect of

athletics such as marketing, fundraising, or compliance, as opposed to pursuing excellence in a variety of fields.

Specialization was not a viable option either for Imani or for Gabrielle as they pursued leadership opportunities. In discussing specialization in athletics, Gabrielle stated, "You know, there's just a lot more, there's a lot more to that than what I'm interested in doing." She also explained that due to her unwillingness to specialize, "that means that I can sometimes wear a lot of hats. That's okay. I'd much rather do that, um, than kind of be siloed into this, um, you know, a position." Gabrielle substantiated the importance of crafting a unique pathway to leadership, as she was amenable to assuming multiple responsibilities within her athletic department in order to develop a breadth of professional experience.

Similarly, when analyzing transcripts, I also had a strong personal reaction to the theme of maintaining uniqueness/individuality within college athletics, and also higher education overall. When examining my positionality through my reflective journal, the need to not be boxed into a specific role or career track to obtain higher education leadership positions resonated strongly with me. During my narrative interview with Imani, I remarked,

> it's like, people wanna force you to go a different path, like stay in this box. And that is like, I don't wanna be in the box. Like, that's just not, that's not how I live. I like to know about a lot of different areas. And then that's how you grow.

In this specific conversation, I shared with Imani my frustration of how throughout my career in higher education, I have been constantly judged for having skillsets and interests in multiple disciplines. The predominant train of thought is employees should specialize or develop expertise in only one area because that is the way it has always been done. As such, there is a continual need by supervisors and administrators to place employees, especially Black women,

in one generic box, so that our talents are easier to process and understand, but also easier to dismiss and overlook.

Maintaining their individuality and uniqueness in the higher education workplace, and not conforming to the mainstream, is both an act of resistance and of resilience (Collins, 2000). Not conforming to the norms of uniformity in college athletic culture was also a motivating factor for Tamika, and was a significant reason for her pursuit of leadership and success in the industry. She stated,

> A big motivating factor for me is personal growth, but then also just being different. Um, that is, I think one of the biggest motivating factors outside of money and like generational wealth is just showing my friends and family that there are different ways to be successful. It doesn't have to be the standard way that people put us in these boxes of saying like, no, you can only be this or you can only get to this level.

The need for Tamika to be different and unique from her intercollegiate athletic colleagues in how she pursues success is a significant factor for her pursuit of professional leadership positions within intercollegiate athletics.

(De)valuing of Black Women in the Work Place

Competitive team sports thrives on the feel-good stories of the singular athlete using their individual skills to help their team score the ultimate victory, while also embracing the duality of never becoming bigger than the overall team. Similarly, Black women administrators have had to continually seek avenues to express their individuality in the college athletic workplace while simultaneously finding ways to be embraced as part of an athletic team environment. Black women want to use their individuality and uniqueness to enhance college athletic organizations. However, the similarities between the heroic athlete and Black women administrators ends here..

Whereas the college athlete may achieve icon status and is highly regarded for their individual achievements, the participants in my study shared stories of how oftentimes their contributions and position within the industry are devalued. Emerging from the data, sub-themes of dealing with unwarranted behaviors and limited advancement opportunities were conceptualized to present an overall narrative of the devaluing of Black women leaders in intercollegiate athletics.

Dealing with Unwarranted Behaviors

It is easy for higher education administrators to condemn behavior in the workplace that most people would categorize as outwardly racist, sexist, or discriminatory. Outward expressions of inappropriate conduct from university employees is much easier to identify, isolate, and rectify by providing methods to correct the problem or remove the employee. However, when the actions of those in leadership or other members of the organization do not fit neatly into one of these categories, it becomes much more challenging for employees, especially Black women, to navigate unwarranted behaviors in the work environment. My research participants shared stories of feeling blindsided in the work place.

Two research participants shared stories of negative evaluation experiences which were unwarranted and impacted their behavior in the workplace and in their personal lives. One participant, Ebony, shared her ordeal of being blindsided by a negative evaluation received from her supervisor, which resulted in her removal as an academic advisor for football. Referring to the evaluation as "the worst one I've ever had," she explained that prior to her evaluation, her supervisor had never informed her of any concerns regarding her work performance. Receiving a negative evaluation with no forewarning of any looming performance issues was completely unsettling for Ebony. Her supervisor had also failed to inform her of the specifics of the evaluation process at her institution, as she was a new employee. "In fact, the seven areas that we

get evaluated on, I didn't even know until I had to do my self-evaluation. And that was a week before we had our meeting" remarked Ebony.

While listening to Ebony recount her evaluation experience, it was clear from her body language and from her voice cracking, the experience was traumatic and would be significant in my dialogic analysis of the data after the interview. While gently probing to gain more insight into her experience, I asked her about the process of being removed as a football academic advisor.

C. Stone: Did they give you an explanation why?

Ebony: They just, they, apparently there was a meeting that took place about a month ago. And they, and when I say they, I mean my boss, um, his dotted line boss, I guess um, the AD, it might have been the, even the head football coach was in the meeting, and they just felt like I would not be able to get the job done.

C. Stone: So, you, how were you informed of that meeting? Did someone else tell you, did your supervisor tell you?

Ebony: My supervisor told me during the evaluation. You know, sometimes you, sometimes like when, when something like that happens, you start to question yourself. Like, well, did, did I do that bad of a, can I do this job? And I did have those questions. Like, I, I know what I can do. Um, just like when you hire a coach, they put you on a three-to-five-year contract to turn something around…and to be here in less than a year and like, "Nope, you can't even do it." It's like that. That hurt. That hurt a lot. I think about it sometimes and it makes me mad and angry, but then I'm just like, "Nope, I, I can't let that get to me," but I, I'm not even gonna lie, this morning… getting ready. I had a little bit of anxiety.

Having no forewarning of perceived problems in her work performance, the experience caused Ebony to question her skillset, despite having over 10 years academic advising experience without a negative evaluation. The disconcerting experience even prompted feelings of anxiety prior to reporting to work. For Ebony, the lack of communication from her supervisor regarding her work performance caused her to feel devalued as an employee. Though she disagreed with the evaluation, she was not given an opportunity to improve her performance prior to her removal as a football academic advisor, as if she were irredeemable as an employee. Not having a chance to weigh in before the decision was made caused her to question her competence despite years of professional excellence. The unwarranted unprofessionalism shown by her supervisor was traumatic. Approximately a month after our interview, Ebony exited the athletic department to take an athletic position at another university.

Analogous to Ebony, I also had a negative evaluative experience which was surprising and unexpected. I, too, began to question my competence, my skill sets, and would obsessively replay key decisions I had made. Fortunately, because of my decades of experience and high levels of work performance both in higher education and in professional sports, the time period of questioning my professional competence was relatively short. Conversely, Tamika did not have decades of experience to rely upon when receiving what she perceived to be an evaluation unreflective of her work performance. In another instance, Tamika shares a story of a supervisor's expectation of high performance as long as she understood she would have to wait in line to be compensated for achieving this goal.

Tamika discussed arriving as a new employee in her institution's athletic department and immediately displaying a disciplined work ethic. "My first year I put my head down, I did the work. I didn't, I didn't ask for anything," shared Tamika. She discussed receiving a good

evaluation after her first year of work, with continued expectations of high achievement and work performance during her second year of employment. Tamika stated,

> So, I knew year two, I'm, I'm cooking up. Like I'm, I, I know the student-athletes, they are receiving me well. They come and they come, they come talk to me where, you know, senior-level administration was coming to *me* **(emphasis),** asking *me* **(emphasis),** how to relate to the student-athletes because they didn't have that connection. I was very relatable and I was very welcoming to the spaces where I felt like I was, um, of value because when 2020 hit and the George Floyd [murder] happened, they were looking to me to help navigate the Black student athletes. So that's not in my day-to-day job responsibilities when I got hired. That was not something that I expected to take, but I did it because they looked like me.

In this context, Tamika shared insight into how not only was she successful in establishing connections and building relationships with a variety of student-athletes but she also was instrumental in guiding senior athletic administrators to develop better relationships with their student population. In addition, she was also asked to help navigate conversations and implement programs for Black student-athletes who were trying to process their reactions to the George Floyd murder and subsequent protests.

Due to her perceptions of how her positive attributes were received in the athletic department, Tamika assumed her contributions to the overall workplace were valued. As such, she had realistic expectations of receiving higher compensation after her next performance evaluation.

> So, I think at that point, when I did all of that, then that's when I knew, like, it's not that I'm asking for something that I didn't work hard for or I don't deserve. I'm just now

noticing the value that I add to the program. And I would like to be compensated…and when I went to have my evaluation, um, they were saying, "well, you gotta wait another year to get a title, to get more money, to get all these things". And I'm like that doesn't sit right with me. So, it's like, they only, they reward longevity and not good work. So, they're like, "oh, well this person's been here five years." So, they're up for a [raise], and to me that has nothing to do with me if they're complacent. Okay, cool. If they don't ask, then you don't get, so how, why compare us when, if they never asked and they're complacent, then that's fine. When you first hired me, you knew I wasn't gonna be complacent.

Tamika believed she had successfully demonstrated her value to the athletic department but instead was told to wait for a promotion and salary increase because other employees were next in line due to their length of employment, as opposed to their demonstration of high work performance. Her narrative is an example of the devaluing of Black women administrators in intercollegiate athletic work environments. On one end of the spectrum, Black women are singled out to do the heavy lifting of diversity work (in this case navigating athlete-administrator dynamics in the wake of nationwide protests after the George Floyd shooting). On the other end of the spectrum, the extra work is only valued up to the point in which it aligns with the status quo of promoting employees based on time in the position, as opposed to work performance. Situations such as these minimize the magnitude of work performed by Black women in college athletics, especially when the work is bound to the racial and gender identity of Black women.

Additional examples of outward expressions of unwarranted and boorish behavior from supervisors and colleagues that devalue Black women in intercollegiate athletics were elicited from the stories shared by participants. These behaviors were in the form of both macro and

microaggressions experienced in the work environment. Microaggressions are the brief and common frequent cumulative acts of indignity towards a group of people, most often culturally marginalized groups, which consist of hostile, demeaning, or negative prejudicial behaviors (Patton et al., 2016). Whereas as microaggressions are often subtle and covert behaviors and insults, macroaggressions are more outwardly blatant forms of racism and/or discrimination in behavior or policy (Sykes, 2021). Nia discussed the norms of athletic organizational culture as "sitting in a room with a room full of men all day, every day and them not respecting your expertise, your knowledge, what you bring to the table. That for me has been [an] issue since I got…my very first job." Nia perceived there is an undercurrent present of Black women not having their expertise valued or respected on the job.

Unfortunately, for Black women, at times, the lack of value crosses the line into outwardly disrespectful behavior. For instance, Nia shared a story of a macroaggression that resulted in her not suitable for work (NSFW) reaction to an outburst from a former supervisor.

> My boss, uh, at **(redacted)**, he came to my office, yelling and screaming and he had slammed the door... and I just simply looked up and said, "who the fuck are you talking to?" Like first, like "what, what are we doing here? You can go out and you can come back in when you ready to bring a different energy into my space, because this right here, I'm not gonna do." And he stood there yelling and whatever. And I called downstairs and I said, "can we have security up in, in the **(redacted)** suite for me? And he said, "did you just fucking call security on me?" I said, "Yes. Cuz, I don't feel comfortable in your presence the way you came in here." So there, there are times where I'm like, okay, let me handle this as a professional, whatever. And there are times where I just got [to] throw out that "who the hell do you think you talking to?" … I'm not gonna sit across

from anybody in a personal setting, professional setting, anything in-between and allow

somebody to disrespect me.

Some people may read this story and feel that Nia overreacted to her supervisor's outlandish

behavior and should not have used explicit language or called for security. However, when faced

with a superior entering her office unannounced, yelling, screaming, and slamming doors, I

question what exactly is an appropriate response to that type of outburst in the workplace,

especially in the heat of the moment? Yes, over time, fiery behavior and language has become

synonymous with competitive sports. It is an outward expression of the toughness and grit

expected in sports. Such behavior may be more tolerable when observing coaches motivating

18–23-year-old athletes to execute at their peak level of performance, however it is not

acceptable professional conduct for higher education administrators in the office. Despite what

may be sensationalized as normative in movies or on television shows, microaggressive

behaviors such as this devalue the humanity of Black women. This behavior assumes Black

women should be accepting of demeaning behavior in order to be included in intercollegiate

athletic culture. It also reinforces the racial stereotypes of Black women as asexual or less

feminine than White women, thus it is okay to yell and scream at Black women because their

womanhood is not valid (hooks, 1981).

Although Gabrielle did not share a microaggressive experience of being yelled at by a

supervisor, she detailed the microaggressive experience of facing an unwanted (and untrue)

stereotype of Black women. Following her formal interview for a position, Gabrielle described

what occurred at the onset of the hiring process at the university.

Gabrielle: So I interviewed and it started day one. *(Shakes head)* I know. And this is a

Black male and let me also tell you that, so, yep. Um, so I interviewed. Later that

evening, I got a call from him and I was like, "Hi." And he is like, "Hey, really enjoyed your interview. Wanted to know if you had some time to do an off, off the record meeting." So, I said, "sure", hung up, called a friend of mine who's an attorney. And was like, "I've never been asked to do this. It doesn't sound right."

C. Stone: *It's a very unusual request.*

Gabrielle: Exactly. So, she was like, Go, document it, make sure it's a public place." Okay, fine. So, we ended up meeting… And so, he's just like, you know, "I'm just trying to build a team of mine and I gotta get to know people. Um, you know, one question I gotta ask you is, um, when Black women get money, they lose their minds. You're not gonna lose your mind. Are you?" That's what he said day one. Day one.

The initial encounter with her soon to be supervisor was a harbinger of difficulties she would encounter on the job at that institution. Unfortunately, after making a conscious decision to minimize her interactions with her supervisor outside of the office, the work environment soon became toxic and Gabrielle filed a formal complaint with human resources. The impact of the situation was so traumatic, it negatively impacted her health and eventually she left the university for another position.

Encountering stereotypes in the work environment devalues the contribution of Black women administrators as they pivot their attention away from the job for which they were hired, to decide how to direct their energies in response to frequent microaggressions. These stereotypes devalue Black women by subjecting them to untruths regarding their identities. The unwarranted behaviors results in the othering of Black women as opposed to the valuing of Black women for their multiple identities.

In another story of unwarranted behavior, Laila shared her frustration with stereotypes when her credentials were questioned via an anonymous letter.

> I received an anonymous letter…Yes. The lovely, you know, powerful anonymous letter. You feel so strongly about your words that you had to send this to me anonymously. And basically, just told me they know why I was hired and I'm, um, I'm not qualified and yada yada yada. And I remember just being so pissed off **<laugh>** right. That I, I have worked this hard and I had these credentials and I've done all these things. And this, whoever you are, is sending me this anonymous letter…Um, you know, that, that was, it, it, it's a moment that my parents always speak of cuz they grew up in the sixties and they grew up in the south and you know, but you just never feel, like I, I'd been removed from that for such a long time. And I don't wanna say that I was, I was complacent, but I, I probably was complacent as far as, you know, my feelings of how I was being perceived as a Black woman. And that brought me right back to, well maybe I need to put my guard up even more or, or maybe this is just an idiot, right? Like I, I walk between the two **<laugh>** cause I, I don't wanna be that hardened individual that doesn't give people the benefit of the doubt, but the same time I wanna protect my peace and I'm not gonna be anyone's stomping ground. So, it, it is a delicate balance…I don't think people really understand the impact this has on me and making me feel diminished as an individual…So that's a moment that always kind of sits with me. That's really unfortunate. But, I think, unfortunately most of my colleagues probably have stories like that.

In my interpretation of Laila's story, what stood out for me was her statement of feeling "diminished as an individual." Six of the participants in my study shared stories ascribed to the

idea of diminishment and devaluation as Black women due to unwarranted behaviors from supervisors and colleagues in the workplace. If your humanity is constantly under attack in the work environment, it becomes difficult to find your value and place within the organization, or a sense of belonging, when Black women are simply hoping to be seen as whole.

Although experiencing microaggressions are, at times, part of the athletic landscape for Black women, my research participants responded to them using multiple tactics. Tamika responded to microaggressions using humor, sarcasm, and a measure of incredulity.

Unless it is student-athlete focused, there's not really too many positives right now for being a Black woman [in college athletics]. The pay is not great. Um, the microaggressions are high. Like the other, I would say like last month I had my hair short. "Oh my gosh. Did you cut your hair?" Like it's 2022. We have learned to not ask women about their hair. "Are they pregnant? How old are you?" And it still happens because of entitlement. They just can't, just can't ignore it. You just have to say it. We, we don't get that luxury. Just say whatever we wanna say out loud, like "oh my gosh, are you 65?" Like what? No. Just because you look old, I can't just say, "are you 65 years old?" You know?

Whereas Tamika became frustrated when comments were made about her appearance, Imani chose to use her experience as an opportunity to build relationships within her organization, while continuing to emphasize the individuality of Black women. In discussing the advice she gives to Black women newly entering the profession, Imani stated,

I encourage them to be like whoever who they are, um, be…be consistent with it. So, it's, it's okay. If you wanna have long nails or you wanna wear braids or, you know, have your curly and natural hair, whatever that is. I think it's important though, to be

consistent. And if you change something, because we change things a lot. Cause I'm the

queen of today I have braids. I have straight hair tomorrow…You know, like, I, I, I, I am

very open to have the conversation about change, to educate my peers and not give the

[bad] attitude when they come and they ask something different. Um, cause that's

something that I, I try to let them know, like it's okay to have the, the conversation, um,

because it's gonna help the relationship, too. And I know some folks are like, "well I don't

need to explain X, Y, Z." Well, you're right. You don't have to explain it, but it, it can

help [build] more relationship capital within the organization. So, it's kind of up to you

how you want to navigate that.

While my research participants shared multiple approaches to dealing with macro and

microaggressions, what became clear during data analysis is the time and energy spent by Black

women navigating instances of a lack of respect and unwanted behavior from supervisors and

colleagues. Their stories regarding unwarranted behaviors contribute to the narrative of the

devaluation of Black women in intercollegiate athletics.

Limited Advancement Opportunities

Participant stories detailing limited advancement opportunities contribute to the overall

theme of the devaluation of Black women athletic administrators. Due to the preponderance of

Black women in specific areas of intercollegiate athletics, it leads to the explicit

acknowledgement by other Black women, as these are the spaces in athletics in which we

occupy. Black women are most likely to procure employment and have the highest levels of

representation in positions such as academic advisors or life skills coordinators (Lapchick,

2021b). When referencing the academic area in her athletic department, Trinity shared, "we also

have the most volume of Black people in athletics. Like we, we make up a lot of the Blackness outside of coaching in…in athletics." Michelle also explicitly stated,

> Yeah, I think, um, if you look at the majority of women of color in the positions that they have within athletics, they're either in, um, compliance, student services, um, or they're doing like academic advising. None of those things have a major stage. None of those things are providing you access to people who write checks. None of those things are providing you access to premier sports that have a great deal of visibility, right?

By identifying the spaces in college athletics where Black women are located, it also provides clarity on the majority of spaces in which Black women are not located–mainly in senior-level leadership positions. Michelle expressed when Black women are relegated to academic advising or student services jobs, they are not exposed to opportunities or professional experiences that afford them a larger platform to display their skillsets, therefore limiting advancement opportunities.

The relegation of Black women to primarily athletic supportive roles is evidenced both in the research literature and in employment data. Even if this information was not supported by current literature, it is part of the subjugated knowledge shared amongst Black women in the industry which is used to help Black women navigate an athletic culture that fails to see them as qualified for leadership outside of these supportive functions. Multiple participants quickly identified the areas in which the majority of Black women administrators were housed within athletics–as a way to shed light on the issue but also to illuminate the reasons why this is occurring. For instance, Trinity commented on the apparent segregation of Black women into specific athletic areas. She stated, "I don't know why there's a concentration in athletic academics. Um, maybe cuz other areas just be hiring their friends."

The majority of participants noticed a similarity in hiring patterns throughout intercollegiate athletic administration. The overwhelming majority of intercollegiate athletic leaders, across all divisions, are White and male. These leaders have been more likely to hire individuals into their organizations that mirror the style (values, characteristics) and fit of others within athletic culture, and are most similar to the department leaders. Thus, as suggested by Trinity, if the leaders within athletics tend to hire their friends, and their friends are more likely not Black women, advancement opportunities for Black women are truncated.

The hiring pattern in athletics, which streamlines Black women into specific areas, places limits on the value of Black women and the overall organization. Expressing exasperation as to why she feels college athletics limits itself, Nia remarked, "that's also another reason why college athletics is mediocre and stays in its own way because they're not, they don't hire the best people. They don't seek out the best people, they hire who they're comfortable with." Failure to make allowances for multiple perspectives and diversity of thought, by predominantly hiring those who most resemble the characteristics of current leadership, athletic departments stifle their own development and growth.

In another example of the lack of advancement opportunities, one participant bemoaned a Black woman peer who was unable to be promoted within her organization and chose to seek advancement at another institution. As told by Trinity,

> So, you know, she was here for...years and it took her having to leave to go somewhere else, um, to kind of move up when she, you know, you would think that, you know, you went to undergrad here, you played a sport here. You've been working here and been loyal and that then somebody would've kind of helped you into that higher role, but you

know, people get into higher positions and they bring in their friends and most of the

times [their] friends don't look like us. So here you go.

The "us" Trinity referred to are Black women. During our interview, Trinity felt comfortable

enough to use the coded language shared between Black women to acknowledge the "us"

(Black) versus "them" (White) racial dynamic often present in work environments, and society in

general.

Similarly, because of our shared racial and gender identities I, Tamika disclosed whom

she believes gets hired most frequently and her thoughts on why Black women do not. In

discussing her experiences, Tamika shared,

So, I don't think I was even given an opportunity to show my skillset. But I still do think

that's the hard part where it's sometimes your work doesn't even speak for you. It's about

who you know, and that's the most, the more frustrating part where it's you see that

there's good work, but oh, because you know Johnny and Billy...gonna get the job and

[sic] not even get an interview. **(Long pause)** I think that's more of an issue for Black

women, honestly, because even if let's say, let's say I'm up against somebody's name,

whatever his name is. Michael. I think Michael would get an interview before I would.

My name is **(ethnic name)**. You know what I'm saying?

In this statement, Tamika commented that because she has an ethnic name, and therefore her race

is easily identifiable during the application process, she is less likely to get an interview than

"Michael" or another male who perhaps has a prior relationship with "Johnny and Billy" who

work in the athletic department. Her story reflects the often-shared life experiences between

Black women, as she assumed I understood the "Johnny, Billy, and Michael" references in her

story were White men. An explanation of the racial identities of the characters was unnecessary,

as it was unspoken code between us that I would know she was referring to White men hiring other White men.

Likewise, in another tale of limited advancement opportunities, Jada discussed the phenomenon of athletic leaders only hiring people who they feel comfortable with, which again typically are White males. Jada tells of having a conversation with a previous supervisor who shared an update on the hiring process at her former institution.

> So, it takes a little bit of time. People hire what they're comfortable with. Um, I got a call from an old boss two weeks ago and he said, "Jada, do you know that they, they took your interview questions and eliminated all of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) questions that you had?" I said, "yeah, I bet they did because we were hiring Hispanic people and Black people and it was making them uncomfortable. I was trying to tell you that when I was there, but it's like people, people are comfortable with who looks like them, sounds like them, has the same sort of background, but that doesn't always reflect the students that we're serving." You know, diversity definitely allows for the level of excellence to be raised because you have the ability then to look at things from a multitude of perspectives and people are uncomfortable with that. So, I think there are few [Black women] because of all of those things. Um, because a lot of people have always done what they've always done. They've hired who, who they're comfortable with, who looks like them, who they have access to. And, um, that has resulted in it being a very White and male division and, um, NCAA.

In this passage, Jada detailed her intentionality to diversify employees at her previous institution, such as incorporating DEI practices within the selection process. She believed this effort made other athletic leaders uncomfortable. From her perspective, and supported by employee

demographics, this practice of hiring for comfort versus hiring the best candidate leads to an overwhelmingly White and male leadership hierarchy at both the institutional level and in the NCAA–the governing body of college athletics.

Ultimately, to combat the trend of current leaders hiring their friends, thereby truncating opportunities for Black women within college athletic departments, Imani shared ideas on how to transform the hiring process. According to Imani, here is how the process should begin,

> Well, I think the first thing is just looking around the room. If the room looks exactly the same, that's the first thing, but if it's always comfortable to you and you're participating in group-think every day, because everybody is always on the same page, then that right there is an issue. Um, there has to be someone who's gonna challenge that status quo, um, and what the norms are. And as far as like getting [Black] folks in the room, um, I think it's about elevating those voices. There are like Black women all throughout the organizations. So, you have to give them a chance…They'll create a job for their homeboy. So, like create the same job for Black women, to…give them a space.

Black women wanting to acquire roles in areas that have been traditionally White male occupied, or to reside in rooms in which they have historically been the minoritized racial and gender identity, are automatically deviating from the status-quo of intercollegiate athletics. Black women are therefore cast as outsiders within an athletic culture in which they are seemingly devalued.

Persistence/Survival

Despite the challenges faced by the Black women interviewed for my study, the final theme identified during data analysis was the persistence of these women to exist and advance within intercollegiate athletics, and the tactics they use to do so. Stories of persistence/survival

and subsequent sub-themes—making it better for the next person, areas of support, and humility—combine to provide the narrative of the varied experiences of Black women in college athletic leadership.

Making it Better for the Next Person

Captured from participant interviews, there were multiple reasons why the women continued to pursue leadership opportunities in college athletics. One overwhelming motivation was the ability to make it better for the next person, whether that be other Black women or student-athletes of color. For instance, when discussing her work with student-athletes of color, Tamika commented on her ability "to impact people that way, where it's not necessarily taking on their burdens, but giving them tools and resources to be better. And I think that gives me fulfillment." Here Tamika referenced the fulfillment she received both professionally and personally by helping student-athletes acquire tools to succeed in life. She also expressed a desire to show students how they can be successful in all industries and are not limited to their talents as athletes.

> I think that is another piece that like tugged at my heart because growing up a lot of people don't think that, you know, Black and brown people can do anything outside of sports. And they're just like, you're either gonna be in sports, you're gonna be in entertainment, or like a teacher. You know, those are kind of the areas that they put us in. So, um, it helps me when we're able to give back and I can say, no, let's do something different.

In this passage, Tamika referenced helping student-athletes overcome the stereotypes and diminished expectations often attributed to Black people in which success is limited to certain

acceptable fields such as sports or education. Her motivation to persist is to provide guidance to athletes on opportunities for success outside of these few limited areas.

In addition, Tamika also wants to defy expectations that Black women only establish relationships with students of color and instead are a positive influence for all athletes.

> You know, [a] positive thing that I've been able to gain from just being a Black administrator is that it shows our versatility because not only do Black student-athletes resonate with us, White student-athletes resonate with us more too. It matters how you treat people. So, um, that has taught me that I'm, that I have the flexibility to resonate with both groups, because I do think sometimes the narrative, narrative is well, just because you're Black, you're always gonna get the Black people. Well, what about the White people? They're in my office. So, I think that has been a positive that it's been reassuring to me that I do have the skills to work with both groups.

Her persistence to exist positively impacts all student-athletes but also proves to herself that she is more than a diversity hire used for relating to athletes of color.

The ability to create a positive atmosphere for all student-athletes, irrespective of race, was also communicated by Michelle. When reflecting on her choice to pursue college athletic administration, Michelle stated,

> I want to be able to be somebody who not only is a representation for the, the handful of students of color that were at the type of schools that I, I choose, but I tend to choose very high academic, liberal arts or STEM institutions. That's kind of my space. Um, I, I wanted to be representation for those young people, but honestly, probably more over for the number of White students that will end up being, you know, future leaders. That they can see people that don't look like them as bosses, as people that they wanna hire, as folks

that can be their neighbors, as individuals they wanna make sure to raise their children

with. Right. Like for me, that part is, if not equally, more important to how we kind of

make an impact and, and leave a legacy for what's next.

Michelle is conscious of how her existence and excellence as a college athletic administrator

leaves a legacy for all student-athletes, but specifically White students. She is intentional in

providing a positive representation of Black women in the hopes she can influence the

perspectives White students may have about interacting and existing in environments inclusive

of Black people. Her excellence makes it easier for the next Black woman to be accepted

authentically within athletic leadership.

Furthermore, along with positively impacting students, participants also expressed a

desire to help other Black women reach their goals of pursuing and succeeding in leadership

positions. Participants used their experiences and knowledge gained in the industry, reflective of

principles of BFT, to help other Black women navigate the leadership hierarchy. Nia remarked,

We don't have very many Black females who make it past the mid-management part. So,

sitting in a room with my peers at other schools and saying, "we have a problem here

because women, especially women of color are getting in this business, but they're not

making it to the top of this business." And I would like to solve that problem.

Nia was not the only participant I interviewed who was motivated to provide increased

leadership opportunities for Black women. Sharing a similar sentiment, Laila discussed why she

aims to persist in an often-unwelcoming intercollegiate work environment.

To really overtake and, and really be able to institute change... And I think that's why

we're always, most of the women I know are just huge, such huge advocates of diversity

and inclusion and trying to bring up those women. And I hired a Black woman in my

office. It's um, we got a grant position and I had someone in mind and I knew I didn't

wanna hire another White woman **\<laugh\>** and, um, it, it worked out so two of the three

people in our office are Black women, and that [we] were intentional about that. So, um, I

think as we continue to lift, as we rise and, and bring each other on… um, and a lot of us

are, are doing that. So, we're, we're working it as best we can. We're trying to work the

systems and, and get us in place.

In this excerpt, Laila explained how she and her peers are providing opportunities for Black

women to gain employment and obtain success by working from within the higher education

system to influence hiring decisions. When afforded the opportunity, Black women are

intentional about taking proactive measures to increase diversity and inclusion, specifically for

other Black women, in college athletic leadership.

However, Laila also goes on to share that by taking these intentional measures to increase

diversity within the ranks, she has suffered the negative effects of breaking through institutional

barriers such as having her credentials questioned by peers or receiving an anonymous

derogatory letter due to her racial and gender identity. Fortunately, she is willing to endure the

challenges in the workplace in order to empower other Black women using the knowledge she

acquired from often being the first Black woman in each position she has held.

Yes. Um, I, I feel like I've been a first at a lot of these, so I, but I, I, I never take it for

granted. I definitely feel the pressure of it being that representative and maybe that only

representative that someone will know or engage with. Um, I feel a responsibility to, to

carry that on and, and carry that through. Um, there's, there's definitely pride. Uh, there's

excitement. There's a hope that we stop celebrating these firsts **\<laugh\>** …um, yeah, I

think we're getting there slowly but surely, but I, I, I feel the pressure to make it better for

the next go around. And I always say we're, we're blasting through these glass ceilings

and if I have to take some of those scratches and, and the punctures by, by going through

these ceilings, just so the next person has a little bit of an easier path, then I'm okay with

that. Um, I, I think that's just part of the hand that we're, we're being dealt.

The steadfastness shown by Laila to persist in college athletic leadership for the benefit of other

Black women immediately reminded me of a comment shared by another Black woman leader,

President Roslyn Clark Artis of Benedict College. When discussing her ascent to the presidency,

Artis acknowledged, while it is celebrated when Black women or women of color reach the

pinnacle of higher education, inside or outside of athletics, breaking through the glass ceiling

means "the shards come raining down on you" (Gray, 2018, p. 5), leaving less opportunity to

make mistakes or learn on the job. The burden shared by Black women who are often "the first,

the only, or one of a few" Black women in an organization leaves little room for professional

errors. The burden also motivates Black women to help one another persist in navigating

untenable environments by sharing their hard-earned knowledge—an aspect of BFT (Collins,

2000, p. vii). Black women persist to help other Black women reach their goals.

Areas of Support

Another sub-theme gleaned from the data was the importance of the level of support

available to Black women administrators as they strive to persist within and ascend the

intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy. In the research literature, the value of support

systems for Black women has shown how Black women in administrative roles counteract

feelings of isolation and marginalization within predominantly White work environments (Patitu

& Hinton, 2003; Thacker & Freeman Jr., 2021). The presence of family, friends, and religion—

all external to the work environment—were areas of support for Black women administrators

(Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019). However, for my research participants, the sources of support was more nuanced, materializing in areas both external and internal to the organization.

External Support. Each participant discussed the importance of establishing a network of same-race, same-gender peers within the industry, especially those with similar professional experiences. According to Michelle, if you are a Black woman who aspires to pursue the top levels of leadership, your peers are invaluable.

> Um, and I, and I still actually tell people that now, right, you go to these conferences, conventions, like it's great to try and get in line and meet, you know, all the big wigs. But if you're gonna be doing this for a while, you're gonna need some people that can be in the trenches with you. Especially if some of you wanna ascend to the heights that you're talking about. Sitting in the AD chair is a very lonely chair. And if you need people to like pat you on the back and say attaboy, attagirl, you're not getting that from the people around you, right. You need people that, that are gonna be in the trenches with you.

In understanding the assertions of Michelle who values her peer network as a source of support, it is noteworthy how she references "being in the trenches" twice in her statement. In my interpretation, she is emphasizing the obstacles Black women encounter within college athletics, and the necessity of peer support to fight the battles Black women face in the workplace.

Black women allies perform multiple roles in the lives of Black women administrators. Having a core peer network can provide support for Black women personally but also in the professional space. During her interview, Laila discussed the duality of support from her peer network.

I always tell people that, um, you know, who you know, will get you in a door, but what you know will keep you there. And, um, you know, meaning that you still have to have the knowledge **<laugh>**, um, you still have to be able to speak well and present yourself well. But if you know the right person, some of these positions are coming through backdoor channels or when you're at the bar at the convention or, you know, you're casually talking to a colleague, you know, like, "hey, I need someone." So, the network piece is really big. Um, those individuals are vouching for you. Um, even if they can't hire you themselves, they might be in the room with others that can hire you. So, I think I cannot speak enough about the importance of network, not only for the professional piece and advancement and, and promotion, but also from the, the personal piece. I, I've got my group texts. I know who I can call and vent as a Black woman about what I'm experiencing. "Am, am I being crazy or am I being emotional or is it them?" …Cuz leadership is, is very lonely, especially in, in these positions as AD's and commissioners. So, if I didn't have that, in addition to my, my home support system, I, I don't know where I would be.

Laila believed her peers provide insight into job opportunities that may not pass through traditional job-posting channels, and helped her navigate the mental and emotional challenges she experienced when working with "them" (White people) in college athletics. She ultimately contributed part of her persistence within athletics to her peer network.

Similarly, Nia, explains how her peer group reaffirmed her value as a Black woman in higher education. The support she receives from her peer network, who simultaneously serve as mentors, has proven invaluable to her longevity in intercollegiate athletics.

And then I would also say I am big on peer mentors. I know everybody wants the people above them-the AD's, the, the deputy AD's, you know, that sort of thing-to be their mentor. But I, I got a, a dope set of peers that we just hash out and, and talk about everything. And they, they make sure that the crown stays on the head. Uh, you know, that's, that's all I can say is they, they make sure the crown stay on the head, cuz I can talk to them about anything. Um, and we're kinda all in the trenches, uh, together and learning from each other. And I would say that that's been, um, most valuable to me.

I interpreted two key points from Nia's narrative on the importance of peer support. One takeaway is the reoccurrence of the language of needing support "in the trenches." There is important symbolism in equating a war reference to the experiences of Black women within college athletic work environments.

The second takeaway is the nuance of peer support specifically acknowledging and esteeming the value of Black women. The necessity of Black woman peers for this purpose reinforces how Black women recognize they are devalued in athletic administrative culture. Nia twice references how peers help to ensure "the crown stays on the head." A dialogic analysis provided insight as to the importance of repetitive words and phrases uttered by research participants. In this instance, Nia emphasized the importance of retaining the image of Black women as queens, hence the reference in her narrative to wearing a crown. Black women viewed as queens is a metaphor for upholding the regality and value of Black women in society, and subsequently, in the intercollegiate athletic work space.

In addition, participants shared stories of how the support of peers external to their current institutions assisted in providing proven strategies for success within the workplace. One key recommendation, especially for the women who ascended to top-level athletic positions, was

the ability to negotiate professional development and other perks within their employment contracts. For instance, Jada referenced the actions her peer group advised her to follow before she accepted her current leadership position.

> Um, so it was suggested that I negotiate into my contract, again by this like grouping of women that are helping to support, um, that helped to support one another. It was suggested through that brain trust, like negotiate for executive coaching, negotiate for transportation, negotiate for country club. And I just threw it all out there.

While illustrating how her peer group actively supports one another and taught her how to negotiate her contract, it is noticeable the high regard in which Jada esteems her peers. Jada could have referred to the group of women as a peer group or colleagues. Instead, she refers to them as the "brain trust," which illustrates the knowledge and competence present in this group of Black women.

> Similarly, Gabrielle stated that upon obtaining her leadership position, she also sought the services of a professional coach. Not only did she negotiate this benefit within her contract, she also shares the advice with other first-time senior leaders and why she believes a coach is a necessity.

> I do remember being like as soon, that's the one thing that I'm gonna negotiate is an executive coach and anytime that I am on panels with people, uh, like in front of crowds, whatever, I always recommend, if you're a first-time AD get an executive coach and negotiate that in your contract. Um, so yeah, so I, um, I think it's been super helpful and I think it's helpful for folks who are new in the seat when you just need to like, complain about somebody they don't know, really get some feedback and just really be like, "I don't know." Um, and not feel like somebody's gonna judge you or tell someone else.

Um, so I, I've recommended that to a couple of other colleagues who have stepped in the role.

In her narrative, Gabrielle discusses the necessity of having a confidant within the industry who can also provide constructive feedback on her work performance. Her positive experience in negotiating this key aspect of professional development into her contract is information she passes on to other Black women in senior athletic positions.

Internal Support. While the research literature had very few examples of internal organizational support for Black women, my research participants discussed the value of support within the work environment and its impact on persistence. One explanation as to the lack of peer support within organizations, specifically same-race and same-gender support, is simply the limited number of Black women employed within intercollegiate athletics. As a result, internal organizational support must assume multiple forms. One form of support, described by Tamika, is the support of White allies and their impact on creating opportunities for Black women in leadership.

Um, I think based off of just what I've heard, um, and I've seen is, and it's very unfortunate, but the truth is you kind of have to have like a, a White ally, like a White male ally to help advocate for you in these spaces. If you look at the, outside of, and I, I don't know because I've never worked at a HBCU or you know, the dynamics of what that looks like, but from Power Five institutions and mid-major level, if you look at the staff, it's never multiple Black women. It's one Black woman. And I'm sure it's because the athletic director had, uh, one of his group of men having [previously]worked with X, Y, Z. "Is she good to work with? I need more diversity on my staff." Um, I do think the Black women who are in leadership do phenomenal work. They work their butts off and

I'm pretty sure if they were a man, they would have probably got to that role five times

faster, but they didn't. So, it took them 10 years, 12 years to get to that deputy athletics

role. But I do think their athletic director or somebody on exec staff was either a mentor,

knows somebody that knows somebody, because of the people, who most athletic

directors are White males, so, you have to be able to get along with White men to get a

role like that because those are who you're gonna work with in a day to day. And I don't

think people teach Black women, unless you have good mentors, how to interact with

White men. And that's just calling it for what it is. You don't have enough people who are

willing to teach us this is how you have to be in these spaces and how to play the game in

a space where it's not only male-dominated, but White male-dominated. Cuz that's a

different ball game in itself compared to working with a Black man who's in a leadership

role or the athletic director. So that's just my personal opinion. I can't prove that it's right.

But that's how I think leadership is.

Tamika asserts that Black women need White men as allies in athletics not only to advocate for

leadership opportunities but also to teach Black women how to interact with White men in a

work environment. In her opinion, working alongside a White man in an organization requires a

different skill set than interacting with a Black man in leadership due to the difference in racial

identity. Her perspective reinforces the idea that Black women must transform their personal

characteristics to adapt to the majority culture of the work environment, as opposed to the

organization embracing the wholeness of Black women's intersectionality as a means of

inclusion. Her statement is telling in that it is expected for Black women to contort themselves to

achieve a sense of acceptance within the workspace. However, the dominant culture, i.e., White

men, can choose to be allies, or not, because they currently hold the power within the athletic leadership hierarchy.

Another way Black women feel supported internally within organizations is through the actual display of uncommon leadership qualities by both athletic and institutional leaders. As discussed in the theme describing the value of the uniqueness and individuality of Black women in athletics, Black women appreciate leaders who are innovative, unconventional, nonconformist, and intentionally prioritize diversity in leadership. The perceived level of support experienced by Black women within the workplace is influenced by the type of leader at the top of the athletic department, within the university, and those external individuals who exert significant influence on the institution. Unfortunately, the homogeneity in the demographics of those occupying the majority of athletic leadership positions are often harbingers of if Black women will have support internal to the organization. Reflecting on the current status of Division I athletic leadership, Nia commented on the leadership qualities she prefers within an athletic department, in addition to other factors she considers before accepting a leadership position.

> Um, for me, I need people who lead intentionally, people who can be a leader and also a follower because just because you're at the top does not mean that you're always the right person to carry the water to, to the whale. So that's, that's important for me. Um, I also wanna have a good understanding of who the board of directors are and how they interacted with athletic directors in the past… For me, if I'm going somewhere, I'm not going somewhere where the, the board of directors is all White males. That's not gonna benefit me ever in, in life. And I'm not saying that, uh, Black people or women or [a] minority is, is gonna be, you know, kind of the, the bulk of it. But there has to be some sort of diversity on, on a board. Um, and then culture, culture is important to me. Um, I

could never go in to work at a school, like I probably shouldn't name names, but like a Mississippi State, right. They're, they're never gonna see me as the leader…it's always, "oh, they let that Black woman in" or "they let that Black girl," whatever it is, right. So, I, there's just certain places that I know that I'm not going to go because they're rooted in racism, which lets me know that, that board, them donors, them boosters, gonna be rooted in the same thing. And I'm always gonna be walking on eggshells. Uh, and I need somewhere, that's gonna be a little bit more, uh, progressive in their approach, in their thinking. And again, not just as an athletic department, but the community that's around that athletic department, because oftentimes that's where you get caught up in as, as an AD.

Nia feels most supported when athletic leadership is willing to let her assume leadership responsibilities, with both parties able to lead and follow based on the appropriateness of the situation.

Support is important within the organization but also the culture in the surrounding community is another key component in persistence and survival. Are the leaders in the institution, and the surrounding community, progressive in living and modeling diversity or are the espoused diversity goals expressed in mission statements performative only? Nia perceives universities located in certain parts of the country which historically have had issues with racism, are not on her list of places she would ever consider working. Therefore, her perception is the external environment surrounding an institution exerts influence on internal institutional factors, which impacts the level of support available to Black women administrators.

Humility

Humility emerged as the final sub-theme culled from analysis of participant narratives. Humility serves as a strategy for Black women to depersonalize or distance themselves from the hardships and unwarranted behaviors faced in intercollegiate athletics. Although none of my research participants framed humility specifically as a strategy for success, my interpretation of the narratives led me to conclude humility is another technique Black women use to survive inhospitable environments.

Humility emerged for one participant in how she discussed never having viewed herself as a leader, despite holding leadership positions. It was not until Ebony reflected on a conversation with her mother, where she was reminded of her career accomplishments, that she began to acknowledge her achievements and why she felt the need to engage in humility.

> Ebony: I mean, it makes you feel accomplished like, oh, because honestly, I've never seen [it]. Everyone has always said it. They're like "Ebony, man, I don't care what you say. Like you're a leader" and I, I I've never really saw that. Like even, um, just recently I was talking to my mom, and she started naming off all this stuff that I did. And I was like, "What? I don't even remember half that stuff." And she was like, "You've always been a leader" and I, I guess I've never, you know, how I felt like as a Black woman, as a woman, you kind of wanna, I don't, you don't kind of wanna, but it's almost like humble yourself. So, you don't seem like,
>
> C. Stone: *Is it more that it's that pressure to make sure you don't feel like or exude that you're better than someone else?*
>
> Ebony: Yes. I, I do feel like it is misconstrued when it comes from us, as opposed to them. And when I say them, I mean, White women, White males. I feel like when, when

we act the same way or we carry ourselves the same way, it is in my, in some of my

experiences it's been misconstrued like, "oh, so you think you better than me?" Oh, well,

you know, so I, I never wanna come off like that. So, I guess that's why I've never seen

myself in like, as a leader, but I always seem to get pushed into leadership positions and

roles.

Ebony felt the need, perhaps instinctively as a protective measure, to humble herself and not

display confidence in her professional abilities, as a means to blend in or assimilate within

athletic culture. She perceived showing confidence and talking about her achievements may be

looked upon as a negative attribute for a Black woman, as opposed to White men and White

women. Her way of surviving in the workplace is to be humble, despite the unintended

consequence of not viewing herself as a leader. In this instance, humility is a technique for

persistence but also lessens the value of Black women administrators in higher education. The

outcome of humility as a strategy for persistence contradicts participants' placement on the

importance of appreciating their uniqueness and individuality in the workplace. Humility for the

sake of assimilation prevents Black women from showing up authentically in leadership.

Humility also emerged in the manner in which some participants unabashedly professed

they were still learning on the job, despite seated in leadership positions. Embracing the need to

continue to grow and develop in their careers kept participants grounded and was also perceived

as a professional strength, not a liability. For example, after acquiring a new leadership role, Jada

embraced her willingness to learn and its impact on her work environment.

Um, I feel like I'm still learning, again with, with, um, the background of lifelong

learning. Um, I intend to have a, a growth mindset until the day I die. I always feel like

there's more that you can learn and be challenged with. So, um, I think that the college

I'm at right now offers unique opportunities to affect change, even outside of athletics.

Jada describes her development as a lifelong learner and using a growth mindset to continue to

embrace challenges and learning new things. Her current institution is an ideal match for her

desire to grow and affect change, which increases the chance she will persist and succeed at the

institution because her needs are being met.

Like Jada, Ashleigh openly expressed her desire to continue to develop as an

administrator, and was unafraid to embrace her learning curve. Similar to Jada, Ashleigh was

also new to her current leadership position. Unfortunately, in her short time at her current

institution, she noted perceptions inside and outside of the athletic department that cast her as

unqualified for her role because she was not perceived as a seasoned professional-or old enough

for the job. In defending her qualifications, Ashleigh shared,

> I'm comfortable not knowing what I don't know and learning it and saying that, whereas
>
> there's some[times], I think seen as a weakness for some folks. I'm fine with it because
>
> you know what, you'll know that I'm working toward it, and I'll know it.... But I think
>
> some people will see that as a, um, like "it should have been me." I'm like, "okay, well, it
>
> should have been," but **<laugh>**, um, I mean *enough*.

"Enough" was uttered by Ashleigh in exasperation. "Enough" with having to prove her

professional worth and "enough" of the expectation of needing to be knowledgeable or an expert

in all areas of athletics. She humbly admitted she has more to learn. Her humility is seen as a

strength and provides an opportunity for continued professional growth, a strategy for success.

Finally, humility presented itself for one participant in whom and to what she credits her

career success. Over the course of our interview, Imani exhibited a great level of confidence in

her professional skillsets. Her self-assurance never bordered on arrogance or cockiness because she was insistent on the time, effort, and hard work she put in to acquire her skillsets, both old and new. However, despite her work ethics, she attributed her success in climbing the leadership hierarchy to a higher calling.

> I can't take the credit for, for anything. Um, He has instilled in me different gifts and different passions and puts things on my heart. Um, and He provides me with the opportunity to continue to, to live them out. I didn't achieve those without my faith in Him and uh Him opening doors, or even Him giving me a different vision to know that like one day I'm gonna be there.

The "Him" to which she credits her passion and zeal is her God, and her deeply-held religious beliefs. Without her faith, Imani believed she would not have envisioned herself in leadership roles or would have had the job opportunities afforded to her. Her humility is rooted in her religion and serves as the ultimate motivation for accomplishing her goals.

Summary

After analyzing my research data, three main themes were culled from participant narratives. Narrative analysis and coding produced overarching themes of uniqueness/individuality, the (de)valuing of Black women in the workplace, and persistence/survival within intercollegiate athletic leadership. While there were other lesser themes established from the data, the three themes presented in this chapter were the most significant findings from the data analysis. A summary of the findings will be discussed in detail in chapter five, along with each theme's relationship to the research questions and the theoretical framework, practical implications for higher education, and suggestions for future research studies.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

> Yes, ma'am every position, every position that I've had. I, me, and my friends joke. I am
>
> the Olivia Pope of college athletics.

<div align="center">—Nia</div>

Olivia Pope was a fictional character played by actress Kerry Washington on the widely popular television show, Scandal (IMDb, n.d.). In the political drama, Pope, a Black woman, was considered a fixer—a highly resourceful, intelligent, and well-connected person known for her ability to navigate complex situations and fix the political scandals (or mess) created by those in power (IMDb, n.d.). Pope was often hired by clients after they had exhausted all of their resources and were looking for someone to save the day and help avert a political crisis. Similarly, the role assumed by Pope, is the role Nia believes she, and other Black women, are called to assume in intercollegiate athletics.

During our interview, Nia discussed her perception of feeling as if every position she was hired for was often in response to cleaning up (or fixing) what she perceived as messes, or problems, created by those with positional power in athletics.

> We get hired, women in this business at the Power Five level and minorities get hired to
>
> solve problems. So, when, when everything has gone to hell and it, it, it needs a different
>
> touch, let me bring in the, the woman, let me bring in the, the ethnic minority to say, "oh,
>
> we're, we're doing things differently," right?

While Nia was confident in her qualifications for every position she was hired for, she felt that Black women were often overlooked for leadership positions until being called on to fix problems that others are unable or unwilling to solve.

While it cannot be assumed that all Black women in college athletic administrative roles are hired to fix problems created by others, it is extremely important to provide opportunities for Black women leaders to share their stories and perspectives. Their stories need to be documented and shared broadly to add the perspectives of Black women to the current body of literature on college athletic leadership. By providing space for the collection of these narratives, I am fulfilling the purpose of my study, to examine the experiences of Black women within college athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities in intercollegiate athletics. Utilizing narrative inquiry as the research methodology and a Black feminist thought theoretical framework to illuminate the life experiences and perspectives of Black women, my research study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways has the intersectionality of race and gender in the predominantly White male culture of intercollegiate athletics impacted Black women administrators' leadership journey?

2. How has the intersectionality of racial and gender identity affected Black women's sense of belonging within intercollegiate athletic organizational culture?

3. What are the strategies utilized by Black women administrators to access and navigate the intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy?

In this concluding chapter, I provide an overview of my research questions and how the findings of my study correlate to each question. In addition, during the discussion for each research question, I weave in connections with themes previously found in the literature, linkages to Black feminist thought, and based on my findings, implications and recommendations for the intercollegiate athletic industry, along with future research possibilities.

I also provide a brief synopsis on the limitations of my study, prior to providing a conclusion of the dissertation.

Race and Gender Identity and its Impact on the Leadership Journey

The first research question guiding my study was the exploration of the ways the intersecting racial and gender identities of Black women impact their leadership journey as they navigate the predominantly White male culture of intercollegiate athletics. Through data analysis, I found that all of my study's major findings—uniqueness/individuality, the (de)valuing of Black women in the workplace, and persistence/survival—help explain how the multiplicity of identity impacts the leadership journey for Black women in college athletic administration.

Limited Advancement Opportunities

One manner in which Black women's intersecting identities impact their leadership journey is in my research finding describing the devaluing of Black women in the workplace, specifically in the lack of advancement opportunities in college athletics due to a streamlining of Black women into certain athletic disciplines. These disciplines provide fewer opportunities for advancement into roles with increased responsibility and positional authority. Specifically, the literature reveals the preponderance of women in athletic areas such as academics or life skill development, as women occupy over 60% of all positions in these areas (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021c). Subsequently, academics and life skill development positions are the athletic areas with the highest proportion of Black women.

The preponderance of Black women in these select areas poses a few issues. First, while these positions are an important aspect of athletics, they help student-athletes excel in areas outside of their physical talents; they are often less visible positions in the department and have lower levels of positional authority. When Black women are clustered in these less visible

positions, they effectively become less prominent within the organization and are an afterthought for consideration for leadership. In the daily operations of an athletic department, particularly when viewed from Bolman and Deal's (2017) structural frame, athletic directors and other senior leaders are more likely to interact with employees near the top of the leadership hierarchy such as coaches, budget administrators, fundraisers, etc.—positions that are more front-facing to the public and integral to the business side of athletics. These positions, and the individuals in them, are therefore deemed more valuable to the organization. The more interaction the employees near the top of the organization have with the athletic director, the likelier it is for those individuals to wield more positional power in the organization, typified by a political framing of intercollegiate athletic organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Thus, those in positions outside of these areas and closer to the lower-level of the leadership hierarchy, become second-tier within these organizations, which includes the preponderance of Black women in academic and life skills roles.

Athletic department employees whose work is primarily focused on student life outside of the playing field, and not on the business aspects of college athletics, lends credence to the characterization of athletic organizations as family-oriented, as viewed through a human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Student life positions serve to reinforce the narrative of a caring athletic department, invested in the holistic development of student-athletes. As Black women are hired into these positions, they may become pigeon-holed into traditional family and gender-roles, serving as the cheerleaders or maternal figures in the organization. Current athletic leaders serve lip-service in the valuing of these positions but not necessarily the women seated in the positions. Thus, when top leadership opportunities are available, a more rigid definition of leadership emphasizing traditionally masculine qualities, is used to frame the ideal candidate.

The person hired is pitched as one who can best develop the organizational culture and wield the power necessary for accomplishing the goals and vision of the department through an adherence to structure and processes, not necessarily through creating a caring environment (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

The employee selected is usually touted for their agentic leadership capabilities such as strategic visioning, an ability to hire and develop coaches, lead fundraising campaigns, or facilitate the construction of multi-million-dollar facilities—not for their communal skillsets such as the ability to coordinate career fairs and community service projects for athletes, or keeping them eligible for competition (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al, 2011; Burton & Parker, 2010). Roles that expose employees to budget management, contract negotiation or sport oversight have proven to offer the best opportunities for advancing up the leadership hierarchy, especially if those positions are intertwined with football (Forde, 2020).

Prioritizing these qualities of leadership makes sense when viewing athletic organizations from both structural, political, and symbolic perspectives. Candidates who have more agentic leadership traits reinforce the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, and are sought after for their power and authority to impose their will over the organization. They are perceived to have the necessary strength to lead an organization of coaches and athletes to prominence, especially if there is a belief they can help the institution achieve the athletic status of esteemed programs such as those within the FBS division. Their leadership culminates in establishing an organizational culture in which employees are willing to work long hours and go the extra mile for low pay in order to prioritize the needs of the department over the individual.

Candidates who have the potential to interweave athletic traditions and symbols into the overall fabric of the university are the most sought after, even if these symbols are better suited

for other institutions. These athletic organizations are not necessarily looking for innovators as much as they are looking for candidates who can emulate the success of top-tier programs who have more financial resources, newer facilities, and national television opportunities. Thus, employees in roles focused on student-development, such as Black women in relation-oriented positions, have fewer chances of advancing to roles with more campus/national visibility and positional responsibility. The implication for Black women, by being overrepresented in these areas, is that it severely hampers their chances for climbing the leadership hierarchy.

Though the lack of advancement opportunities for Black women supports extant literature in which agentic leadership capabilities are preferred by those in power, it also provides support for my research finding of the need for Black women to be appreciated for their uniqueness and individuality. While research evidences the prevalence of homologous reproduction in college athletic leadership, my finding of uniqueness/individuality points to Black women preferring to work in organizations with uncommon leaders. Uncommon leaders were identified as those who valued diversity within leadership and in overall employee ranks. Uncommon leaders were innovative and were willing to think outside of the box, whether in business practices or identifying alternate paths to leadership. This type of stewardship runs contrary to leadership in organizations characterized as more structured in its culture. As a consequence, Black women in more structured environments are automatically viewed as outsiders by expressing their unique perspectives, as innovation and individuality are not prioritized in these environments. The Black women in my study wanted to be respected for their talents in multiple areas of athletics and did not want to subscribe to one path to leadership. Thus, the acceptance of their individual talents was an important aspect of their leadership journey, in addition to their sense of acceptance within the organization.

Reinforcement of Gender Roles and Racial Stereotypes

Second, my research finding of the devaluing of Black women in the workplace is exacerbated by the concentration of all women in supportive roles which reinforce gender stereotypes of women. From the data collected in my study, overrepresentation in positions prescribing to stereotypical womanly gender roles and underrepresentation in gender roles typified as masculine, contributes to the devaluing of Black women in college athletics and is intertwined with their racial and gender identities. Though all women in supportive roles may be subject to gender stereotypes, there is more impact on Black women in these roles.

Both agentic and relational positions relegate Black women into dominant culturally-imposed images of the matriarch or the mammy—motherly images which highlight broader systemic concerns in college athletics, and are consistent with challenges raised by Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986; Davis & Brown, 2017; hooks, 1981). For White women in these roles, though they may face stereotypes, they do not carry the same weight as being described as matriarchs or mammies, as these terms are culturally significant to Black women only. The image of Black women as matriarchs, mammies, jezebels, sapphires, and other racist caricatures were created by White people for the sole purpose of dehumanizing Black women in order to prioritize the lives of White women and men (hooks, 1981).

Black feminist thought helps explain how roles representative of the mammy image reinforce racial and gender stereotypes of a more tolerable, amenable, and motherly Black woman—one who is long-suffering, asexual, subservient, nurturing, but most importantly, non-threatening to a White patriarchal society (hooks, 1981; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price et al., 2017). If Black women served in a variety of leadership roles within college athletics, it would indicate acceptance for the uniqueness and individualism they bring to the

workplace, thereby valuing their positionality. It would also indicate a willingness of university administrators, inside and outside of athletics, to be truly innovative leaders by prioritizing diversity in leadership, an uncommon characteristic in leadership as evidenced by the dominance of White men in leadership. Instead, the relative abundance of Black women in supportive roles reinforces the framing of athletic departments as political organizations by creating an imbalance of power. Black women continue to occupy fewer roles in senior leadership, thus lacking organizational power, while White men hold the majority of power as they dominate senior leadership positions.

On one end of the spectrum, there were Black women in my study who sought roles supportive of student-athletes, as they held altruistic intentions of positively impacting and influencing student-athletes of color, in addition to all athletes. For example, in my research finding describing reasons for persistence/survival, Tamika shared one reason for her leadership aspirations is to show Black student-athletes how they can be successful in multiple industries, not just in sports. Tamika was also motivated to prove Black women are adept at building meaningful relationships across identities, not just with student-athletes of color. In essence, she aimed to dispel the notion of Black women as the diversity hire, more capable of building relationships with and nurturing student-athletes of color, as opposed to their White colleagues. Though White women represent the majority of supportive roles, when it relates to issues regarding race, such as responding to the George Floyd murder or coordinating identity-based activities, the women in my study believed those burdens fell disproportionately on the shoulders of Black women.

From the other end of the spectrum, when Black women pursue athletic roles in which leadership qualities are traditionally associated as masculine-sport supervisors (especially

football), contract negotiators, facility managers, etc., they run the risk of running afoul of other culturally-imposed stereotypes. Images of Black women as matriarchs, though motherly, are simultaneously viewed as unladylike (again placing Black women in an asexual identity), emasculating, domineering, and too assertive (hooks, 1981). Traditional leadership characteristics associated with masculinity (strength, aggressiveness, confidence) unfairly casts Black women in a negative light, especially when Black women are referred to using language such as stern, direct, or aggressive–invoking the all-encompassing racial trope of the angry Black woman and reaffirming the matriarch image (Burton et al., 2009; Collins, 1986). These negative stereotypes of Black women serve to devalue them in the workplace by making them more likely to be subjected to unwarranted behaviors such as biased evaluations and microaggressions, as detailed in my research findings.

The implication of this false dichotomy is evidence of the double-bind phenomenon found in the literature explaining the experiences of Black women within the workplace. Black women are both marginalized and oppressed due to their gender and race (Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019) and the specific identity responsible for the othering of Black women is not always easily distinguishable. Black women must choose between roles where they are cast as saviors for student-athletes, sacrificing their needs for the greater good of others, or roles in which they are typecast as emasculating and aggressive for displaying leadership qualities. Both choices devalue Black women in college athletics and limits opportunities for advancement, thereby adversely impacting the leadership journey for Black women.

Race and Gender Identity and its Impact on Sense of Belonging

The race and gender identities of my research participants impacted not only their leadership journey but also their sense of belonging within college athletic organizations. Their

feelings of belonging were influenced by the lack of acceptance of their Black womanhood in the workplace due to an overabundance of hegemony and homologous reproduction. These issues create an athletic culture unwelcoming to Black women and thereby foster a need for Black women to create external systems of support in order to persist and survive within college athletics.

Hegemony and Homologous Reproduction

According to my research findings, for Black women in college athletic administration, both advancement opportunities and their sense of belonging are impacted by the presence of hegemony within the industry. In the literature, hegemony explains how certain social groups wield more power and authority over others, and in intercollegiate athletics, the dominant group in power are White men (Whisenant et al., 2002). Belonginess is a foundational human motivation and a need to create a sense of personal relationship and acceptance within a group (McLeod, 2007). In college athletics, the sense of belonging for employees is impacted by the culture within the organization and the dominant group who sets and reinforces this culture. The dominant group establishes the standards for the qualifications deemed as acceptable or desirable for those wanting to be a part of their environment or group. In intercollegiate athletics, the dominant group are White men, and White supremacy provides them the power to influence athletic culture through hiring decisions and their restraint in accepting a diversity of individuals into the fold.

In my research study, multiple participants shared similar viewpoints of believing a majority of current athletic leaders only hire their friends for open vacancies. Based on my research findings, this practice results in fewer Black women being welcomed into the larger group dynamic and into leadership positions. Without naming the phenomenon seen in the

literature, my research participants referenced the preponderance of hegemony within intercollegiate athletics, and a byproduct of hegemony, homologous reproduction—the physical and social replication of those in power (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Replication occurs as the dominant group of leaders are White men, therefore their friends are usually other men–White men–and they are hired for most leadership positions. Subsequently, a culture develops which sends a message that Black women are not acceptable unless they are willing to settle for positions with lower levels of responsibilities such as in academic or life skill positions. Thus, a sense of belonging in the organization is impacted when Black women are predominantly streamlined into certain areas of athletics, as opposed to welcomed into the entire fold. Black women are allowed admission into the group, they just have to settle for entering through a side door.

While hegemony is a significant influence on athletic organizations, it should be noted that homologous reproduction is not exclusive to any particular social group, it only requires that the dominant group in power socialize new members of the organization to fit the characteristics of current leaders (Stangl& Kane, 1991). For example, participants in my study discussed using their positional authority to hire more Black women, when possible, to combat the abundance of White men in leadership. Though their efforts barely make a dent in improving representation of Black women administrators in intercollegiate athletics, it does prove that homologous reproduction occurs in multiple social groups, even when there is a benevolent intent.

In upholding athletic organizational norms, new members are expected to assimilate by downplaying their unique characteristics in order to be welcomed into the organization by those in power. If one has to lessen themselves in order to fit in, belongingness is subsequently effected as a sense of connectedness to others in the organization which is limited by the inability to be

authentic in the workplace (Strayhorn, 2018). Those individuals who fail to assimilate are cast as outsiders, even if they are granted permission to join the group. Seemingly, those who are seen as outsiders have less social capital specific to their institution, resulting in less power and authority within the organization. Thus, for my research participants, their sense of belonging in college athletic organizations was impacted, as they placed a higher value on their individual characteristics and maintaining authenticity as Black women. Though these women were admitted into the larger culture of athletics, a failure to assimilate cast them as outsiders. Unfortunately, Black women viewed as outsiders is not an aberration, as Black feminist thought explains the outsider-within status Black women often occupy in professional and social environments (Collins, 1986). In athletics, it results in a culture of "us versus them," as implied through the narratives of multiple participants.

In college athletics, Black women are expected to understand the intricacies of athletic organizations such as an intimate knowledge of the qualifications deemed necessary for leadership by men, but yet are marginalized if they display these qualities. When Black women display aggressiveness or directness as leaders, they are then negatively characterized as emasculating or less feminine than their White woman peers. Similar to the narratives supporting my finding of the devaluing of Black women in college athletic administration, Price et al. (2017) found Black women leaders are judged by their gender, their race, and their ability to contribute to the organization. Though some participants found their identities were beneficial in the workplace, they were also limiting, as the women were expected to relate to student-athletes of color and assume supportive roles in the department. Both Price et al. (2017) and my research study support the presence of the mammy-fying of Black women leaders in college athletics.

The lessening of their individuality and uniqueness to gain favor with those in power, in exchange for acceptance within the group (belongingness) or enhanced job opportunities (valuing), was not a tradeoff my research participants were willing to make. Black feminist thought acknowledges the temptation of Black women to grow "smaller," hiding their authentic selves to make the dominant culture more comfortable (Collins, 2000). My research finding of Black women wanting acceptance not assimilation within athletic organizational culture speaks to their unwillingness to compromise their uniqueness, and thereby, their unwillingness to assimilate in an attempt to truly belong within the college athletic industry.

The presence of homologous reproduction in intercollegiate athletics suggests that Black women cannot be themselves and simultaneously expect to fit into athletic culture. Price et al. (2017) found Black women felt pressure to hide their cultural and racial expressions of identity (clothing, language, hair) so they would be judged less critically for their appearance, in comparison to their colleagues. Black women should be expected to lessen themselves to inauthentically form relationships with those in power, simply to gain access to this exclusive club of predominantly White men. My research participants were willing to wait longer for the right job opportunity, in an environment accepting of their Black womanhood, as opposed to increasing their chances for advancement by limiting their expressions of self. As a result, homologous reproduction in college athletics operationalizes a power imbalance in favor of White men and creates competition for limited leadership opportunities. This imbalance creates an environment in which the odds are stacked against Black women for advancement as they have less social capital within the organization, resulting in a need to build community with external support groups to achieve their sense of belonging.

My research finding on how Black women persist and survive within these often-unwelcoming environments at their institutions is for them to seek support outside of their organizations through peer groups, thus creating belonging within these networks as opposed to within their home organizations. Peer networks provide support, which gives these women motivation to persist in seeking higher positions of authority in the hopes of improving the success outcomes for other Black women. As my participants spoke of the importance of peer networks to get insider tips on accessing leadership positions, my research findings add to existing athletic literature focused on networking, social capital, and peer support for the purposes of understanding ways for Black women to access athletic positions (Bower et al., 2015; Burton & Parker, 2010; Hancock & Hums, 2016). However, similar to Patitu and Hinton (2003), the women in my study also valued their peer networks for the affirmations received from fellow Black women administrators as a means to counteract isolation in the workplace, as a result of not being fully accepted as Black women within college athletic organizations. Due to the devaluing of Black women through unwarranted behaviors faced in the work environment, Black women athletic administrators needed to feel a sense of support and community from other outlets, and these outlets proved to be outside of the institution in the form of religion, peers, and mentors.

While analyzing the influence of homologous reproduction in intercollegiate athletics, an interesting nuance arose in my research findings. As stated previously, multiple participants discussed having to overcome the phenomenon of leaders hiring their friends for leadership positions. Interestingly suggested by one participant, a method to counteract homologous reproduction is the ability of Black women to ingratiate themselves within the professional and social circles of the White men in power. In a contradiction of sorts between championing the

individuality and uniqueness of Black women and conforming to the predominant culture of athletics, Tamika commented that Black women should be taught how to get along and "interact with White men." Hence, Black women have to learn how to conform to the norms of White-male dominated spaces such as in intercollegiate athletics. Teaching Black women how to act, or conform, is perceived as a strategy to increase social capital with intercollegiate athletic leaders, thereby increasing advancement opportunities and a sense of belonging for Black women as they are enveloped into the network of White men. Increasing social capital with White men subsequently places Black women in the pool of friends from which future leaders are selected.

However, even when Black women are given tips for success, these strategies are rooted in negative racial and gender stereotypes. Therefore, these concepts substantiate the necessity for research conducted from a BFT theoretical framework to present Black women in a more affirming light (Collins, 2000). Conformity places the focus on what Black women must do to gain acceptance within the White social circles of college athletic leaders. As seen in my research findings, conformity often means Black women must lose the unique perspectives they perceive as adding value to organizations due to their racial and gender identities, as a tradeoff for inclusion and belonging. Again, the women in my study were unwilling to compromise their Black womanhood to increase belonging within the organization.

Conformity also assumes Black women operate from a place of deficiency; therefore, Black womanhood is not enough for inclusion into athletic culture. This idea speaks to my overarching research finding of the devaluing of Black women in the work place. Existing literature evidences the belief that Black women are less likely to be hired because there are not enough women in the pipeline (Barnhill et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2015; Whitford, 2020) and the skills they possess are simply not enough. My participants provided an alternate argument in

which their individual talents and characteristics should not only be sought after in the industry but college athletics would inspire more innovation through a commitment to diversity in leadership.

Increasing the number of Black women in the leadership pipeline will not solve the problem of a lack of diversity, and subsequently belonging, within athletics. Using the organizational frames to provide perspective on how systemic issues are inherent to college athletic organizations, helps in understanding how hegemony and homologous reproduction perpetuate the devaluation of Black women. The predominance of White men in leadership creates a power imbalance that places Black women at the lower end of the organizational hierarchy unless Black women conform to the norms and structure of the established culture. There is one preferred path to leadership which involves developing masculine leadership qualities—qualities that can then be used to marginalize Black women through imposed stereotypes.

In addition, if Black women are welcomed into the athletic family, they are expected to lessen expression of their individualism in order to assimilate or must be willing to play the role of the caregiver or motherly figure in supportive roles. None of these scenarios creates an atmosphere in which Black women are openly accepted therefore belongingness is decreased or nonexistent. The better solution for increasing diversity in leadership and a sense of belonging is the elimination of homologous reproduction, particularly because White men dominate college athletic leadership. As eloquently stated by Imani, if the White men in leadership will "create a job for their homeboy, so, like create the same job for Black women." Imani's suggested strategy will go much further in creating job opportunities and a sense of belonging for Black women, as opposed to focusing on how Black women must conform in order to be accepted.

Strategies to Access and Navigate Leadership

My third research question is a straightforward inquiry to determine how current Black women administrators have been successful in gaining access to and navigating the intercollegiate athletic leadership hierarchy. The literature points to the importance of networking and mentorship as strategies for obtaining both entry-level and leadership positions in athletics (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). In addition the importance of support systems (Clayborne& Hamrick, 2007; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Logan & Scott Dudley, 2019; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) and professional development (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Lumpkin et al., 2014; Quarterman et al., 2006), were revealed in the literature as guidelines to follow for obtaining leadership positions. The participants in my study shared stories on strategies they used to persist and survive in college athletics which supports existing research literature, though my findings add a layer of complexity to the themes found in the literature.

On the surface, the strategic areas of networking, building support systems, and developing professional skill sets make sense. When employees wish to advance in their careers, it is necessary to develop a network of peers, build social capital, develop professional skillsets, and have supportive relationships and environments as a safe haven when professional responsibilities become overwhelming. However, for the participants in my study, these strategies are used intentionally to combat the prevalence of homologous reproduction in intercollegiate athletics, which essentially diminishes the value of Black women within college athletics. As this replication pushes Black women to the outskirts of professional social circles, the women in my study established their own network of Black women within the industry as a source of both professional and personal support for persisting and surviving within the industry.

Making it Better for the Next Person

The network established by my research participants was vital for Black women looking to help each other acquire jobs and advance within intercollegiate athletic leadership. Their peer networks were intentional in helping other Black women succeed. The network served to procure knowledge of available positions within the industry, in addition to tips on prospering once seated in these positions. Similar to information found in the literature, my participants noted how their network alerted them to position vacancies outside of traditional job-posting websites, in addition to serving as mentors and sponsors (Davis & Maldonado; Gray, 2018). My research participants shared stories of the intentionality of their peers, mentors, and sponsors to make the industry more accessible for Black women. This intentionality on the part of Black women is under researched in current athletic literature. Participants in my study discussed how their mentors and peers vouched for their qualifications for available positions with those responsible for hiring and discussed ways to help Black women ascend past middle management.

For two of my research participants, helping Black women access leadership opportunities meant directly hiring other Black women when afforded the opportunity to do so. For other participants, it meant intentionally restructuring interview questions to increase equitable hiring practices, resulting in more inclusive hiring at institutions. In addition, for the Black women in my study who were in senior-level leadership positions, their peer network helped them strategize how to negotiate specific benefits into their employment contracts such as professional coaching, transportation, and other perks. In contrast to the literature, these women provided tangible and practical actions to follow to acquire leadership, as opposed to the more generic advice of finding a good mentor and developing their skills. My participants did not rely

on just offering advice; they took actual steps to introduce Black women to gatekeepers in the industry.

For example, Tamika shared a narrative of a Black woman mentor who went so far as to share hotel accommodations, even though at the time they had never met in person, in order for Tamika to have the opportunity to network at a conference to procure her first foothold in the industry. These Black women were adamant about helping other Black women acquire leadership positions but also intentional in sharing insider knowledge to help the next potential leader succeed. Their actions support the activism seen within BFT as a mechanism to combat oppression in the work environment, using their accumulated knowledge to help other Black women prosper and ascend to athletic leadership (Collins, 1986, 1989).

During my narrative interviews, outside of the women who held roles in academic support services, most participants shared how in multiple leadership positions, they have often been the first Black woman seated in those positions. As such, Black women felt pressure "to make it better for the next go around," thus using their life experiences as "the first, the only, or one of a few" Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership to create an easier path for other aspiring Black women leaders (Collins, 2000, p.vii). As being the first Black woman in a specific role is not unique to my research participants, or their peer network, the knowledge (intellectual thought) these women gained from traversing the majority White-male environment of intercollegiate athletics, combined with the strategies used to diligently persist and survive (their activism), serves as confirmation of the presence of BFT within my research findings (Collins, 1986). Each research finding (uniqueness/individuality, devaluing of Black womanhood, and persistence/survival) evidences how the Black women in my study were cognizant of the challenges and obstacles they faced as Black women in athletics, yet were adamant in forging

their own self-definition and determination of their worth through relationships with other Black women to form their own intellectual thought, used to fight oppression within college athletics.

Humility

Another tactic employed by some of my research participants as a means of navigating the leadership hierarchy is the use of humility as both a strategy for persistence and a means for Black women to depersonalize the hardships faced through their positioning in athletic culture. Humility is operationalized as a tool to survive the devaluing of Black women in athletic administration, as opposed to a simple personality trait. The concept of humility as a professional work place strategy is an interesting dynamic uncovered through analysis of my research data, and one not specifically referenced in the literature review. The presence of humility for these women differs from imposter syndrome in that my participants did not voice feelings of believing they were unqualified for leadership. Conversely, the majority of participants expressed confidence in their skill sets and professional capabilities, and were looking to increase leadership opportunities. Instead there was a conscious effort of at least five participants to exude humility while navigating their leadership journey, though none identified humility as a specific strategy for persistence or survival.

My research participants discussed humility as a tool for avoiding unfair judgement by others. Confidence and assuredness displayed by Black women in athletic administrative positions can be unfairly misconstrued as cockiness, aggressiveness, or a feeling of superiority to others. While a hegemonic culture prioritizes the aforementioned characteristics of cockiness and aggressiveness as akin to leadership, they are viewed differently for Black women, as opposed to their White colleagues. As shared by Ebony, confidence for Black women is misinterpreted when colleagues assume "oh, so you think you better than me?" Therefore, one reason for a conscious

display of humility was to avoid common misconceptions about Black women, specifically the racial trope of the "angry Black woman" (Collins, 1986). To avoid being unfairly typecast as having a superior attitude towards peers or as being angry, humility was used as a strategy to downplay the achievements of Black women within the industry, though its use presents a conundrum for Black women.

One, the need for some participants to employ humility as a tactic to avoid racial stereotypes was so strong that unfortunately, some women failed to see themselves as leaders. When Black women remain so humble that they fail to see their own leadership capabilities, it makes it easier for those in power to ignore their value in the workplace, effectively passing them over for consideration of leadership opportunities.

Two, the strategic use of humility as a defense mechanism for avoiding potential instances of unwarranted behaviors causes some Black women to focus their energies on appearing grateful for the job opportunity, as opposed to talking up their achievements. This practice may serve to survive within the industry but also means their accomplishments may go unnoticed, further reducing opportunities for advancement. Simultaneously wanting to stand out for their uniqueness but also blend into the athletic culture so as to not draw unwanted negative attention, humility serves as the balancing act between the two ends of the spectrum. Humility also serves as a counternarrative to the traditional expectations of athletic leadership characteristics. My participants wanted to be seen as capable of leadership, yet did not want to emulate the aggressiveness and dismissiveness synonymous with the hegemonic masculinity evidenced in athletic leadership. Thus, humility served as a strategy for survival but also as a way to distinguish themselves from their peers, another display of uniqueness.

As Black women focus on survival strategies within the organization instead of concentrating on their career progression, it places Black women at a disadvantage from their peers. Concentrating on ways to persist and survive within athletic culture diverts time and attention away from professional development and displaying the individuality that Black women value as important to their success. Using humility as a means of blending into the athletic environment to avoid stereotypes and make their White colleagues more comfortable, lessens the impact of Black women in the industry. As their self-expression is compromised, this concept corroborates my research findings on the importance of uniqueness/individuality to Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership. When Black women feel they have to suppress aspects of their identities to access professional positions and to survive in college athletic environments, there is a subsequent devaluing of Black women within the overall college athletic industry and sends a message that they do not belong.

Limitations

One limitation of my study was the shared assumption of communal experiences between Black women in general, and Black women specifically in intercollegiate athletics. These shared assumptions resulted in a lack of probing for verification of certain terminology and vernacular used by my participants while sharing their stories. BFT theorizes that all Black women do not have the same life experiences due to differences in class, age, sexuality, religion, and other factors, but there are instances of common experiences due to our shared identities (Collins, 1986). This theory was evident during a few of my narrative interviews. During these interviews, there were occasions where it was assumed by my participants that I knew the exact meanings of their oral and non-verbal expressions based on shared cultural experiences.

For example, Laila recounted a story regarding the receipt of an anonymous letter questioning her qualifications for a particular position. At the conclusion of the story she explained how the incident made her feel diminished, specifically as the letter implied she was unfit for her position because of her identity. She believed that many of her colleagues had experienced similar scenarios which also diminished their value as Black women in intercollegiate athletics. Laila assumed because of our shared identities, I would deduce when referencing her colleagues, she was speaking about Black women. My assumption of her communication style, due to our shared cultural identities, prevented further probing of me asking specifically who the colleagues were that she referenced.

My assumption also negated further clarification when other participants used language in their narratives such as "us versus them." Due to my positionality, my participants did not feel it was necessary to explain the nuances of shared colloquialisms and I did not feel a need to ask. I have no doubt of the veracity of the data collected during interviews, as the trustworthiness of data is established when fidelity is enhanced through the use of vernacular language and phrases uttered by participants. However, trustworthiness would have been heightened if I had asked participants to clarify the exact demographics of the individuals referenced in their narratives, instead of assuming their racial and gender identities.

Implications and Recommendations

One consequence of the devaluing of Black women in intercollegiate athletics is the streamlining of Black women into certain areas of athletic administration, particularly into those units focused on student-athlete support such as in academics and/or life skills development. By streamlining Black women into these supportive roles, it implies Black women cannot be impactful in other areas of athletics and are not capable of significant leadership responsibilities.

One recommendation to combat this perception is for senior athletic administrators to provide interdepartmental professional development opportunities for employees in all areas of athletics. Whether for entry-level staff or more seasoned veterans, intentional exposure to other athletic units within the organization serves two purposes.

First, it allows all employees, but specifically Black women, to develop multi-faceted skillsets in areas such as marketing, fundraising, business operations, and other administrative units. Instead of focusing solely on attending conferences for exposure to emerging trends within the industry, administrators can spark creativity within their own organizations by tapping into the talents of their current employees. Exposure to more functional units within college athletics creates opportunities for Black women to develop new professional talents, to network, and also encourages innovation within athletic organizations. Exposure also creates opportunities for employee immersion in the work areas of other athletic units in a low-risk environment, without having to change jobs or employers.

Second, experiential learning internal to the institution allows increased engagement with all employees in the department, including those from diverse backgrounds. One method to counteract homologous reproduction is to encourage leaders to expand their sphere of influence to include those from a multitude of racial and gender identities. By widening the circles in which candidates are chosen from, intercollegiate athletics will start to move away from the perception, and demonstratable fact, of current leadership (who are usually White men) exclusively hiring individuals with similar attributes.

Furthermore, as more Black women have an opportunity to step into leadership positions, they are positioned to use their individual talents to reimagine athletic leadership in a manner embracive of Black womanhood. As my research finding on persistence details the motivation to

positively impact student-athletes of color, and all athletes, recognition that the ability to impact athletes is not limited to traditionally supportive roles is crucial. Once seated in leadership positions, Black women can choose to redefine the level of interaction and influence they have with student-athletes, such as by designing more inclusive marketing campaigns or providing athletes with the opportunity to see diversity in leadership. The ultimate expression of uniqueness, individuality, and value for Black women is to recreate models of leadership that embraces their authenticity in the workplace and increases opportunities for building community.

Another implication of the devaluation of Black women in athletic administration is the continued need to share the challenges experienced by Black women in their own words. My study's significance lies in the opportunity to educate higher education administrators on the obstacles Black women encounter in the workplace. Obstacles such as enduring microaggressions and dealing with boorish behavior from supervisors as a result of Black women's multiple identities, are significant and pervasive. These negative experiences must be acknowledged to effect real change in the systemic issues plaguing college athletic administration. As the experiences of Black women are overlooked as women (White women) and Black people (Black men) gain ground in athletic leadership, it is imperative to continue to highlight the travails of Black women in the industry and their perceived lack of value within college athletic culture.

My recommendation is to advise academic researchers and the NCAA to conduct more studies on the ordeals of Black women in athletic administration. While it is admirable that the NCAA publishes an annual database on the demographics of those in athletic leadership positions, the numbers only tell part of the story. Black women need to share their unfiltered exploits in college athletic leadership by bringing attention to both their trials and their triumphs.

The entire story of Black women in college athletic administration must be told. There is a need for specific research on Black women in senior leadership positions, in mid-management positions, at Division II and III institutions, at HBCUs, and other areas within the college athletic realm. It is an unrealistic expectation to believe the few studies focused on the experiences of Black women in leadership, including my own, is expansive enough to capture the multitude of reasons Black women are devalued within college athletic administration. In addition to conducting more research, higher education administrators need to use the information procured from research to critically analyze their hiring practices. For monumental change to occur in the diversity of leadership, an intentional focus on hiring practices is warranted. For instance, is the institution exhausting its resources to search for an expansive pool of candidates? Is there an overreliance on search firms used to hire senior leaders, and if so, how are these firms vetted to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion ideals are integral to candidate searches? Are vacancies advertised using a variety of job boards, thus targeting organizations with diverse membership, or do candidates have to know somebody that knows somebody to learn about open positions? And who are these somebodies? Institutions cannot expect an increase in diverse leadership without taking intentional actions to revamp the process in which college athletic administrators are hired.

Conclusion

The purpose of my narrative inquiry was to examine the experiences of Black women within college athletic leadership and how they access leadership opportunities. Utilizing a Black feminist thought theoretical framework for my study, I also sought to provide an opportunity to magnify the voices of these Black women by allowing them an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words. As I conclude my research study, I believe I have achieved the purpose of my

study. While my study elicited participant narratives illuminating obstacles Black women face, extant literature has begun to draw attention to research conducted on underrepresented populations, guided by frameworks and research questions focused on the challenges faced by racial minorities as opposed to strategies for achievement (Harper, 2010).

As research focused specifically on the experiences of Black women in intercollegiate athletic leadership is still an underexplored topic, I argue the importance of shining a spotlight on challenges Black women face in the industry, and the reasons for those challenges. My purpose as a researcher is to forefront those challenges so higher education leaders can better understand the work experiences of Black women in college athletic administration in order to implement practices that actually create a more inclusive environment on our college campuses. To do so, the experiences of Black women must continue to be foregrounded in research and their entire story (trials and triumphs) must be acknowledged and shared. In addition, it is also important from an anti-deficit approach, to focus on the Black women who have achieved success in intercollegiate athletic leadership and the strategies utilized to do so. My research study accomplishes both goals. Also pertinent, researchers must also use caution when using an anti-deficit approach for their studies. When focusing on Black women who have achieved success, care should be shown as to not stereotype these successful Black women as superhuman or having "Black girl magic." Even if an image is intended to positively characterize Black women, it can have a harmful effect if the Black women who have not ascended to athletic leadership are viewed as deficient, as opposed to subject to an unwelcoming athletic culture.

In seeking answers for my research questions, I had the privilege to interview and converse with 10 phenomenal Black women. These women shared stories that were insightful, poignant, frustrating, honest, inspirational, emotionally-taxing, and at times, laugh out loud

funny. In composing my research findings after extensive narrative analysis, I realized that I, as the narrative researcher, co-created knowledge with my research participants and subsequently have contributed to the existing literature on Black feminist thought. In addition, after listening to these women share their experiences, as a narrative researcher, I reexamined my own work experiences in intercollegiate athletics in relation to my research findings on the importance of uniqueness/individuality, the devaluing of Black women in the workplace, and the reasons for the persistence/survival of Black women in college athletic administration.

One specific experience stands out as a seminal moment in which I realized why I had persisted so long in college athletics, despite unsettling experiences, and why I knew I had to leave. In college sports, March Madness does not begin with the start of the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, it commences during conference tournament championships. At the school where I worked, our men's basketball team was favored to win the conference championship and advance to the NCAA tournament. The only thing that stood in their way was a championship game facing their archrival, a school they had defeated two other times during the season.

The championship game had everything you would expect in a college rivalry—fans who disliked each other, coaches who disliked each other, and players who really disliked each other. The game was back and forth action with teams trading baskets, no team leading by more than a few points. Both teams were so evenly matched that the game eventually went into overtime. Down to the last few seconds of overtime, our team trailed by one point and needed one shot to win. Although I was working in a professional capacity at the tournament, thus not permitted to cheer for any specific team, I was cheering on the inside and barely breathing. The ball was in the hands of one of our all-conference players on the team as he dribbled up the court. As the

seconds ticked away, I turned my back on the action, unable to contain my nerves. At the last

moment I turned around in time to see our player miss the three-point shot which would have

won the game. In a fit of despair, he immediately fell to the floor in tears, his jersey pulled up

over his face to prevent everyone from watching him cry. Unfortunately by doing so, he was

unable to see the winning team celebrating in close proximity to where he was laid out on the

floor.

     I immediately knew what was about to occur. I ran out onto the floor to try to get him out

of the way before he got trampled during the celebration. I was too late. Inadvertently while the

winning team was celebrating, someone stepped directly on our student's chest and he

immediately jumped-up, swinging at everyone in sight. Chaos ensued. The security staff ran in to

separate teams as fists were flying everywhere. I grabbed our student from behind, loudly

identifying myself so I could avoid taking a punch in the middle of the melee. Once he realized

who I was, he immediately collapsed in my arms in uncontrollable tears, distraught not only by

the loss, but in missing the game-winning basket. Through sobs, he asked me to help him get to

the locker room where he could compose himself without thousands of fans watching him in this

heartbreaking moment. I threw a towel over his head and proceeded to steadily guide him off of

the court into the sanctuary of the locker room.

     There is no comparable experience to watching a group of student-athletes give their all

in a high-stakes atmosphere and come up short in achieving their goal. The atmosphere in the

locker room after the game was the epitome of pain and silence. As heartbreaking as it was to

watch the team in such a vulnerable position, I treasure that moment. Those experiences, even

when disappointing, bond you to student-athletes and coaches, providing the motivation to

continue to persist in an unwelcoming culture. You are forever chasing that high. It was a

moment I will never forget. Unfortunately, it was also a moment where I knew my time in college athletics would soon be ending, as I would begin pursuing other opportunities in higher education.

Amongst the chaos in the aftermath of the game, I scanned the crowd to find where our athletic director was sitting, while simultaneously guiding our emotionally overcome athlete off of the court. As if in slow motion, I watched our athletic director shake his head in contempt at the melee slowly dying down on the court, both the pushing and shoving between teams, and the on-court celebration of our rival school. And then he left. I watched him turn, walk up the stairs, and out of the arena bowl. At first, I thought that surely he was taking another route to get to the team locker room. Surely, he would offer words of encouragement to both the student-athletes and the coaches who were emotionally drained from the game. I was wrong. The lack of compassion and empathy in that moment, from the leader of the athletic department, was the tipping point for me. I could never hope to be fully appreciated and valued as a leader in our department, when the ultimate authority figure appeared to lack basic human decency. That was the type of culture in which I had persisted and was the reason why I, and so many other Black women, have departed.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol (no Background Information)

Opening Statement: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview about your experiences within intercollegiate athletics. I appreciate you finding time in your schedule to accommodate my interview request. Please note, if there are any questions or topics you feel uncomfortable in discussing, please let me know and we can move on to another area. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You may stop the interview at any time for any reason. Would you still like to continue?

Warm up Questions

Tell me in your words how did you get to your current position today.

OR

You are currently [the job title] at [school name]. How long have you been in this position and what interested you in applying for this specific position?

Where did you matriculate (go to school) and what was your major?

Describe your career path to your current position. (NP)

a. How are/were you informed of career opportunities? How do you become aware of advancement opportunities? (NP)

b. How do you envision your career journey? (NP)

What has been most helpful to you along your career journey? (NP)

Tell me about any mentors or advocates in your career. (CP)

How have you navigated balancing your personal and work responsibilities? (P)

How important are your support systems outside of work? (P)

What support systems do you have inside the industry? (Follow up)

Let's discuss your experience as a Black woman in athletic leadership.

In what ways have you had a positive experience? (CP)

Have you experienced challenges as a Black woman? If so, in what ways (CP)

i. Are those challenges unique to Black women? Explain. (Follow up)

ii. From your perspective, why are there not more Black women in athletic leadership positions?

    iii. What are factors that impact the low quantity of Black women in leadership positions in college athletics?

    iv. If you were giving advice to a Black woman entering the field, how would you advise them on embarking in a career in athletics? What are keys to longevity in this field?

What have you learned in the industry that you wish someone would have shared with you earlier?

What is one idea/lesson that you would like for me to take away from this conversation?

What else would you like to share?

<div align="center">

Ask if not discussed during narration phase

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Mentoring/Networking/Advocacy (RQ3)

- Tell me about any mentors or advocates you have encountered in your career.
- What role does the process of networking play within the college athletic industry?

Strategies (RQ2,3)

- How have you continued to develop your professional skills to better position yourself for advancement opportunities? Are there particular skills more important than others? What are they?

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Follow up/Probing questions (if necessary)

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- Is there someone whom you consider to be a quintessential leader in intercollegiate athletics that is a role model for you? What makes them a role model? Describe them for me. Do you have a personal relationship with this person?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol (with Background Information)

Opening Statement: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview about your experiences within intercollegiate athletics. I appreciate you finding time in your schedule to accommodate my interview request. Please note, if there are any questions or topics you feel uncomfortable in discussing, please let me know and we can move on to another area. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You may stop the interview at any time for any reason. Would you still like to continue?

Warm up Questions

- Tell me in your words how did you get to your current position today.

OR

- You are currently [the job title] at [school name]. How long have you been in this position and what interested you in applying for this specific position?
    - Where did you matriculate (go to school) and what was your major?

Narration Phase Questions

- Describe your career path to your current position.

- How are/were you informed of career opportunities? How do you become aware of advancement opportunities?

- How do you envision your career journey?

- What has been most helpful to you in your athletic career?

- What has had the most impact on your career?

- Let's discuss your experience as a Black woman in athletic leadership.

- If you were giving advice to a Black woman entering the field, how would you advise them on embarking in a career in athletics? What are keys to longevity in this field?

- What is one idea/lesson that you would like for me to take away from this conversation?

- What else would you like to share?

Conversation Phase Questions

Mentoring/Networking/Advocacy (RQ3)

- Tell me about any mentors or advocates you have encountered in your career.

Support systems (RQ2)

- Tell me about a time you received support during your career in athletics. How was this support helpful to you?

Success/Challenges (RQ1, 2)

- What specific challenges or obstacles you have encountered in your career? Please share an example.
    - o Are those challenges unique to Black women in athletics? Explain.
    - o Have your colleagues encountered these challenges? Explain.

Strategies (RQ2,3)

- How have you continued to develop your professional skills to better position yourself for advancement opportunities? Are there particular skills more important than others? What are they?

Follow up/Probing questions (if necessary)

- What role does the process of networking play within the college athletic industry?
- Describe your network of peers. How diverse is your network?
- How have you navigated balancing your personal and work responsibilities?
- How important are your support systems outside of work? What are they?
- How would you describe "success" in this industry? What kind of opportunities for success have you had?
- Using your definition of success, do you consider yourself successful? Why?
- From your perspective, what are factors that impact the low quantity of Black women in leadership positions in college athletics?
- Is there someone whom you consider to be a quintessential leader in intercollegiate athletics that is a role model for you? What makes them a role model? Describe them for me. Do you have a personal relationship with this person?
- What have you learned in the industry that you wish someone would have shared with you earlier?
- What actions do you propose for increasing representation of Black women in the industry? Within senior leadership positions?