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# A Phenomenological Study of the Underrepresentation of Division I Minority Women Athletic Directors

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## **Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**

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Abilene Christian University  
School of Educational Leadership

A Phenomenological Study of the Underrepresentation of Division I Minority Women Athletic

Directors

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Jacquelyn K. Timmons

April 2023

## **Dedication**

My journey toward my doctorate has not been without the hills and valleys and the many, many challenges and obstacles. However, I am thankful to God for his guidance throughout this journey. First and foremost, I dedicate this to my parents, who instilled in me the tools and values: my father, who did not live long enough to see me get that first “piece of paper” (as my mother referred to my diploma) and mother who was able to see me graduate first with my bachelor’s, despite her being far more ill than we realized, she braved the Abilene cold to witness my graduation with my master’s, and she lived to see my acceptance to the doctoral program. Unfortunately, she passed the day after the program began. The loss of my mother remains my most difficult challenge during my dissertation journey. Finally, to the person with whom “we paddle together,” my rock, C. Green, and our wonderful daughter, S.N. Green, I dedicate this to you, for your unwavering support, for reminding me I traveled too far to turn back throughout this process, despite all of the obstacles and that my perseverance was a virtue as I strived to become Dr. Timmons.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to sincerely thank K. Phanor and Dr. Joey Cope for that initial conversation regarding the doctoral program during the Conflict Resolution Residency. Thank you to my first two dissertation chairs, Dr. Christopher Jenkins and Dr. Myron Pope, and my first dissertation manager Dr. Andrew Lumpe. Much appreciation to Dr. Wade Fish for helping me successfully accomplish my Achilles heel, Quantitative Analysis; Dr. Melissa Atkinson, Dr. Basil Considine, Julie Johnson Archer, Avery Weems, and Paula López for their assistance with writing and research; Karla Perkins for assistance with the IRB; Elisabeth Evan for the prayers during her time as my advisor; Courtney Hernandez (a former advisor), Hunter Watson, and Stephanie Ferrell for helping me over this last hurdle; Dr. Nanette Glenn for approving my extension; my fellow doctor friends, family, and mentors, Dr. Barry Brummett, Dr. Brenda Brooks Coleman, and Dr. Stephanie Timmons Brown, for their feedback and encouragement. I greatly appreciate the women who agreed to participate in and who contributed valuable information to my study. It was an honor to have you share your lived experiences. Thank you to my village for their unwavering encouragement and support and who stepped in when needed; A. Jones, A. and G. Leday, A. Lott, B. Keys, C. Hudson, C. Sinegal, D. Boute, D., and V. Green, D. De Rouen, D. Clover, D. Wagner, E. Watson Jr., F. Williford, H. Savoy, J. Davis, J. Gamble Jr., J. Darwin, K. Wordell, L. Washington, L. W. Washington, L. Dennis, M. Gaspard, M. Ravey, M. Bergeron, N. McLean, O. Bob, P. Baker, P. Williams, R. Tschirhart, R. Levege, R. Monell, S. Rozell, T., and V. Young, V. Dennis, W. Haliburton, W. McDaniel, and W. Taylor. Last but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee: Dr. Dana McMichael, dissertation manager, who has been on this journey with me since day one, for all the prayers, assistance, guidance, and encouragement, and Ph.D. comics; Dr. Colleen Ramos and Dr. Jenifer Williams,

my committee members who have also been with me since they agreed to be on my committee for the prayers, guidance, and encouragement; and Dr. Jennifer Butcher, my current chair, who stepped in, agreed to chair my committee at a crucial point in my dissertation journey and has been unwavering in her guidance and support to help me accomplish my goal. I pray I did not omit anyone. Please charge it to my head and not my heart if I did. Thank you to each one of you who provided prayers, positive vibes, fiscal support, and encouragement. You are truly appreciated.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors women of color in athletic administration perceive to be contributors to the underrepresentation of minority women in Division I athletic director leadership positions. The study sought to identify and understand barriers that ostensibly impact women of color. Moreover, it serves current and future minority women to overcome similar trials to advance their collegiate athletic careers. Furthermore, the study sought to provide a lexicon of strategies that minority women regard as bridges to the racial and gender leadership gaps within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) organization. Previous studies are limited regarding social dominance and critical race theoretical frameworks. The need existed to investigate the inordinate number of minority women in NCAA leadership and how that is impacted by the intersectionality of their race and gender. Since the inaugural summary, Dr. Richard Lapchick's The Institute For Diversity and Ethics in Sport report showed college athletics continue to underperform as it relates to racial diversity in NCAA leadership. According to Lapchick, women and people of color lack leadership opportunities in college sports compared to their White counterparts. I collected data from 12 women of color (11 African American women and 1 Asian woman) drawn from collegiate institutions who currently hold varying levels of athletic director and senior women administrator positions within Division 1 athletic departments. The women chosen met the eligibility criterion to provide data from firsthand knowledge. The criteria included being a member of a Division 1 institution's athletic department, being a woman of color, and seeking, having sought, or planning to seek an athletic director position. Material for the study included 12 interview questions, including demographics, career paths, and barriers relating to the research questions. Interview questions were open-ended and allowed participants to expand on their answers and offer additional



information. All 12 women believed gender and racial barriers contributed to the underrepresentation. The participants suggested networking, mentoring, and not limiting their pursuits were necessary to become leaders. Future research is suggested to provide a thorough understanding of the racial and gender inequities in NCAA Division I athletic leadership.

*Keywords:* critical race theory, intersectionality, minority women, National Collegiate Athletic Association, social dominance theory, underrepresentation

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], n.d.) promotes efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion. The mission, vision, and values serve as a foundation for the office of inclusion work as proponents of programming, preparing educational resources, encouraging diverse, unbiased, and inclusive environments that augment the student-athlete experience and furnishing opportunities for coaches and administrators (NCAA, 2022). Numerous researchers have explored the underrepresentation of women and minority women in NCAA leadership positions. This study's topic has been the subject of theoretical and practical consideration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Butler & Lopiano, 2003; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Inglis et al., 2000). Grappendorf and Lough (2006) indicated that previous studies characterize athletic directors as a homogenous body consisting mainly of White men. As a result, African American women continue to endure conflicts and difficulties in pursuing NCAA athletic director (AD) positions, and the intersectionality of their race and gender presents a barrier to their "perceived" success (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Historically, Caucasian men have dominated sports as well as sports governance and leadership positions (Zenquis & Mwaniki, 2019). The NCAA organization objectively formulated its staff's appointment criteria, including gender balance, educational background, work-based experience, and ethnic considerations (Walker & Melton, 2015). Despite these criteria, diversity within the institution remains unbalanced. According to Katz et al. (2018), men dominate 85% of all NCAA intercollegiate AD positions.

The NCAA is a member-managed sporting organization that oversees, assents, sanctions, and executes sports competitions (Katz et al., 2018). NCAA representatives include collegiate institutions within the United States. Every year, the NCAA supports an average of 480,000

student-athletes across all divisions from various colleges and universities to participate in different athletic events (Carter & Hart, 2010). The member-led organization's responsibility revolves around student-athletes' welfare and ongoing success (NCAA, 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2018, the percentage of women in the overall workforce, 57.1%, was almost equivalent to 2017 statistics of 57.0% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The number reflects a decrease from the pinnacle of 60.0% in 1999 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In contrast, men totaled 69.1% in 2018 compared to 86.6% at its pinnacle in 1948 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Currently, ADs administer leadership, context, and supervision, which shape the intercollegiate athletics program (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Following Title IX's enactment in June 1972, women led over 90% of women's sports programs (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). However, their roles changed from leadership roles to include others' duties. Most women ADs' backgrounds included physical education, and unlike their male counterparts, most often taught and performed AD duties for large and essentially unsubsidized women's athletics programs (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

The latest study released by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) in 2019 at the University of Central Florida revealed that leadership positions within Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) college sport remains overwhelmingly controlled by White men (Lapchick, 2019). The report demonstrated the underrepresentation of women and people of color in those positions, resulting in a combined grade of a D on the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC; Lapchick, 2019). According to Lapchick (2019), the less-than-favorable grades in the report indicated how stagnant FBS leadership is regarding diversity. Furthermore, activists in



the athletic field are more aware of the impact of exclusion and the adverse effects of being excluded (Lapchick, 2019). The author also stated that the results failed to match the otherwise diversified proportion of students and student-athletes at postsecondary institutions in the United States (Lapchick, 2019).

The 2019–2020 report depicted the following numbers, showing the lack of diversity: 88.5% of chancellors and presidents were White, 80.8% of ADs were White, 83.6% of faculty athletic representatives were White, and 80% of conference commissioners were White (Lapchick, 2019). More importantly, “77.7% of chancellors and presidents, 76.2% of athletic directors, 52.9% of faculty athletic representatives, and 70% of conference commissioners were White men” (Lapchick, 2019, para. 6).

Sánchez and Lehnert (2019) recently interviewed participants from seven American universities to assess whether experience, negative cultures in administration, and competence influenced women’s appointment to leadership employment positions, such as the NCAA AD. However, the researchers did not explore how the three issues of experience, opposing cultures, and competence applied to minority women’s selection. Burton (2015) examined gender stereotyping in the administration posts of intercollegiate athletics among graduate and athletic undergraduate students. The participants rated masculine characteristics as key in influencing AD appointments.

Conversely, the study by Burton (2015) did not assess feminine managerial roles among minority women as critical characteristics of the AD position. Adriaanse (2015) examined gender diversity in sports governance across the world and revealed that women remain underrepresented in AD leadership positions and three key leadership employment position indicators: chief executives, board chairs, and board directors. Hannan (2006) embraced a global

approach to examining the underrepresentation of women in NCAA leadership employment positions to reveal a perspective (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

According to Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012), the results may not be generalized to women's underrepresentation, particularly minority women in key leadership positions. As such, there is a need to undertake this study based on Lapchick's (2018) insights that minority groups are underrepresented in NCAA leadership. Besides, the available studies have not elaborately presented a comprehensive theoretical framework that can examine the need to understand the disproportionality and intersectionality of minority women in NCAA leadership, further prompting this research proposal. Lapchick (2018) highlighted the number of female student-athletes in terms of representation and compared it with the percentage of female administrators.

The problems identified are associated with the fact that there is a gap in knowledge regarding the experiences of minority women who have sought or are currently seeking AD positions. The issue addressed in the research question was, what barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organizational level?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors that women of color in the athletic department's administration perceive to be a contributor to the underrepresentation of minority women in Division I (DI) AD leadership positions. Identifying the challenges minority women face in their leadership career growth is essential in conforming to those identified hurdles. The study sought to identify and understand these barriers, which ostensibly impact women of color. Moreover, it serves current and future minority women to overcome similar trials to advance their collegiate athletic careers. Furthermore, the study sought

to provide a lexicon of strategies that minority women regard as bridges to the racial and gender leadership gaps within the NCAA organization.

### **Research Questions**

The study investigated three specific research questions as outlined.

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organizational level?

**RQ2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position?

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers?

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of the study relates to the imbalance of gender and racial diversity in the AD's position. According to Beyer and Hannah (2000), intercollegiate athletics is reminiscent of American culture's vast societal experience and compelling features. The United States of America maintains efforts to deal with social change, which creates a public dialogue on societal racial and gender inequalities (Black Lives Matter, n.d.; Me Too Movement, n.d.). As a result, these movements within society are consistent with college athletics and the inequities in gender and race, which are common in big-time college athletics (Cooper et al., 2020).

The results achieved from this research codified critical data for those involved in universities and intercollegiate athletics. Women, specifically minority women, who wish to explore DI athletic administration leadership realms could understand the obstacles faced when attempting to achieve leadership positions. These barriers include bias, inequity, and injustice in the form of racial and gender discrimination. Both the critical race and social dominance theories

required an examination to address the underrepresentation of minority women as DI ADs. Additionally, the study provided the reality and experiences of the women, which encompasses development and advancement in a career as an AD. Furthermore, the research furnishes those in higher education with the data and knowledge necessary to improve the gender and racial diversity of AD roles in DI of the NCAA. While numerical data is vital to the study, the quest to understand the importance of representation in this field is equally important. The voices of the minority women who aspire to become ADs provide a symbiotic view of their experiences. The authenticity of the information received from these women contributes to invaluable firsthand experiences regarding their careers and the obstacles they faced. Therefore, a review of minority women in athletic leadership, the approach to DI AD roles, and the reality and struggles experienced as it correlates to race and gender contribute to the essence of the study.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the context of this study, the following definitions of relevant terms are provided.

**Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women.** Emerged from the 1917 Committee on Women's Athletics to ensure a standard within athletics (Mattheessen, 2015).

**Minority women.** The United States' female citizens who are primarily Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, Latinos, and African Americans (Hollomon, 2016; Lapchick, 2018).

**National Collegiate Athletic Association.** A nonprofit organization that regulates student-athletes (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

**Underrepresentation.** Disproportionally low or insufficient representation of one group at the workplace.

## Chapter Summary

The specific research focus was limited to examining and exploring minority women's DI ADs' leadership underrepresentation. The research scope included African American, Native American, Pacific Islander, Asian American, and Latino women or individuals who work or who worked with these women.

The NCAA encourages efforts to augment diversity and inclusion. The phenomenological study sought the personal experiences of minority women in NCAA DI leadership utilizing the critical race and social dominance theories related to the inequities of minority women ADs. Numerous researchers have explored the inequality of minority women in NCAA leadership. Previous studies characterize athletic directors as a homogenous body consisting of White men. Diversity within the NCAA leadership remains disproportionate.

Prior to Title IX, women held many athletic leadership positions. Following the passage of Title IX, many leadership positions were given to men, and the former women leaders were assigned other duties. Prior research participants rated masculine characteristics as key in influencing (AD) appointments. The available studies have not elaborately presented a comprehensive theoretical framework that can examine the need to understand the disproportionality and intersectionality of minority women in NCAA leadership, further prompting this research proposal. The problems identified are associated with the fact that there is a gap in knowledge regarding the experiences of minority women who have sought or are currently seeking DI AD positions.

Chapter 2 includes a section on literature search methods, a discussion of the theoretical framework, and a background of the NCAA organization. The chapter also includes a historical

perspective of women in sports, TIDES, and women in sports leadership. Additionally, Chapter 2 addresses factors such as equality in women's leadership roles in sports management.

Chapter 3's methodology examined the qualitative aspect of the study and espoused the aspect of these women's lives relating to their experiences. The questions used for the study focused on the personal accounts of women currently serving as ADs or assistant ADs or who have chosen to pursue the career field. I gained beneficial knowledge about the reason for the lack of minority women in NCAA athletic leadership positions. The approach to the methodology provided an awareness of the underrepresentation of minority women in NCAA leadership and identified how it related to the intersection of racial and gender disparities. The objective of the methodology was to expand awareness and obtain valuable knowledge, which might lead to an increase in minority women's leadership roles.

The findings in Chapter 4 examined the answers to the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organizational level?

**RQ2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position?

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers?

The findings revealed the development of numerous themes regarding prior experiences, confidence, deciding against pursuing the position, barriers regarding race and gender, desire to sit in the seat, barriers to the self, barrier to moving, culture, work-life balance, fiscal responsibility, compliance, meeting all requirements, representation, senior woman administrator

(SWA) pathway, search firms, committees, networking, leadership training, and positive mentors.

Chapter 5 includes a review of the findings, the implications, the study limitations, and recommendations for research in the future regarding the underrepresentation of minority women ADs in DI athletics.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors that women of color in the athletic department's administration perceive to be contributors to the underrepresentation of minority women in DI AD leadership positions. The objective of the literature review was to develop an insight into past and current research relating to the inequalities of minority women in NCAA leadership positions. Chapter 2 includes a variety of literature search methods, a discussion on the critical race and social dominance theories, and discrimination. It also addresses intersectionality, gender-based issues, the lack of mentors, diversity, and the motivation to lead. Additionally, Chapter 2 discusses the history of women in sports, the NCAA, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), Title IX, the NCAA and AIAW merger, and TIDES. The chapter also addresses changes to learning institutions, underrepresentation, and the government's role in promoting the representation of minority women in leadership.

### **Literature Search Methods**

Studies have been conducted regarding the underrepresentation of women in AD positions within division one athletics. According to Lovett and Lowry (1994), homologous reproduction of leadership in sports is maintained due to those in power and the tendency to hire those whose looks are similar to theirs. As a result, the group with the most dominance is White men, and therefore gender and racial minorities endure the difficult task of trying to become leaders in sports management (Lovett & Lowry, 1994). The intersection of race and gender plays an important role in the hiring practices of ADs, specifically in DI athletics. This position has been shown to be occupied predominantly by White men. The same segment is primarily responsible for decision-making, specifically in the hiring process. TIDES addresses systemic



racism and inequality that exists in sports (Cooper et al., 2017). TIDES releases reports annually, which document the status of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in NCAA leadership positions (Cooper et al., 2017).

A few strategies occurred that guaranteed articles concerning minority women's underrepresentation in DI AD positions. First, keywords were identified, such as *Division I, athletic directors, underrepresentation, minority women, racial inequality, and gender inequality*. Second, the search for scholarly articles utilized the Abilene Christian University (ACU) school library resources and Google Scholar. The investigation revealed additional resources such as Research Gate, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, Science Direct, Elsevier, EBSCO, Emerald, HEIN Online, Springer Link, and Allen Press. Third, each article's reference section exposed like-minded research, which uncovered 99 scholarly articles.

### **Theoretical Framework Discussion**

According to Columbia Law School (2017), "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" (para. 1). According to Hopkins (2017), Crenshaw (1991) introduced intersectionality to the academic world via her investigation into Black women's employment experiences. Crenshaw (1989) observed that the prevailing way to deal with bigotry focuses on exclusions existing on a singular definitive axis (Hopkins, 2017). Hopkins (2017) revealed that Crenshaw's (1989) observation stated that it "erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Crenshaw's definition is pertinent to this study's goals, considering the significance it plays in the critical race theory (CRT) and social dominance theory (SDT). Both race and gender impact Black women seeking NCAA DI AD

careers. Thus, intersectionality, as visualized by Crenshaw (1989), includes two vital components: the intersectional approach necessary to understand the basis of social inequality and the cause by which they are created and sustained and to produce an alliance of different groups to oppose and alter the status quo (Gillborn, 2015). SDT is significant because it was created to learn the formation and preservation of social echelons (Pratto et al., 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

CRT emerged from critical legal studies (CLS) during the 1970s (Cole, 2009, 2012, 2017a, 2017b; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Walton, 2019). According to Walton (2019), CRT's White supremacy theory is from historical, bureaucratic, and fiscal realism that neo-Marxists should not reject. According to Gillborn (2008), critical race theorists believe the perception of White supremacy is vital to their principle. For example, some scholars contend that White supremacy is fundamental to CRT as capitalism is to the theory of Marxism and a society dominated by men to feminism (Gillborn, 2008; Walton, 2019).

As such, the notion of White supremacy acts as a critical, triple act within the CRT theory. First, it highlights the preponderance and deviousness of racism in the Western world. Therefore, White supremacy secures the fundamental elements and the features of racism that manifest by way of individual and group conduct and points of view (Walton, 2019). Second, it focuses on the importance of a power liaison in the Western world: racism is compellingly injurious to those who are described as non-White, specifically damaging to those individuals specified as Black (Walton, 2019). White individuals possess a deluge of advantages over individuals and groups who are under this White label (McIntosh, 1992; Walton, 2019). Last, the notion of White supremacy reveals that discrimination in Western society is a system of domination by Whites over other non-White individuals (Walton, 2019). White dominance is

continuous due to being renewed or regenerated by those of that race from all classes and does not have a predictable end (Bell, 1992).

Since its onset, CRT has developed into a diverse field that extends beyond legal studies; for instance, education (Cooper et al., 2017; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009) and sport (Cooper et al., 2017; Hawkins et al., 2016; Hylton, 2008). While the theory unfolded, numerous foundational principles emerged as essential to CRT. The related assumptions included (a) continuity of racism, (b) normalcy of whiteness, (c) intersectionality, and (d) social dominance, which was addressed in this study.

In 2004, TIDES was created by Dr. Richard Lapchick to address systemic racism and inequality that exists in sports (Cooper et al., 2017). TIDES produces reports annually documenting the diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender in intercollegiate and professional sports organizations and their progress (Cooper et al., 2017). Since the inaugural summary, Lapchick's report showed that college athletics continues to underperform as it relates to racial diversity in NCAA leadership positions. According to Lapchick (2021), women and people of color lack leadership opportunities in college sports more than their White counterparts. The 2019 TIDES report reveals that Whites represent 84.5%, 89.8%, and 92.5% of AD positions across Divisions I, II, and III, respectively (Lapchick, 2021). The NCAA and college athletic departments assert a level of pride concerning diversity and inclusion hiring practices. However, the intercollegiate athletic administration is not held to the same standards.

The majoritarian narrative, according to CRT, is the majoritarian group's construction of reality that reinforces the tale of its natural superiority to minority groups (Writer & Watson, 2019). In accordance with CRT, the majoritarian characterization confirms the group's narrative of its implicit supremacy over minority groups. The narrative acts to rebut, eliminate, or render

the views of those without power invisible, therefore codifying their subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT embraces the intersectionality of race with other identities, such as gender or sexual orientation (Yosso, 2006). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal for employers to discriminate based on a person's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). These conditions apply to racial inequalities in schools, employment, housing, law enforcement, and imprisonment, among others.

### **Social Dominance Theory (SDT)**

Social dominance, in some instances, establishes a culture in which men exert greater control than women. According to Kleppetø (2019), group discord prevails across history and cultures. Social dominance targets individuals and fundamental aspects contributing to numerous types of group-based oppression (Sidanius et al., 2004). The theory includes all patterns of oppression, such as group-based discrimination, bigotry, ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism (Sidanius et al., 2004). In a culture that tends to embody dominance and inequality trends, those in NCAA leadership exhibit behaviors and beliefs associated with male dominance in certain career fields, such as AD. As Lovett and Lowry (1994) mentioned, White men are dominant. Philosophies that legitimize opinions concerning the supremacy of dominating groups might reduce contention by approving the present hierarchical situation (Kleppetø, 2019; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). SDT examines how factors at various levels combine to develop and recreate both gender inequality and random-set inequality; for example, based on race, citizenship, ethnicity, religion, and class (Sidanius & Pratto, 2003). Institutions such as higher education and NCAA intercollegiate athletics tend to choose individuals whose beliefs regarding group supremacy are compatible with the organization's ideals. According to SDT, when these

ideologies are widely accepted within a society, they justify discrimination and allow some groups to dominate over others based on their gender, age, and, especially, socially constructed markers of group membership such as class, race, ethnicity, caste, and religion—what SDT coins arbitrary sets (Kleppestø, 2019).

As it relates to social dominance, Sidanius et al. (1996) asserted that individuals with progressive attitudes gravitate toward resources that threaten existing power in organizations, while individuals who label themselves as Republican or Independent favor policies that retain or enhance existing inequality. Instead of asking why human beings stereotype others, why individuals are bigoted, why they discriminate, or why people believe there are justice and fairness in the world, SDT inquires as to why human societies favor group-allocated hierarchies (Sidanius et al., 2004). According to Tesi et al. (2019) and Pratto et al. (2006), an element of SDT is social dominance orientation (SDO), explained as the higher a person's SDO level, that individual is more apt to support group-based hierarchies and inequities. A critical indicator in SDT deems that the ramifications of group-based correlations, specifically those supporting or disagreeing with group interests, are mediated by ideals and opinions supported at different levels (Bergh et al., 2019). Institutions such as higher education and intercollegiate athletics demonstrate systemic and individual discrimination. Institutional bigotry within intercollegiate athletics continues to perpetuate a group-based hierarchy with male-dominant athletic directors.

Group-based hierarchy is associated with what is known as the glass ceiling. Gender and racial inequality (intersectionality) are prevalent in NCAA DI leadership. The glass ceiling applies to race and gender, thus explaining the need to examine CRT and SDT. In the Glass Ceiling Act of 1991, Sec. 202, Congress revealed that despite an increase of women and minorities in the workplace, they remained underrepresented in leadership and decision-making

positions, and barriers exist that prevent the advancement of women and minorities in the workforce (Civil Rights Act of 1991, n.d.).

### **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)**

The NCAA began in the 1900s. Formed in 1906, the NCAA was referred to as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association and was responsible for contests and eligibility guidelines for football and other collegiate sports (NCAA, 2020). The Intercollegiate Athletic Association ratified its current name, NCAA, in 1910 (NCAA, 2020). The management of the NCAA evolved over time. Initially, students led oversight of athletic teams. However, deception complicated by the growing commercialization of sports became a cause for concern (Smith, 2000). Smith (2000) noted many of the same problems that existed in the past as it does today, such as the burden to win, continued commercialization, and the demand for an administration and a governing body. Ultimately, following the progression from student control to faculty oversight, other changes occurred. The establishment of conferences replaced faculty supervision, and eventually, the transformation led to the addition of a national body for governance purposes (Smith, 2000).

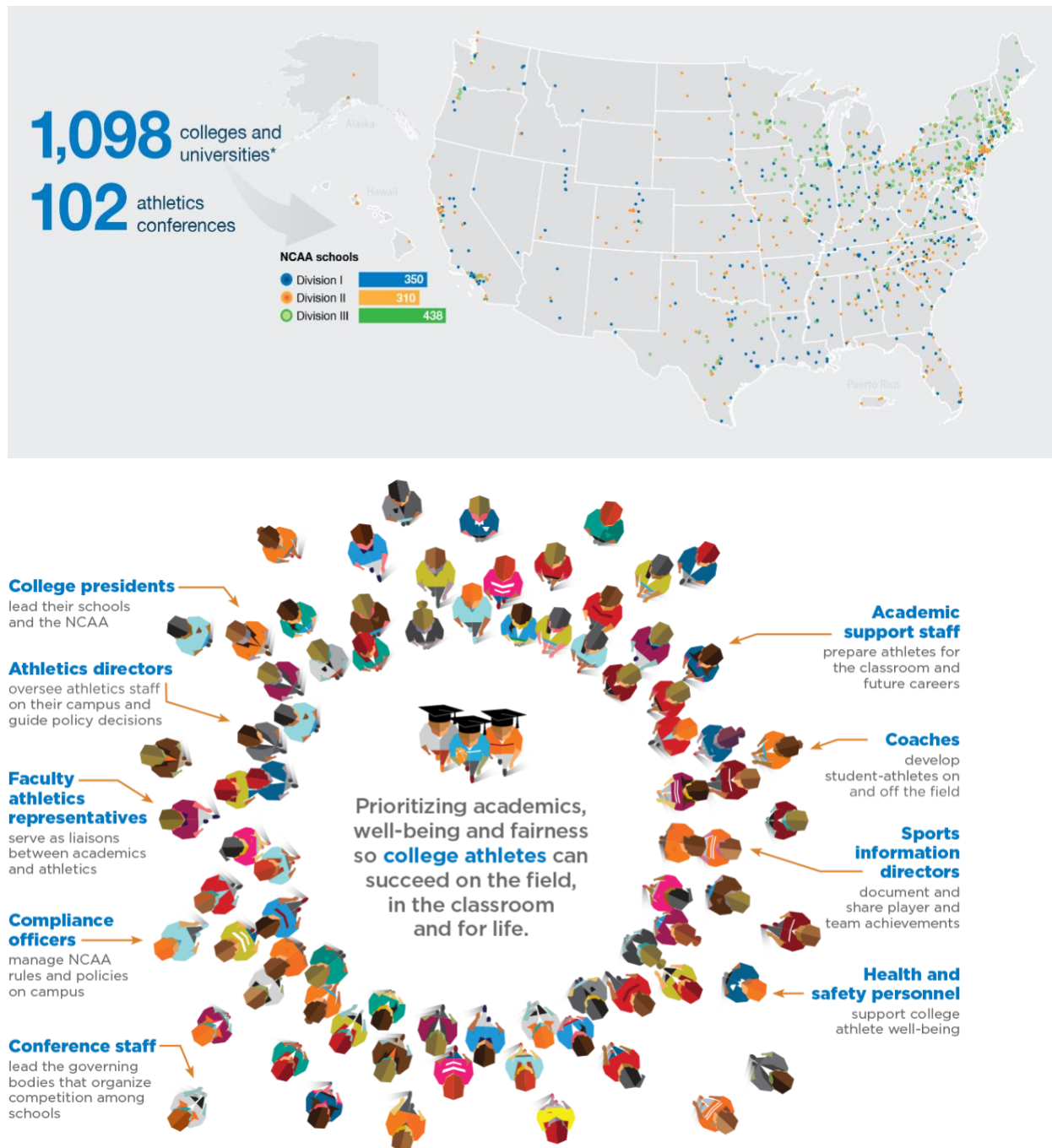
The organization functions as a legislative and administrative authority for men's and women's college athletics. The NCAA drafts and administers rules for athletes and sports and manages athletic contests and championships in 24 sports (NCAA, 2020). The organization is comprised of Division I, Division II, and Division III. The divisions were established in 1973 and offered distinct levels of competition, with each college choosing its division (NCAA, 2020). Intercollegiate athletics is ingrained in the culture of higher education.

For many years, the NCAA's responsibility focused entirely on intercollegiate athletics for men, while women's athletics was under the governance of the AIAW. Over the years, the

NCAA fought to keep men's and women's athletics separate. The NCAA bolstered its effort to enhance intercollegiate athletics through its organization. Women fought for the same with the AIAW, an organization founded and governed by women to give women equity in the sports arena.

**What is the NCAA?**

The NCAA is a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes (see Figure 1; NCAA, 2019, 2020).

**Figure 1***What Is the NCAA?*

*Note.* Reprinted from *National Collegiate Athletic Association*, 2019, 2020

(<https://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa>). Copyright 2009 by the NCAA.



## **Women in Sports, The Beginning**

Women have fought extensively for equality in the sports industry. Before 1870, women's sports lacked competition and focused on recreational and physical activities (Bell, 2008; Gerber et al., 1974). Based on their biological features, women were discouraged and thought incapable of participating in physical activities. During women's entry into higher education, Dr. Edward Clarke (1874) released *Sex in Education, or, A Fair Chance for Girls*, which triggered a relentless and belligerent debate concerning women's physical activity ability (Bell, 2008; Clarke, 1874). Clark asserted that muscular and brain energy should be decreased during menstruation commencement (Bell, 2008). The discriminatory rhetoric regarding women's physical and intellectual abilities continued to impact their quests in sports and leadership roles.

Women educators continued to fight for women's athletics. The Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA) and the American Physical Education Association (APEA) were instrumental in advocating for programs supporting the extensive participation of women (Bell, 2008; Park & Hult, 1993). In 1929, a report titled American College Athletics disclosed that amateur sports were excluded from college athletics as colleges converted athletics to a commercial enterprise and suggested an effort to return intercollegiate athletics back to men (Bell, 2008; Thelin, 1994). As women were again being ousted from athletics, their educators considered those views problematic and forged an effort to form an organization to support women's sports. The Women's Division-National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF) was established to create intercollegiate competition between women (Bell, 2008; Park & Hult, 1993).

As equal rights for women became a focal point, the fight for equal rights in women's sports became part of the deliberation. In 1957, further evolution occurred when the Division for

Girls and Women in Sports (DGWS) issued a statement allowing intercollegiate programs to occur (Bell, 2008). In 1963, additional progress ensued when the DGWS revealed its support by acknowledging the desirability of the existence of women's intercollegiate programs (Bell, 2008; Gerber et al., 1974). The DGWS selected, for the purpose of managing intercollegiate contests, a Commission on Intercollegiate Sports for Women (CISW) in 1966, which was renamed the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) in 1967 (Bell, 2008). As the movement continued, women's sports advanced, as did championships. Women desired a corporate association much like the NCAA, and in 1971 the AIAW replaced the CIAW (Bell, 2008). Therefore, it set the stage for the jurisdiction of women's athletics between AIAW and the NCAA (Bell, 2008; Gerber et al., 1974).

### **Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW)**

The AIAW became operational in 1971. Following the first broadcast contract, the NCAA members coordinated a contentious appropriation of the AIAW, which made the AIAW defunct in 1983 (Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). According to Grappendorf and Lough (2006), the takeover of the AIAW by the NCAA drastically diminished women's opportunities for "championship sports offered for female participants by the NCAA and in the number of women who retained administrative leadership positions" (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012, p. 2).

Before 1951, the NCAA did not have a full-time administration. However, the organization's growth increased its significance, which spurred the sport's development within the United States. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) discussed the importance of understanding the NCAA's historical foundation and the AIAW merger. Additionally, they pointed out the significance of federal civil rights laws regarding access to education and the fortuity for

employment as a means for understanding contemporary problems pertinent to women and intercollegiate leadership in sports.

Discrimination practices against specific minority groups in the United States have been a problem since the Civil Rights Act was signed and enacted in 1971. The sports industry portrays the best picture of minority groups' discrimination, especially with the underrepresentation of minority ethnic subgroups among women in leadership (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). The extensive research into the underrepresentation of minority ethnic subgroups among women has borne fruits to some extent. Minority women leadership in sports and, more specifically, the NCAA has yielded crucial information that has helped open doors to a few women in leadership positions. Researchers stated that previous studies have failed to shed light on women's emotional and cognitive issues in competitive sports (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Patton, 2016). Some studies have similarly linked the mistreatment that women have endured in the sports industry's leadership positions, which conversely has caused hesitation among other women when attempting to attain various leadership positions (Patton, 2016).

Historically, Caucasian men have dominated sports and sports governance and leadership. Numerous researchers have studied the underrepresentation of women and minority women in the NCAA's leadership positions. The topic has been the subject of theoretical and practical consideration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Butler & Lopiano, 2003; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Inglis et al., 2000; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Grappendorf and Lough (2006) indicated that previous studies characterize ADs as homogenous, consisting of White men. Even though Caucasian women have made strides, African American women continue to endure conflicts and difficulties, such as bias and discrimination in pursuing NCAA AD leadership positions due to their race and gender.

According to Katz et al. (2018), men currently dominate more than 85% of all NCAA positions, which hinders women's effective participation. Women's participation in athletics has increased during the past decades, and currently, women participate in many sports activities that men previously dominated. Many women engage today in competitive sports such as football, distance running, golf, baseball, and basketball (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). Likewise, women continue to demonstrate excellence in various sports in which they participate. Even with the increased participation of women in sports, there is a limitation in the representation of minority women in the NCAA within sports activities.

### **Title IX**

The law that served as the catalyst for Title IX was the 1964 Civil Rights Act. According to the Women's Sports Foundation (2019), "Before Title IX, one in 27 girls played sports" (para. 3). As of 2019, the number of females playing sports was two in five (Women's Sports Foundation, 2019). The enactment of Title IX facilitated girls' and women's involvement in sports. Before Title IX, girls and women lacked opportunities such as admission to certain postsecondary institutions. The distribution of athletic scholarship awards was practically nonexistent, and women could only pursue limited courses of study. Title IX evolved from the need to promote equality for women in education and sporting activities.

A senator from Indiana, Birch Bayh, introduced a bill known as Title IX to amend the 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Bell, 2008). According to Bell (2008), the amendment acknowledged the diminished access in the educational arena for women and confronted the inequities women experienced in athletic and extracurricular interests in academic organizations within the United States. The law banned discrimination based on a student's gender. The bill materialized as Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which was

signed on June 23, 1972 (Bell, 2008). Section 901 (a) revealed that no one could be prohibited from participation, refused benefits, or be discriminated against in any educational curriculum or activity were the recipients of federal financial assistance (Bell, 2008).

A need existed to ensure every institution adhered to the new law. As such, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) was tasked with regulations for implementing the amendments (Bell, 2008). However, the regulations did not protect a Duke University athlete. Heather Mercer tried out and failed to make the Duke football team despite being an all-state placekicker. In 1994, she became the first woman to try out for the team. Mercer became the state placekicker. The coaches informed Mercer she was a member of the team following a scrimmage in which she kicked the winning field goal. However, Mercer was not afforded the same privileges as the men on the team. They prevented her from attending preseason camp, she did not receive a team uniform, was encouraged to participate in cheerleading and sit in the bleachers with her boyfriend, and was eventually removed from the roster (Greene, 2005). HEW's regulations failed to protect Mercer. Instead, the regulations permitted member institutions to deny those of the opposite gender an opportunity to try out for single-sex teams for unspecified reasons or any reason for contact sports (Greene, 2005).

The enactment of Title IX facilitated women's involvement in sports. Such accomplishments promote the process by federal law enactment meant to safeguard persons from discrimination based on sex in educational activities or programs that get federal financial aid. Despite the progress, the number of women assuming coaching roles has reduced. Before the law passed, an estimated 90% of women's teams were coached and managed by women (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2020). Female administrators and coaches reduced as more men pursued coaching positions in women's teams and administrative positions. At present, very few athletic

departments are governed by women across the three divisions of the NCAA (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2020).

According to Acosta and Carpenter (2014), before Title IX, greater than 90% of ADs for women's athletic programs were female. However, not long after Title IX, approximately 85% of the athletic programs were controlled by men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). As of 2020, there are two Black women, two White women, six Black men, five men described as other, and 48 White men in NCAA DI AD positions (see Table 1; NCAA, 2021).

**Table 1**

*NCAA Demographics Database Spreadsheet*

Gender–race/ethnicity	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Female, Black	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	1	1	2
Female, White	4	4	3	4	6	5	5	4	2
Male, Black	5	5	8	9	9	10	10	9	6
Male, Other	2	2	2	2	4	3	6	6	5
Male, White	49	49	51	52	47	47	43	44	48

*Note.* All participant information was identified as directors of athletics. The years represent the years of the NCAA report, and the numbers are how many Ads are in each category according to race and ethnicity. Reprinted from *National Collegiate Athletic Association*, 2021

(<https://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/ncaa-demographics-database>). Copyright 2021 by NCAA.

### **The AIAW and NCAA Merger**

The AIAW was tasked with awarding national championships to women in intercollegiate athletics. The AIAW provided 41 championships in 19 sports and three divisions during its existence (Wushanley, 2004). Following the AIAW women's inaugural television

contract in 1981, members of the NCAA coordinated a contentious acquisition of the organization by voting to offer championships to women in the NCAA and forcing the AIAW to cease operations by 1983 (Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). The annexation resulted in a negative effect on women in leadership. According to Grappendorf and Lough (2006), leadership opportunities for women declined drastically. Additionally, championship sports for women decreased.

### **The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports**

TIDES completes an annual College Sports' Racial and Gender Report Card (CSRGRC). TIDES disclosed information from the report to point out improvements in specific areas and dormancy and a decline in the racial and gender structure of professional and intercollegiate sports employees (Lapchick, 2018). The report also provides an avenue to increase racial and gender diversification in departmental and administrative positions (Lapchick, 2018). According to Lapchick (2018), college sports earned a C+ for both racial and gender hiring practices.

Since university presidents are responsible for hiring ADs, it is essential to note that 89.2% of the DI FBS presidents are mostly White and male, thus indicating a lack of diversity in hiring personnel. The 2018 TIDES report affirmed 130 ADs, of which 108 or 77.7% are White men (Lapchick, 2018). At the time of the release, FBS schools lacked representation by African American, Asian, and Native American women but did have one Latina AD (Lapchick, 2018).

Shortly after the 2018 TIDES report release, Carla Williams became the first African American and female AD for an FBS athletic department. Crenshaw (1989) initiated the intersectionality theory to acknowledge the importance of race and gender and how each connects to shape the many facets of African American women's struggles and experiences (Davis, 2008). McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) discussed the intersection of gender and

race-related biases in society and employment, thus resulting in minority women's challenges. Additionally, the term intersectionality includes institutionalized details that establish various susceptibilities and discrimination in a dominant societal structure (Weber, 2000; Wells & Kerwin, 2016). In Williams' case, she experienced being the first African American woman hired to lead a Power Five conference school in a White male-dominated institution.

The underrepresentation of minority women in leadership in the NCAA remains exceptionally high, even though many women are highly qualified to hold office and run the organization's affairs effectively (Stepan-Norris & Kerrissey, 2016). The NCAA takes a proactive stance on inclusion and diversity with education, resources, and programming. To support their viewpoint, the NCAA has a presidential pledge identified as "The Pledge and Commitment to Promoting Diversity and Gender Equity in Intercollegiate Athletics" (NCAA, 2022). Despite the NCAA's position on inclusion, DI institutions continue to lag in broadening the scope of upper-level administrative positions for women and minority women.

This study aimed to investigate the major components behind the underrepresentation of these women in NCAA leadership. Identifying the challenges experienced is critical in developing and implementing strategies necessary to address them. It will also help present and future minority women handle similar obstacles as they seek collegiate athletic careers. The literature review focused on gender-based resistance to sport leadership, lack of mentors, lack of diversity, intersectionality, motivation to lead, changes to learning institutions, discrimination, and underrepresentation of minority women.

### **Overview of Women's Involvement in Sports Leadership**

Global concerns are associated with women's roles in sports leadership and their inability to land key employment positions. According to Burton (2015), women are underrepresented in



sports management across the globe. Furthermore, Burton (2015) argued that such a widespread underrepresentation is not linked to competency factors only. Instead, it is based on gender-based inequality. Despite the severe shortfall of women in the principal leadership positions in the NCAA organization, Burton et al. (2009) also agreed with the findings that women's underrepresentation within the sporting sector is not taken seriously by its stakeholders. Moreover, Burton et al. (2009) contended that most women involved in the sporting activities' governance only attain a leadership position for smaller posts in the organization.

The representation of minority women in leadership positions at the NCAA is an excellent example of the problem. According to the NCAA (2015), women holding leadership positions from ethnic minority subgroups made up less than 7% of its workforce. The study painted a vibrant picture of minority subgroups' underrepresentation in leadership positions in the NCAA. The research focused on background information about the underrepresentation of minority women ethnic subgroups who have attained NCAA leadership positions. Racial balance in the sports industry has been a significant issue for an extended time. The study aimed to review the problem of misrepresenting minority groups among women in leadership positions in the NCAA. Additionally, the study evaluated past work performance, indicating the underrepresentation reasons to understand how this situation has escalated to its current state and the possible solutions suggested by various scholars.

Regardless of the minor number of women leaders in the sporting sector, the 21st century has seen a slight gain in women's total number in sporting organizations' leadership structure. Harris et al. (2015) maintained that most sporting activities' commercialization had encouraged more women to strive for leadership roles. Moreover, Harris et al. (2015) debated that notwithstanding the extent of discrimination, some women have pursued some of the best

leadership positions in the sports sector and have attained these positions against the odds. However, Hollomon (2016) differed with the findings and purported that the sports revolution has only complicated gender-biased employability issues. Hollomon (2016) noted that the expanding leadership scope within the sports sector has even provided a ground for more male employees and leaders than women.

In the suppression of women seeking to ascend to leadership positions, many women have overcome the odds of emerging as top leaders, even in the sports world. According to Hollomon (2016), women who competently transformed these institutions into excellent organizations and managed various sports activities now lead many sports activities and agreed with Holman's disclosure and mentioned that women's involvement had increased global sports performance. However, Burton et al. (2009) also noted that there were still very few women in these key leadership positions, and existing female leaders' contributions remain relatively insignificant.

### **Discrimination**

The other contributing factor was personal and observed discrimination. The NCAA's (2015) findings showed that many women experienced various discrimination types based on gender. The translation of the results was evident as more men from minority groups were in leadership positions than women. The same study also showed that 44% of people from minority groups had experienced a version of perceived discrimination, which they attributed to race or ethnicity.

Equally important, hiring perceptions where minority women believed they had lower chances of acquiring specific jobs were also adversely contributing to the underrepresentation. Most women from minority groups have learned from experience that they are rarely picked for

leadership positions (Cunningham et al., 2006). Mistreatment of the few selected and discrimination were the other factors that made many women refuse to apply for leadership positions. The NCAA (2015) showed that only 18% of women from minority groups believed that the NCAA hiring process occurred without considering the gender factor. About 55% of women from minority groups believed that some athletics administrators only hire people with whom they share an ethnic origin. The constant feelings of discrimination have pushed many minority groups to expect and prepare for some form of discrimination. Besides, out of fear of discrimination, many women have opted to avoid applying for such jobs. The effect has led to women's underrepresentation from minority groups (Burton & Leberman, 2017).

One effective strategy to increase minority women's representation, according to Sánchez and Lehnert (2019), would be to make careers for women at the NCAA look more attractive. Sartore and Cunningham (2007) argued that making jobs attractive for women could be done by providing monetary and nonmonetary incentives to attract more women to careers in the sports industry.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a fundamental test of the legitimacy of the point of view theory. As an applied worldview, intersectionality originated from the perception that people will, in general, zero in a lot on the bias, segregation, and avoidance happening along with a solitary hub of intensity and abuse (Crenshaw 1989). More explicitly, Crenshaw (1989) worried that women's liberation, for instance, zeroed in on individuals' encounters; for example, White women, while different groups; for example, Black ladies, remained minimized. McCluney and Rabelo (2019) discussed the depiction of Black women in the workplace via the lens of visibility. First, they discuss the intersectionality theory concept, which suggests that power is typically entrenched in

institutions, resulting in varied lived experiences at the intersection of social aspects. Examples include class, sexuality, gender, and race. Further, McCluney and Rabelo (2019) stated that ideal employees' and leaders' concepts supported specific elements and bodies as capable and desirable. As such, to attain success, Black women might experience pressure to perform in means that seem appealing to those around them (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). At the same time, the forces are determined by the past legacy of Black people's labor.

McCluney and Rabelo (2019) discussed the conditions that enhanced Black women's workplace visibility. From an intersectional point of view, Black women experienced distinctiveness and belongingness. The tensions may be considered continuous aspects that intersect to establish visibility for Black women in the workplace. First, they experience precarious visibility, which entails low belongingness and distinctiveness (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). The authors stated that Black women in this category are often susceptible to systemic oppression.

Further, for those working in unsafe conditions of visibility, exclusion from opportunities is highly likely to affect their work (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Concerning minority women seeking DI leadership, the article showed their exclusion from the positions. Such occurrences are common since the organization hardly supports its advancements.

Second, McCluney and Rabelo (2019) examined the invisibility depicted by low high belongingness and low distinctiveness. The study revealed that Black women are likely to encounter invisibility conditions due to structural factors that hamper their ability to assimilate at work. In this context, the term defines the incapacity to view Black women's special experiences. McCluney and Rabelo (2019) established that people consider their experiences the same as other social groups.

Nevertheless, this is not the case with Black women. Often, they are quite distinct due to their numerical underrepresentation, which results in significant scrutiny and exploitation. For example, studies have shown that Black women leaders who make mistakes are considered fewer leaders and criticized more harshly than their White counterparts (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Concerning DI women ADs, the article showed that minorities lacked the skills needed to lead, meaning they were highly prone to making errors.

### **Lack of Mentors**

Mentorship is a method utilized for employee advancement. Mentors provide employees with proficient ways to carry out their responsibilities and exhibit qualities deemed necessary for professionals. A study by NCAA in 2015 showed that of the women holding leadership positions in the NCAA, only 35% had mentors from their minority group. Furthermore, of the women who had mentors, 27% had mentors from the NCAA institution. From that study, 73% of the women holding leadership positions in the NCAA had mentors from other institutions. This study helps to point out the lack of mentors for women from minority groups in the NCAA. The number collected from NCAA in 2015 helps to indicate that young women need help in considering an AD career at the NCAA, given the lack of mentors.

Besides, women from minority groups have resorted to settling for mentors from other ethnic groups. According to the NCAA (2015), women who failed to find mentors from their minority groups seek out White women. The other source of mentorship comes from White men and other ethnic minority groups. The problem with seeking mentorship from other ethnic groups is that such mentors fail to grasp the challenges and experiences women from minority ethnic groups are going through. Therefore, these mentees miss the chance to learn ways to handle the difficulties they suffer due to their origin from minority ethnic groups (Taylor & Wells, 2017).

Earlier research showed that mentor connections are significant for improving abilities and professional success to open doors for female ADs (Bower & Hums, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). This data fortifies the impact on ladies working in the profession of the intercollegiate athletic organization. Likewise, it shows the significance of mentorship to ladies hoping to or seeking careers in athletic administration. Subsequently, there is a need to explore if the fundamental comprehension of vocation and self-awareness opens doors for minority women through mentorship.

An article by Howells et al. (2020) attempted to show the wide range of negative experiences and events experienced by athletes throughout their sporting careers. The authors showed that the circumstances always considered were stressors, traumas, and adversities. Nevertheless, a significant challenge associated with attaining diversity is that the terms' meaning differs across cultures and research (Howells et al., 2020). The article also stated that despite the dominant conceptualizing of difficulty in sports as an unwarranted occurrence, most researchers suggest that adverse situations may also be enhancers of positive change, especially in elite cohorts. The aspect of positive change after adversity is currently labeled as growth. Researchers define it as encouraging changes in the emotional and cognitive that might possess behavioral implications.

Howells et al. (2020) acknowledged that various researchers have studied the concept of exercise and sports and established multiple growth factors. The findings have highlighted improved emotional regulation, enhanced social relationships, and practiced more prosocial behaviors. Despite these critical findings, evidence that enhances growth in exercise and sports remains compelling. Nevertheless, the primary focus has been on conceptualizing change and exploring growth opportunities and experiences. The researchers' study sought to enhance

knowledge transfer from other disciplines of psychology. They systematically reviewed studies using the PRISMA guidelines (Howells et al., 2020). Their findings revealed that growth from adversity might be promoted. In this case, interventions such as mindfulness, social support, and emotional disclosure play a critical role in providing a persuasive narrative of hope. Concerning minority women as ADs, this article showed that those seeking the positions were highly likely to experience adversities that hamper their growth. It is the expectation that this study offers an opportunity for participants to reveal the existence of their experiences relating to the underrepresentation of minority women and DI AD positions. Initial standpoint theories (the 1970s and 1980s) relating to women indicated that all information is found and arranged. The encounters of ladies and their stance are to be treasured in that it uncovers the reality of social reality (Naidu, 2010). According to Paradies (2018), the standpoint hypothesis tries to de-focus ‘truth’ as solid and disturb the thought that it dwells inside bodies that fit regularizing beliefs, embodied by the individuals who are youthful White, male, thin, physically fit, heterosexual, and prosperous (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2016). In addition to the difficulties presented by intersectionality and the intricate elements of suppressed and the special subject positions involved, standpoint epistemologies are comparatively unprepared to manage the increasing adaptability of solitary characters themselves. Instead of being novel, the variability inborn in such fringe intersections adds race and sex to the rundown of previously existing characters, which can differ for any person after some time (Paradies, 2018).

### **Addressing Gender Inequalities in Sports Leadership**

Since gender-based inequality is a significant impediment to women’s leadership within sports, it is vital to provide an enabling environment for women to grow and excel as sports leaders. Providing the merit-based selection of the top leaders will be one of the main avenues

for improving women's role in sports leadership. According to Rosette et al. (2016), sports leaders should be selected based on their abilities to run and manage different sports organizations. Further, Rosette et al. (2016) provided an example that, historically, the selection process has not been made based on merit. It is thereby blocking many qualified women from taking on leadership roles. Rosette et al. (2018) also supported the previously mentioned research outcome and stated that the coordination of sporting activities is something most women in the industry understand. Rosette et al. (2018) claimed that blocking women from assuming leadership roles in sports is a significant injustice.

Legislation must support diversity and inclusion within the organization. Stepan-Norris and Kerrissey (2016) agreed with previous research findings by noting that gender-based governance laws exist in other organizations and should be introduced within sports management. Further, Stepan-Norris and Kerrissey (2016) asserted that sportswomen could not be underrated.

Promoting women's leadership training aids in increasing the sum of women promoted to leadership positions. According to Trolan (2013) and Walker (2018), it was argued that women were ill-prepared to pursue new managerial roles in the sporting industry in the past. Furthermore, Trolan (2013) claimed that sports management's complexity requires highly skilled and educated staff who properly understand industry diversity. Hollomon (2016) also supported the study's result, noting that training women in the diversity of sports aid them in contributing to the development of the sporting industry. Katz et al. (2018) added to the research, stating that proper female training should also include hands-on managerial skills relevant to the sporting industry. Katz et al. (2018) mentioned that senior male managers within the sporting industry should also form a culture of inclusion to welcome women into future management roles in the



organization. Ethical change within organizations can reduce the gender inequality gap in sports leadership. According to Adriaanse (2015), many ethical standards in the sports industry relate to how games are played. However, Adriaanse (2015) noted that similar ethical considerations are not applied in such bodies' management structures. Adriaanse and Schofield (2013) also contributed to the study by mentioning that the proper cultural development to promote women in leadership is critical to advancing the sport. Bear et al. (2017) agreed with the findings and mentioned that women's involvement in leadership would boost the growth of sports culture. Additionally, it would remove growth barriers such as those observed in the NCAA bodies.

According to Bembry (2017) and Hill et al. (2016), one of the critical factors recently used by women to voice their concerns over the organization's low representation is advocacy. Bembry (2017) argued that different women's groups and organizations are responsible for creating lobbying to promote women in leadership. Borland and Bruening (2010) and Farrow (2008) supported the findings by stating that lobbying has significantly impacted recent years. Borland and Bruening (2010) further mentioned that the move had created global awareness of the women leaders' plight who were denied leadership opportunities. However, Bracken (2009) disagreed with the findings and pointed out that there were no significant improvements in women's leadership, which have been enhanced through the proper advocacy initiatives. Lastly, Burton (2015) disagreed equally with the findings and noted that the advocacy had complicated issues of women leaders, as they seem to lead by force.

### **Gender-Based Resistance to Sports Leadership**

Resistance to women's leadership existed within the sports sector for the century. According to Hoyt and Murphy (2016), the opposition to women's leadership in sports was not physical. Instead, the resistance increased to the women, who wanted to assume the higher

echelon leadership roles. Hoyt and Murphy (2016) added that the extent of the resistance to women in leadership continually suppresses women's roles in leading and managing major sporting events across the globe. Katz et al. (2018) agreed with the research findings. They noted that forasmuch as women are prevented from assuming sporting leadership roles, the chances are slim they will influence policymaking and the growth of the industry.

According to Lee and Won (2016) and Fullagar and Toohey (2009), very few women took an interest in sporting activities. Moreover, Lee and Won (2016) added that at that time, women were disinterested in participating in sporting activities and even failed to take on leadership roles. McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) agreed with the findings by appreciating that women started to gain interest after the evolution of sports, and their involvement improved. However, McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) noted that men fill most leadership positions. O'Connor (2018) agreed with the findings and indicated that men had dominated the management of sports fields based on the belief that they had historically revolutionized the industry.

According to Elprana et al. (2015), female leaders remain underrepresented despite raising significant public interest. There exist two significant perspectives concerning the need to involve women in leadership. From a deficit-oriented perspective, various economic issues, such as unsuccessful investment in their university education, result in economic issues. From a resource-oriented point of view, female leaders are more likely to benefit the economy and workers. Elprana et al. (2015) showed that the affective aspect of Motivation to Lead (MtL) is a critical predictor of the emergence of leadership. It predicts leadership role occupancy, particularly among women. Though the sex difference is not huge, its influence is evident for diverse cultural backgrounds.

Concerning the relationship between SDT to MtL, Elprana et al. (2015) observed that due to expectations in gender roles, the female gender role and leadership roles are considered incompatible. This situation results in prejudice toward female leaders and behavior that depicts stereotyping. Based on the theory, three sociocultural variables explain the cause of a lower MtL among women. One of them is role incongruity. In this case, traditional gender role beliefs (TGRB) distinguish men's and women's roles and capabilities. The element evokes negative emotions in women seeking leadership roles (Elprana et al., 2015). It can be deduced that TGRB negatively impacts women's MtL and has reverse implications for men.

Second, SDT states that gender roles are established by observing people's usual roles in society. In this case, similar-sex role models have a considerable influence on the desirability of career choices. As such, women end up being underrepresented in all leadership positions, which later enhances role incongruity (Elprana et al., 2015). Third, despite the belief that conventional gender role beliefs affect MtL among women, gender inequality awareness might diminish or reverse the impact. Women are more likely to question the dichotomy between their leadership roles and gender role. Based on the study by Elprana et al. (2015), one can deduce that the underrepresentation of minority women as athletic directors is attributed to the prevalence of sociocultural variables.

Hideg and Wilson (2020) stated that a proper understanding of the legacy concerning previous injustices by traditionally disadvantaged groups is critical to identify the basis of present inequality. It aids in understanding the prevalence of modern social and workplace policies that enhance equality. Hideg and Wilson (2020) observed two major issues pertinent to examining previous injustices and inequality, including management literature concerning employment equity (EE) and social psychology literature concerning group processes and social

identity. The literature concerning EE shows various policies to solve previous injustices and discrimination against disadvantaged groups. For instance, in the United States and Canada, the two major groups safeguarded by EE policies have always been racial minorities, women, and other persons who have previously been discriminated against (Hideg & Wilson, 2020).

Hideg and Wilson (2020) considered that the social identity theory is based on the idea that individuals acquire self-worth and identity due to membership in various social groups. As such, individuals are greatly encouraged to maintain and safeguard positive images of their identities. Based on the concepts of social identity and social identity threat, Hideg and Wilson (2020) suggested that raising the historical injustices that disadvantaged persons encounter could threaten their social identity.

Few researchers have leveraged an intersectional viewpoint to investigate the generalization of stereotype risk explicitly in the experiences of Black women. Stereotyping has often been used as an instrument of racial oppression. According to Neal-Jackson (2020), it has been a source of White Americans' methods of classifying and justifying the ongoing oppression and feudalism of non-White individuals (Tuitt & Carter Andrews, 2008). Racial stereotypes are described as deliberate ideas and attitudes individuals of one race of people feel toward those of a different race (Torres & Charles, 2004). Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) described the ideology as flagrant generalizations that fail to grasp the essential facts of the individual or group being described. Instead, according to Neal-Jackson (2020), the stereotypes generate descriptions that alter facts and criticize their culture, character, and competency, placing them in a position of inherited inferiority to White Americans.

In this awareness, the researchers tested two hypotheses. The first expectation was that the denial of present discrimination against persons safeguarded by EE regulations would

undermine support for them. Second, they believed that denying present gender discrimination means mediating the interactive impact between injustice control and gender. The study's participants were 141 business students studying at a Canadian university (Hideg & Wilson, 2020). The students were required to complete two online studies concerning the history of Canada and workplace policy. The findings revealed that the reminders of previous cases of injustice toward women resulted in undermining men's support for an EE policy. They enhanced their denial of present gender discrimination. The findings showed that women's pursuit of leadership in DI was likely to be hampered by past discrimination (Hideg & Wilson, 2020). Consequently, various stakeholders have a vital role in ensuring the implementation of EE policies in this field.

### **Lack of Motivation to Lead**

Pape (2020) highlighted an account of organizational change to show why women in leadership were always underrepresented compared to men athletes in various sports organizations. Pape (2020) argued that, like other institutional contexts, men in leadership positions derive support from existing informal and gender-neutral practices and norms. The absence of supportive system disadvantages women. Consequently, increasing women's numerical representation is a critical feminist initiative in various institutional contexts (Pape, 2020). Nevertheless, numbers on their own were not a component of gender equality. For example, concerning sports, subordinating women athletes constantly happens regardless of their high numerical presence in the current years. In this case, they experience challenges such as low media coverage and lower pay compared to men.

The gender composition of leadership is specifically critical in establishing norms that affect the organization's more expansive gendered character. For instance, the enhanced women

in political offices are likely to result in policies that enhance their interests (Pape, 2020). However, such initiatives are rare and poorly implemented in sports. In this case, Pape (2020) lauded various scholars showing that gender imbalance in critical roles is essential for the institution's vast logic. Elements such as the media, coaching, leadership, and other great-status positions confirm sports as a male-dominated sphere. Concerning ADs in DI, the article showed that women, especially minorities, would always have diminished roles as they strive to attain leadership roles. As such, stakeholders should strive to implement policies that seek to enhance inclusion.

### **Changes to Learning Institutions**

Most learning institutions also fail to incorporate sessions to address their racial bias behaviors (Patton, 2016; Taylor & Wells, 2017). Some studies showed that learning institutions could inform students about their racial or multicultural competence (Patton, 2016; Taylor & Wells, 2017).

Thompson and Parent's (2020) study sought to understand how radical organizational changes affect national-level sports organizations' efficacy. The authors documented the significance and influence of organizations' external environments in management and sports literature. Most organizations are required to deal with sociocultural, economic, technological, and geopolitical advancements occurring in their respective domains to enhance survival (Thompson & Parent, 2020). Furthermore, Thompson and Parent (2020) downplayed the organizations' internal and external changes since individuals responsible for implementing and managing radical changes encounter issues that erode success. Examples of challenges entail resistance to change and the absence of the capacity to change. Besides handling the implementation challenges, most organizations experiencing radical changes cannot just shut

their doors. Instead, they are compelled to carry out operations and offer services to stakeholders. Organizations are mandated to be useful during the process of change. Thompson and Parent (2020) also described effectiveness as the capability of an organization to attain its goals. The concept entails effectively delivering critical services to clients and members (Thompson & Parent, 2020). As such, the capability to offer services and satisfy members' needs is vital for survival. In this awareness, the researchers sought to understand how radical changes in the organization affected the effectiveness of sports organizations at the national level from the internal and external stakeholders' points of view.

Thompson and Parent (2020) sought to establish how radical organizational changes affect national-level sports organizations' efficacy. The methodology involved a particular case study using semi structured interviews. Their findings showed that during the examination of goal attainment during radical change, effectiveness was either positive or negative based on the internal stakeholders (Thompson & Parent, 2020). Concerning minority women ADs in DI, these findings show that they are only likely to attain the positions based on how stakeholders perceive the goals. Further, the researchers established that from multiple points of view, radical organizational changes are likely to negatively impact the capacity to meet the needs of stakeholders as before.

### **Government Role in Promoting Representation of Minority Women Leadership**

According to Burton et al. (2009) and Walker and Bopp (2010), every government has the legislative role of ensuring equality in employment by promoting gender-based equality across all sectors. Burton et al. (2009) noted that sport, as an essential activity in a country, should be regulated according to the management requirements. Carter and Hart (2010) supported the findings and mentioned that government regulation could be achieved through

different methods according to the women involved in sports management activities. Also, Carter and Hart (2010) and Fink et al. (2003) noted that government decrees or the creation of laws could create a mandatory slot or percentage for women's representation within sporting bodies.

According to Chrobot-Mason et al. (2019) and Fisher (2014), many government institutions are concerned with managing sports activities, and they can influence women's appointments into senior managerial positions. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2019) stated that female appointees would help dispel the notion that women cannot serve as sports leaders, especially when making policy decisions regarding sports management. Comeaux and Martin (2018) agreed with the findings and mentioned that such appointments would also increase women's morale and make them seek such posts, even if they are elective.

According to Doherty et al. (2010), the government can create institutions or organizations that prepare women leaders to assume higher managerial positions in sports. Doherty et al. (2010) added that such training would equip women with adequate skills and make them capable of effectively running sporting facilities and organizations. Elmuti et al. (2009) and Vial et al. (2016) supported the research and stated that the induction training for women would also include lobbying tactics they can use while seeking elective sports management positions. Elmuti et al. (2009) mentioned that there were currently many sporting leadership roles attained by a popular vote by the specific electorate.

According to Dowling et al. (2018), many myths surround women's abilities to take on leadership roles. Moreover, Dowling et al. (2018) mentioned that such myths always portray women as incapable of promoting proper leadership standards, which is false. Elmuti et al. (2009) also contributed to the research by appreciating that government lobbying and



sensitization would help organizations understand the importance of women leaders and increase their numbers, especially in leadership roles.

### **Underrepresentation of Minority Women**

Wells and Kerwin (2016) proposed future research to focus on hiring personnel's attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, research on hiring practices is essential in understanding the structure of organizations that isolate and exclude women and racial minorities from casual dialogue and activities (McDonald, 2011). The result included unequal access to employment opportunities and promotions within their organizations (McDonald, 2011).

Obenauer and Langer (2019) discussed how racial bias was one of the most controversial issues affecting present society. A minority of White leaders experience critical evaluation when they fail (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). A major explanation attributed to the disparity in outcomes can be linked to the leadership categorization theory (LCT). LCT states that in situations where leaders are incapable of achieving a leadership prototype's demographic expectations, they are likely to become victims of unfair performance evaluations (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). The explanation reveals consistency with differential leadership findings in terms of compensation and performance evaluations.

Obenauer and Langer (2019) examined the concept of glass leadership and how it affected leadership outcomes. Obenauer and Langer (2019) examined the adverse employment outcomes for minority leaders and revealed racial discrimination against these people in professional settings. For instance, African American managers were more likely to stagnate in their careers than White managers. Nonetheless, their White counterparts were likely to attain higher promotions (Obenauer & Langer, 2019).

Current empirical research backs the claim that variations in leadership potential assessment can lead to discounted evaluations of leadership performance for minorities. For instance, in situations where racial minority leaders reveal beliefs that attract attention to the discrepancy with the leadership prototype, their performance was likely to be noted more negatively compared to their White counterparts (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Further research also revealed that White managers were more likely to get higher evaluation ratings than African American managers. Regarding leadership in DI, the Obenauer and Langer (2019) article revealed a clear discrimination case, especially when minorities were involved.

Bednar and Gicheva's (2018) study reported how differences in supervisors' attitudes toward female workers established gender differences in career outcomes. It also revealed that female firms' leadership was associated with a lower wage gap, especially when subordinate workers were involved (Bednar and Gicheva, 2018). The researchers implied that women at the top level were likely to improve the number of those at the lower level. Other research studies have shown that women might possess no positive effect on or might prevent other women's careers' progression. For instance, Bednar and Gicheva (2018) acknowledged a 2010 study that revealed that higher representation by women on a recruiting committee was highly likely to impact female job applicants.

Swanson et al. (2020) stated that women leadership's current developments had turned the focus away from leader-focused theories to the mental perspectives individuals consider about leaders and leadership. The mental frameworks, also called implicit leadership theories (ILTs), depict people's theorization of what ideal leadership entails. The leadership categorization theory suggests that individuals possess a superordinate archetypal ILT comprised of variations for specific contexts. Examples include politics, finance, the military, popular

culture, and sport. Swanson et al. (2020) reviewed ILTs and the associated leadership theories to offer a theoretical grounding to the study. The theories indicate the critical role that individuals' leadership theories play in molding leadership perceptions.

Swanson et al. (2020) argued that the leadership categorization theory seeks to show how individuals seek out information concerning leaders and how they attempt to make sense of the world's complexities. In this case, it advances the concept that people embrace an idealized prototypical ILT and other ILTs representing different contexts and situations. Also, the categorization approach theorizes that individuals assume several mental models that are separate despite having similarities (Swanson et al., 2020). The mental models are only activated if a specific context is experienced when comparing environmental stimuli to the mental framework. Concerning gender variations in ILTs, Swanson et al. (2020) showed that ILTs have foundations in socially established reality views. It implies that they are not purely the private psychological constructions found in people. Instead, significant influence exists due to societal factors shaping people's understanding of the world (Swanson et al., 2020). In the past, men have occupied the most leadership roles. As such, the knowledge of leadership is guided through reference to male leaders and masculinity. This information concerning minority women's athletic directors shows they are less likely to be considered for leadership positions. It suggests that men will always have the upper hand when vacant positions become available (Swanson et al., 2020). The researchers' study sought to establish base-level sports management ILTs for entering the industry. Their results revealed that despite having differences between men and women in sport management ILTS, they are quite the same and should have a similar footing. Conversely, in DI, minority women should have equal privileges as men.

## **Lack of Diversity**

Hartzell and Dixon's (2019) article sought to show that women were still underrepresented in sport leadership positions across the globe despite the progress made in present years, especially at the highest levels. They stated that diversity in organizations possesses discrete positive effects. In this case, those with significant female representation were likely to be more successful than those headed by men. Further, an inclusive and diverse climate promotes positive outcomes, including low turnover, enhanced team performance, higher employee satisfaction levels, and improved financial performance (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019). The outcomes may be attributed to a more diverse group that makes way for individuals with various experiences and backgrounds, capable of offering diverse ideas and gender diversity boosts the organization's performance (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019).

Hartzell and Dixon (2019) acknowledged that previous studies examined the impacts of diversity on business performance. Women are more likely to be affected by fear and susceptibility, while men might react to the same feelings with either rejection or anger (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019). Women are also likely to help in the development of other people and ensure cooperation. Despite showing these benefits, women are still highly likely to remain underrepresented or ignored in leadership, especially at higher position levels. In agreement with Thompson and Parent (2020), men remain the most preferred leaders in various global federations, national sports organizations, and the nation's intercollegiate athletics. For instance, from an international perspective, the representation of women in sports organization boards between 2013 and 2014 was approximately 5.35% (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019). Women's representation in the global federation's boards of directors embraces the same trend, ranging

from zero in bob sleighed and sport fishing. The trend leaves women from the minority overlooked as board members in global sports organizations.

Hartzell and Dixon (2019) stated that underrepresentation patterns remain similar concerning United States intercollegiate athletics. In this case, an estimated 22.3% of AD positions in NCAA institutions are women. The numbers reduce when one considers DI institutions. From a macro level point of view, gendered discourse plays a critical role in determining women's leadership. Lesson entails the creation and passing of knowledge via interactions and language. At the organizational, family, and cultural levels, discourse results in cultural truisms regularly left unquarried and internalized by people in the organization's culture. Concerning the representation of women's ADs, Hartzell and Dixon's (2019) article showed that the NCAA was likely to undermine its significance despite embracing diversity.

### **Chapter Summary**

With the enactment of Title IX of the United States Constitution, discrimination in programs that rely on federal aid has been reduced considerably. Such explains the considerable rise in women involved in sports recently. Despite this progress, the proportion of women in coaching and leadership has experienced a significant drop. Before enacting Title XI, a significant number of women's teams were coached and managed by women. However, the number of men seeking the positions rose later, reducing the number of women taking on administrative and coaching roles. The situation is worse for minority women seeking to fill these positions. The researchers reviewed acknowledged a higher susceptibility to exclusion.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors that women of color in the athletic department's administration perceive to be contributors to the underrepresentation of minority women in DI AD leadership positions. This chapter highlights the approaches to engage the respondents in collecting data, the study's phenomenological aspects, the analysis of the data, and the report's presentation. The section addresses the research design and methods, the population, study samples, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

#### **Research Design and Method**

The research was conducted using a phenomenological study. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), learning the lived experiences of others is vital for scholars and the underlying basis of research. Neubauer (2019) et al. asserted that research comprised a comprehensive review of a subject (i.e., an individual, groups of individuals, societies, or objects) to ascertain information or to attain a different comprehension of the subject.

Phenomenology refers to research that explores the significance of a phenomenon by examining it from the viewpoint of those who have experienced the circumstance (Teherani et al., 2015). The objective of phenomenology is to characterize the essence of the evidence as it relates to what and how it was experienced (Teherani et al., 2015). Qualitative research focuses on individuals describing their experiences and utilizes interviews, open-ended questionnaires, observations, etc., to gather, evaluate, and decipher data (Zohrabi, 2013). The research was exploratory and investigated the how and why of a specific phenomenon and helped to understand the world we live in and the reason behind how things function (Polkinghorne, 2005).

The study gave the respondents a platform to express their concerns openly and genuinely about the NCAA's leadership environment. The study provided perceptions of the challenges faced related to the minority groups, the resistance they face, the number of minorities in leadership recorded, changes in administration, the reason minority groups are less represented in the NCAA leadership, and the selection of leaders. These issues were addressed by employing information from individuals within NCAA leadership.

I collected data from 12 respondents who participated in the study. The participants were women of color currently holding leadership positions such as AD, assistant AD, and senior women administrator within DI athletic departments. Based on a philosophical viewpoint, phenomenology demonstrates the idea of acquiring a party's lived experience (Frechette et al., 2020).

Virtual interviews via video, Zoom, or audio recordings enabled me to collect data from participants who lived the experiences. The data was then used to recount how and what the participants experienced related to the study. Conversely, determined themes were revealed during data collection.

The phenomenological study was used to learn the participants' lived experiences related to their intersectionality and achieving a DI AD position. The study gave the subjects an opportunity and platform to articulate their sagas and satisfaction or lack thereof with the environment of the NCAA's leadership.

## **Population**

The participants' selection for the research consisted of individuals with experience as an AD or leadership in the athletics department, who applied for but did not get the position, or who chose not to apply. Participants from all the strata consisted of African American women and one

Asian woman drawn from collegiate institutions. The study focused on the underrepresentation of minority women in leadership positions in DI athletic departments. The population included selecting 12 women of color who are, have been, or aspire to be an AD of a DI institution. The women chosen met the eligibility criterion to provide data from firsthand knowledge to participate in the study. The criteria included being a member of a DI institution's athletic department, being a woman of color, and seeking, having sought, or planning to seek an AD position. Firsthand knowledge must have been related to the participant's experience and how they were affected during their quest for an AD position. For participants to be included in the study, they must have had experience as an AD or leadership in the athletics department of a DI institution, who applied for but did not get the position, or who chose not to apply. They must have been a minority or women of color. Those excluded from the study were nonminority or nonpersons of color, nonwomen, and those without experience in the DI athletics department. The importance of the criteria stems from the need to understand the experiences of these women as it relates to the underrepresentation of minority women in DI athletic department leadership.

### **Study Sample**

Participants for the semi structured interviews were selected from within the NCAA. Before the actual selection, the respondents were stratified into groups to increase the study's accuracy and reliability. Voulgaris (2018) concluded that stratified sampling helps identify potential participants by placing them into different strata. As such, the final sample included the representation of the desired groups.

The method included dividing the respondents into different strata that consisted of coaches, student-athletes, ADs, assistant ADs, university presidents, and senior women administrators. Including diversity and inclusion committee members and NCAA minority



opportunities and interests committee members allow for an all-inclusive survey team. The different groups were divided into men and women appropriately.

The research highlighted a specific group within a community—the minority women. Therefore, ensuring the primary subgroup factors was vital (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). The technique was utilized because it sought to observe an existing relationship between NCAA leadership and the subgroup of minority women. With other sampling techniques, subgroups under investigation may lack representation as intended within the sample. Additionally, the depiction includes even the smallest subgroups within the population, such as the NCAA's ADs and assistant directors.

### **Data Collection**

Material for the study included interview questions (see Appendix A). The interview consisted of 12 questions, including demographics, while protecting the confidentiality of the participants (using pseudonyms), career paths, and barriers relating to the research questions. The open-ended interview questions allowed participants to expand on their answers and offer additional information. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour per interviewee. Some interviews lasted over an hour and a half. Participants were informed that they could cease participation in the study at any point.

In-person interview questions provided an opportunity to observe participants and read body language, which is not possible during non-in-person interviews. The chance to read body language provided me with additional information. Denham and Onwuegbuzie (2013), in their discussion of nonverbal communication, noted that according to Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008), speech, examinations, illustrations, and documents represent the four critical sources of qualitative data. The information gained from the speech is from interviews, the data from

observations collected by watching or perceiving events or interactions, images represent data from a visual standpoint, and documents serve as data in printed or digital form (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

### **Data Analysis**

My role as the researcher was to build a trustful rapport with the study's participants and be an active, nonjudgmental listener. Establishing a good connection with respondents bolsters the opportunity to obtain the best data desired (Dicks, 2012). The collected data had a predictive quality due to most respondents having similar experiences while in leadership positions or trying to get into leadership. The collected data was derived from the experiences and observations of the respondents. Their responses allowed for follow-up on the answers provided. Other research designs allow zero deviation for the researcher.

The phenomenological study was preferred because it incorporated the experiences of the respondents. Looking at the current world, people prefer statistics, events, and verifiable facts (Taylor et al., 2016). Therefore, it was important to include the human experience and facts for this study. Different people have different perceptions about the same statistic, event, or fact. Individuals see and experience perspectives differently. The study encouraged creativity among the respondents and allowed them to express themselves authentically. The approach ensured the accurate collection of the data. The study aimed to collect primary data because it was firsthand and ensured improved reliability and credibility. Since the research consists of collecting data for a specific purpose, primary data was the most appropriate. Therefore, it added to the validity of the study.

According to Boeije (2002), the constant comparative method or CCM (an inductive information coding measure utilized for sorting and contrasting subjective information for

investigation purposes), in addition to analytical sampling, creates the foundation of qualitative analysis in the grounded theory philosophy established by Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987). The following accessories reinforce the doctrine of comparison: memos, close reading, reexamining what is read, coding, displays, data matrices, and diagrams (Boeije, 2002).

The group of ADs, deputy ADs, assistant or associate ADs, and senior women administrators were interviewed separately to establish the underrepresentation of minority women in NCAA leadership. The semi structured interviews enabled the possibility of accurate screening. With this method, the respondents could not provide false information, especially regarding their race, age, and gender (Ellingson, 2017). With other methods, such as surveys, respondents may avoid such questions or misrepresent answers. Semi structured interviews also helped to capture both verbal and nonverbal cues. For instance, respondents who displayed some hesitation in their response or difficulty answering the question allowed for additional questions. Some respondents were enthusiastic about certain topics, and it allowed me to ask questions outside the interview template.

Semi structured interviews ensured the respondents remained on track and focused during the interview. In other methods, such as questionnaires, respondents may be disrupted by e-mails, videos, social media conversations, and many more distractions. Semi structured interviews were preferred because they were free from these technological distractions (Silverman, 2016). With this method, it was also possible to capture the emotions and behaviors of the respondents. Interviews provided a preferred way to engage different participants to respond to various research problems. It was also possible to explore additional issues whenever they arose during the interview.

A preference for semi structured interviews allows for corrections during the interviews. For instance, if a misunderstanding or mistake occurred during the interview, it was easy to correct. Additionally, it presented the opportunity to build a good relationship with the respondents through the interview, increasing cooperation and mutual understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee. Unlike the questionnaire method, the process allowed for collecting sufficient information by being present in the interview. Data could be collected outside the preset queries so long as it was relevant. Interviews were the most affordable data collection method.

Semi structured interviews were reliable due to one-on-one interaction with the respondents. Before the interviews, respondents received information about my intentions as a researcher and the utilization of the obtained data. Appointments were booked with the respondents early enough, and interview times were established. Follow-up communication confirmed the timings (Silverman, 2017). Respondents completed interviews at the time specified via Zoom. Therefore, all collected data is valid, reliable, and verifiable. The consultation of supervisors and experts in the field improved the study's validity.

Data collection included securing all documentation necessary from the NCAA content license (see Appendix B) and Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). Participants received emails containing information about the study, information on confidentiality, and participation in the study. I established a time and source of interviews, for example, whether interviews will be in person or virtual. Due to the pandemic protocol, interviews were conducted virtually.

Each study participant received an initial interview. A second interview was not necessary to ensure more clarification of the information received initially. Questions from the

interview were related to answering the research questions and understanding why women of color were underrepresented in DI athletic department leadership.

Participants reviewed the results of their interviews and confirmed their responses. They were reminded of the study's purpose and asked additional questions. Interviews conducted via Zoom were transcribed and depicted evidence of a certain phenomenon (Duranti, 2006). According to Moustakas (1994), the interviewing process primarily involves the art of listening, and a position occurs as pertinent experiences are placed in a basic group. I evaluated the valuable information derived from the data collected in the interview to establish an overview while noting any promising responses to the research questions. Those responses deemed relevant were identified and saved. Utilizing the template of Creswell (2014), I manually transcribed each participant's responses and placed them in a coding matrix for the purpose of coding the study.

The interpretive process is one factor which may impact the transcription process, specifically what is transcribed and how it is transcribed (Bucholtz, 2000). Bucholtz (2000) and Oliver et al. (2005) asserted that transcription is objective and subjective. The subjective nature may depend on what is heard during the interview process rather than what is said. Utilizing semi structured interviews based on interview questions and the inductive process allowed me to learn from the participants (Charmaz, 2000; Deterding & Waters, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition, I was open to unexpected findings revealed by the interviews, referred to as an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). By utilizing the process of index coding, it was possible to apply a few codes to increase the validity and reliability of the coding. Themes emerged from the codes established throughout the process. This process allowed themes to develop, which became the basis for codes to analyze data (Deterding & Waters, 2018).

The subjective nature may depend on what is heard during the interview process rather than what is said. Utilizing semi structured interviews based on interview questions and the inductive process allowed me to learn from the participants (Charmaz, 2000; Deterding & Waters, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition, I was open to unexpected findings revealed by the interviews, referred to as an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). By utilizing the process of index coding, it was possible to apply a few codes to increase the validity and reliability of the coding.

Identifying applicable experiences led to disqualifying information or experiences regarded as insignificant. Therefore, removing this information limited the data to information pertinent to the study's purpose (Moustakas, 1994). Themes began to emerge from the codes established throughout the process. This process allowed for themes to occur, which became the basis for codes to analyze data (Deterding & Waters, 2018). This process produced the groundwork for me to analyze and organize the subject's personal accounts of their experiences.

The process of analyzing data using the inductive method also assists in coding and themes. According to Saldaña and Omasta (2017), the approach is referred to as an open-ended inquiry analysis. An inductive examination produces themes and common ground in qualitative compilations. This type of analysis is useful in compiling and reducing raw data into a concise review, which develops precise commonalities among objectives and data and furnishes transparency and rationale for the study (Thomas, 2006).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The data collected supported the reliability of the study. Semi structured interviews were reliable due to one-on-one interaction with the respondents. Before the interviews, respondents received information about my intentions as the researcher and the utilization of the obtained

data. Appointments were booked with the respondents early enough, and interview times were established. Follow-up communication occurred to confirm the timings (Silverman, 2017). Respondents completed interviews at the time and environment specified. There were a few scheduling issues. However, the participants were cooperative with rescheduling interviews. Therefore, all collected data is valid, reliable, and verifiable throughout the research. The consultation of supervisors and experts in the field improved the study's validity.

Interviews presented an opportunity to create a rapport with the participants and build a respectable case for the research study. Additionally, the qualitative descriptive study's application facilitated venues for future research in the subject area by identifying significant and relevant variables.

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability establish trustworthiness in the information, translation, and techniques used to guarantee the nature of a qualitative research investigation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered credibility one of the vital elements when forming trust during the research process (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring trustworthiness requires several steps.

Credibility includes many steps. These steps include the following:

- a. Adopt and maintain confirmed research methods.
- b. Develop a familiarity with the culture of the organization being researched.
- c. Incorporate random sampling to circumvent researcher bias.
- d. Apply the concept of triangulation by employing various data collection methods.
- e. Execute tactics to ensure participants' integrity during their contribution of data.
- f. Exercise the right to use interactive questioning to expose intentional deceit.

- g. Refine the hypothesis to support all cases within the data by completing a negative case analysis.
- h. Participate in recurring debriefings with supervisors.
- i. Allow associates to scrutinize the research.
- j. As the researcher, re-evaluated the study by reflecting on beginning thoughts regarding the collection of data, emerging patterns, and the generation of theories.
- k. The researcher's background, competence, and skills are as vital as the procedure.
- l. Audits related to the data's veracity before, during, and at the end of data collection.
- m. A comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon.
- n. An exploration of the findings from prior research to evaluate the congruency of the results with previous studies (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability in research refers to studies that can be applied to other populations or situations. Bassey (2006) suggested if practitioners conclude their circumstances mimic the study, they might relate the results to their position (Shenton, 2004). Transferability also requires an extensive account of the event to grant readers the ability to understand and compare cases described in the results with those observed compared to their situations (Shenton, 2004). The following issues must be addressed before transference: the total number of participating organizations and their locale, restrictions of the classification of individuals who contributed to the data, the number of participants engaged in the experimentation, the methods used for data collection, the amount and period of data collection sessions, and the time frame in which data was attained (Shenton, 2004).

Research necessitates reliability. Dependability occurs by repeating the work, using identical frameworks, methods, and participants resulting in comparable outcomes (Shenton,



2004). A common research thread explains that the study's actions depend on detailed reporting. According to Shenton (2004), for readers to achieve an accurate discernment of methods and their efficacy, sections of the information should encompass the research design and application, including plans and execution on a strategic level, the functional element of accumulating data and acknowledging incidental detail of fieldwork, and finally a thoughtful assessment of the study and appraising the success of the query.

Confirmability revolves around the participants rather than the researcher. Shenton (2004) asserted that actions must ensure that findings are the product of the source's experiences and beliefs instead of the researcher's attributes and inclinations. The audit trail permits spectators to follow the flow of the study by examining the choices and methods illustrated (Shenton, 2004)

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions play a vital role in research. When conducting a study, assumptions are reasonably out of the researcher's control, and if the beliefs vanish, the research becomes nonessential (Simon & Goes, 2011). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) asserted, "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). Simon and Goes (2011) explained that it is fundamental for researchers to justify assumptions; if not, the study cannot proceed. The following example provides further explanation: subjects participate of their own volition and will provide honest answers, an explanation of preserving anonymity and confidentiality, and the volunteers can disengage at any point without ramifications (Simon & Goes, 2011).

**Limitations**

Limitations, much like assumptions, are out of the researcher's control. Simon and Goes (2011) described limitations as possible deficiencies in a study. For example, when using a convenient sample versus an arbitrary sample, results can only be implied and not be adapted to larger populations (Simon & Goes, 2011). In this study, participants were chosen randomly. According to Simon and Goes (2011), time also places limitations on studies. Currently, the number of African American women in NCAA DI AD's positions is one. In the event that more appointments of African American women occur, it will be noted in the study.

As with any other research, this research had its weaknesses. However, there are ways of overcoming them. For instance, given the utilization of the stratified sampling technique, a possibility of bias existed. Once assigned to the different strata, it is possible to identify persons of interest in the interviews. However, overcoming this weakness included allowing the participants to volunteer. It was also possible for the respondents to interpret the questions differently than intended and provide wrong answers. However, helping the respondent understand the subject during the interview process helped to solve the issue. Before beginning the interview, a conversation with the respondents created a good rapport, making the interviewees comfortable and providing a relaxing environment. The actions helped to remove any of the respondent's fears or worries.

**Delimitations**

When conducting research, several areas were within my control, referred to as delimitations. The delimitations are those attributes that limit the extension and characterize the limits of your examination. Delimitations consist of the preferred objective, research questions,

variables of concern, theoretical contexts I endorsed, and my selected population (Simon & Goes, 2011).

In consideration of conducting this study, the ontology consisted of objective and subjective views. Epistemology methods included the questionnaire, interviews, and coding. SDT and CRT abided in the analytical perspective of the underrepresentation of minority women in NCAA DI AD's positions.

The underrepresentation of women from minority groups touched on different factors and stemmed from many different positions. Considering only one organization reduced the focus on the problem and minimized the scope of the study's solution. Focusing on the more significant question of the representation of women in employment against men could offer more conclusive solutions. The study was also limited because not all minority groups were involved in the study. Research for the study included individuals from two ethnic groups.

Given that all minority groups' composition was not utilized, the information collected only affects some groups and not others. Additionally, the generalization of minority groups reduces the effectiveness of the solutions derived from the study. Furthermore, studies need to focus on each minority group since one group's issues differ from those affecting another group.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 focused on the study's methodology related to the lack of minority female representation in NCAA DI AD leadership. The research design and method section discussed phenomenology and the importance of investigating participants' lived experiences. Data were collected from 12 women of color via Zoom interviews. The women met specific eligibility criteria, which included being a member of a DI institution's athletic department, being a woman of color, and either seeking, having sought, or planning to seek an AD position. Data was

collected using 12 semi structured interview questions. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the confidentiality of the women in the study. Interview questions were open-ended and allowed participants to expand on their answers and offer additional information. Data collected were derived from the experiences and observations of the women. The interviews gave the participants an opportunity to expand on questions as additional issues surfaced. Follow-up interviews were not necessary as quality information was revealed in initial interviews. Data were analyzed using the inductive method, which aided in producing codes and themes. Regarding ethical considerations, the study's trustworthiness was established by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Both assumptions and limitations were out of the researcher's control in contrast to delimitations, which were in the researcher's control.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors that women of color in the athletic department's administration perceive to be contributors to their underrepresentation in DI AD leadership positions. A qualitative study was utilized to collect data and gain the individual experiences and viewpoints of the 12 women chosen as participants through in-depth, semi structured interviews. The criteria for participation included women who have either held or are currently holding leadership positions within intercollegiate athletics. The study centered on minority women in DI athletic leadership. The study aimed to amass information from the perspective of these women related to their leadership aspirations, experiences, barriers, intersectionality, and their views on the underrepresentation of minority women in DI athletic leadership. The research also examined the correlation between SDT and CRT related to the underrepresentation of minority women DI ADs.

The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organizational level?

**RQ2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position?

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers?

Chapter 4 is comprised of the following categories: demographic descriptions of the participants, the themes discovered during the examination of the interview data, findings from the study, and a segment that encapsulates the results established by the research questions.

## Participants

The research included 12 participants from a pool of 42. The criteria for participation in the study included women of color who currently hold leadership positions such as AD, some variance of an AD position: associate, assistant, deputy, or senior women administrator within DI athletic departments. All 12 participants fit the criteria as minority women who currently hold or who held a position within NCAA DI leadership. Participants were from a variety of divisions or conferences within the NCAA. Five of the 12 participants were from the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Two participants were from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). Two participants were from the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC). One participant each was from the Western Athletic Conference (WAC), the Mid-American Conference (MAC), and Conference USA (C-USA). However, the C-USA institution will move to the American Athletic Conference (AAC) in 2023. Seven of the 12 participants were from the Power Five conference: five from the SEC and two from the ACC. Each study participant, as they were informed, was identified by a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. Demographic information included their age, race, gender, family dynamics, whether they were a student-athlete or division coach, their title, and NCAA conference.

Table 2 specifies demographic information for each participant. A pseudonym identified each participant to protect their confidentiality.

**Table 2***Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	Race/ gender	Degree	Family	College athlete	DI coach	Title	Conference
R1 Cheryl	49	B/F	JD	Single	No	No	Deputy AD for Leadership and Strategy	SEC
R2 Patricia	62	AA/F	Masters	Married, children	BB SB	No	Former AD	SWAC
R3 Katharine	58	AA/F	Bachelor	Married children	I was not	Never	Sr. Assoc. Ad/Business Operations	ACC
R4 Judith	54	B/F	Masters	Single, child	BB	No	Deputy AD/SWA Chief Diversity Officer	SEC
R5 Karen	32	AA/F	JD	Married	No	No	Asst. AD for Culture	SEC
R6 Terilyn	38	B/F	Bachelor	Single, child	No	No	Interim AD Deputy AD COO	WAC
R7 Valerie	42	B/W	Terminal degree, EdD	Married son	SB	No	Deputy AD Internal Affairs SWA Title IX Liaison	SEC
R8 Melanie	41	AA/F	Doctorate	Single	BB	No	Sr. Assoc. AD Student- Athlete Experience SWA	SWAC
R9 Tracey	51	AA/F	Ph.D.	Single	No	No	Deputy AD Internal Operations SWA	MAC
R10 Brenda	55	AA/F	Masters; started Ph.D. 2	Married,	I was not	No	Asst. Vice Chancellor Deputy AD For Student Athlete Wellness	SEC

Name	Age	Race/ gender	Degree	Family	College athlete	DI coach	Title	Conference
							SWA Admin WBB	
R11 Aisha	41	AA/F	Masters	Single, children	TF	No	Exec Sr. Assoc. AD Compliance SWA Chief Diversity Off	C-USA
R12 Cynthia	48	Asian/F	Bachelor	Married, children	No	No	Assoc. AD for Culture Diversity & Engagement	ACC

*Note.* All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. Conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC), Western Athletic Conference (WAC).

## Findings

### *Coding Matrix for Research Question 1*

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organization level?

The coding matrix for Research Question 1 is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

### *Coding Matrix for Research Question 1*

Recurring remark/theme	Descriptions	Occurrences	Evidence & subcategories
Prior Experience	Leadership experience	10 / 12	Valerie: "I started out in college athletics." I had an opportunity to pivot into administration. They called and reached out, I will say I wasn't looking for an



Recurring remark/theme	Descriptions	Occurrences	Evidence & subcategories
			<p>administrative job, but they say that your work speaks for you.”</p> <p>Melanie: “I served as coordinator of student-athletes. I was promoted to associate AD for student-athlete support. I was also designated as the senior woman administrator. I served as director of academics. Currently, I am serving as senior associate AD.”</p> <p>Tracey: “So, I’ve been coordinator to director to assistant athletic director for life skills and community outreach. I was responsible for overseeing all of the community outreach center, development, and personal development.”</p> <p>Brenda: “Yes, three institutions in division one athletics.”</p>
Confidence	To pursue job, to sit in seat	10 / 12	<p>Karen: “I knew I wanted to be in athletics, but knew that I also wanted that legal background, knew it would be helpful to be able to get back into college athletics. But wasn’t for sure how I was gonna break back into it, so I had internships along the way. How do you navigate higher education space; what avenues are available that I could tap into? I had a passion for compliance, and so I figured, hey, I will shoot my shot, and I want to work in compliance. After law school, I attended a sports institute for 6 weeks where you could go and you could actually, essentially, what they did was update your basic legal principles.”</p> <p>Terilyn: “I always thought I had leadership capabilities, just wasn’t sure that it would be in the AD role.”</p> <p>Valerie: “They were looking for a senior associate athletic director to sit at their senior table, and in the Ivy League, most</p>

Recurring remark/theme	Descriptions	Occurrences	Evidence & subcategories
			people die or retire. They do not quit. I was like, I don't have to move, I can do this, so I accepted that position."
Decided Against	Chose not to pursue AD position	9 / 12	<p>Brenda: "There [are] definitely times in these 27/28 years where I have clashed with the culture, and the older I've gotten and the more experience I've gotten and confidence in myself unless I try to negotiate saying what I think, so ... I try to give it to a way it is now, is that difficult, not for me, I mean probably the most awkward thing is making the decision from one moment to the next."</p> <p>Patricia: "I applied for a position: My executive coach, who happened to be a female, she shared that I was, you know, number one. That was difficult was the fact that the current sitting AD had a contract, and if they shift[ed] leadership, the university would have to pay out his contract and figure out how they can financially afford to have two people in that world. Well, not in the role, but the fact that you had to bring that individual and move him into another position and be able to pay that person, but you know, as I listened, you know, I came home after the interview and said which was an hour drive, it is no way if I'm offered, I could accept the opportunity."</p> <p>Katharine: "So, I have not ever wanted to be athletic director, a little different than most people field."</p> <p>Melanie: "A lot of thinking, a lot of you know, you have to be metabolic, and so I don't know if I'm ready to like, really, you know, just really emerge like that and go full blaze at playing director."</p>

Recurring remark/theme	Descriptions	Occurrences	Evidence & subcategories
Desire to sit in seat	Is it something you wanted	10 / 12	<p data-bbox="862 279 1414 678">Brenda: "It is not important for me to be the face; it is not for me to be the leader of the organization. It's important for me to contribute, and I believe there are times and ways that not being the athletic director can allow you to contribute in ways being the athletic director won't allow you. My purpose isn't to sit in the seat, but to be in spaces where I can impact people in a way that other folks aren't necessarily looking at a lot."</p> <p data-bbox="862 720 1414 1077">Valerie: "Let me put it this way, junior year of college, you know. Back then, they used to make you write out your short-term and long-term goals, tell you how naïve I was, I said to myself. My goal, I want to graduate college, I want to be sports information director [at a] Division I school for 5 years and then I want to come back to Division II school and be an athletic director."</p> <p data-bbox="862 1119 1414 1560">Brenda: "So I kind of stumbled into athletics, so this wasn't my destination when I started it, it just kinda happened, and I thought, well, I'll do it until I figure out what I'm really gonna do when I grow up. And so, to answer the question as written, given that I have been an athletic director, I will tell you that it was an opportunity arose, and I thought to myself, well, let me try this now because it's an opportunity to see if it's something I do want to do."</p> <p data-bbox="862 1602 1414 1854">Aisha: "Well, so honestly, I first considered becoming a conference commissioner because that's how I got my start; I started at the conference office, it wasn't until I came to campus, which was 8 years ago, that I really started thinking about the athletic director chair."</p>

Recurring remark/theme	Descriptions	Occurrences	Evidence & subcategories
Calling	Was this for you	2 / 12	<p>Cynthia: “I want to work closely with our athletic director, and I see her schedule, and I see all the things that she’s involved with, and I’m not quite sure I wanna do it, but I wouldn’t say, I don’t want to do it, I’m not sure it is my end goal.”</p> <p>Karen: “I knew I liked compliance, and I knew I wanted to be in athletics, but sometimes God works in mysterious ways. And you don’t really know what path he has set for you, and so one thing I’m learning is that until he tells me it’s time to do something different, I’m gonna keep doing what I’m doing is one just to perform.”</p> <p>Valerie: “I’m a pretty spiritual person, and I’m like God, whatever you do, I trust you, and I just followed his lead, and here I am, wow!”</p>

*Note.* All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities.

### **Snapshot of Participants**

The women in the study hold a variety of positions within NCAA DI leadership. They range in age from 32 to 62; six are married, six are single, and three of the single and one of the married participants do not have children. Of the 12 participants, two hold bachelor’s degrees, and four hold master’s degrees, one of which began her studies for two Doctors of Philosophy (Ph.D.’s), two Juris Doctor (JD) degrees, one Doctor of Education (EdD), and two Ph.D.’s. None of the participants were DI coaches, and seven of the 12 were not student-athletes.

### ***Coding Matrix for Research Question 2***

**RQ 2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position?

Table 4 presents the coding matrix data for Research Question 2.



**Table 4***Coding Matrix for Research Question 2*

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
Barriers for Women	Based on gender	12 / 12	<p>Katharine: “My current boss has our executive staff, about 50% female, which is very unusual. So, this is very unusual to have that many females: you’re in the Power Five conference, so that’s even more very unusual. We had a retreat, the executive staff retreat, where an outside company came in, and that was the first thing he said, “I’ve never seen this many females in, in an executive staff of an athletic department.””</p> <p>Judith: “I think barriers that I encountered is, you know, when you’re the only one, you know. When I first started my career, I was the only Black person, male or female, sitting at the table, and even though you’re sitting at the table and you say something, you’re just saying something nobody really wants to take your opinion. You may have a good opinion; nobody wants to hear your opinion now.”</p> <p>Valerie: “I had two bachelor’s and a master’s degree, and after 6.5 years in D2 of HBCUs, I really wanted to move into an administrative role, and my alma mater could not see me past being a student.”</p> <p>Aisha: “There are several men out there that have never coached or played football that they are given the benefit of the doubt because they’re male, right? So, I do think intersectionality of race and gender has played a role. Especially when you think about oftentimes, people say that Black women are the most disrespected.”</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
Barriers for Race	Based on race/ethnicity	12 / 12	<p>Katharine: “I, I think [be]cause gender and race [have] a lot to do with, I feel like we don’t, we don’t have enough of either of those at the top making those decisions, and people still tend to hire and promote who they’re comfortable with and why they see themselves in you know that’s just the person, they’re just naturally comfortable with and so because that person is usually a White male, not female, not a minority.”</p> <p>Judith: “The impact of race and gender, I think, I think what it does is it sometimes prevents them from applying for those jobs.”</p> <p>Brenda: “The upper echelon of Division I, in particular, is [a] very, very, White male, and so being a Black female in that space, I think there are more than a few barriers.”</p> <p>Aisha: “You don’t see a lot of people from underrepresented backgrounds and fundraising, or development, or external facing, which it is historically, that’s where presidents and chancellors hire athletic directors, from those external operations.”</p>
Barrier-Self	Based on disbelief	8 / 12	<p>Patricia: “I never really sought out directorship until it was 2013 when I actually started to say I’m ready. My cousin got on me; she said, why are you always encouraging and coaching everyone else up, but you’re not willing to do it yourself? And so, I think a lot of barriers [were] myself. The fact that I wasn’t a physical education major, [and] I wasn’t in sports other than from the perspective of I was an athlete myself. Lack of confidence, you know, I know what I know, but I’m not confident enough to want to tell everybody else.”</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
Barrier-Moving	Dislike some areas	3 / 12	Melanie: "A lot of thinking, a lot of, you know, have to be very metabolic, and so I don't know if I'm ready to like really, you know, just really emerge like that, and go full blaze as athletic director."
			Brenda: "We've got a job description that has 10 things on it, and if we only have eight of them, we're not going to apply for it. I tell people all the time, don't tell yourself, no, there are plenty of people out there waiting to do that." Cynthia: "I was really happy with my first job, doing what I did." Katharine: "So be willing to relocate, but you really have to relocate to get that job for the next step."
Culture	Of the institution/NCAA	12 / 12	Valerie: "Don't be afraid to move to different positions or to like different geographic regions. I can't tell you the number of people who have said to me they want to pursue a career or they want my help in getting a position and provid[ing] all of these limitations and restrictions. I can't live on the west coast; I don't like snow." Cheryl: "Collegiate institutions have few women, few persons of color."  Patricia: "I felt in my inner peace that link at university was going to be my first director's role became a fearful atmosphere, just being honest because of all of the naysayers."  Judith: "I think it's very difficult for women to obtain an AD's chair because I still think it's a good old boy system no matter where you look."  Brenda: "I'm a realist; I like to deal with what is good and bad or wonderful, you know? Concepts [are] where we live, and so, I think collegiate institutions and the



Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
			<p>culture around them, and the culture around sports deals with a lot of theoretical, that I'm like yeah, that'd be great if that really operated like that in the real world."</p> <p>Aisha: "It is still very male-dominated as far as our industry. And so, what you'll see is that if a female or a person of color typically gets an opportunity, it's after something really bad has happened at an institution or the institution is in dire straits."</p>
Work-Life Balance	Being a wife, mother, boss	12 / 12	<p>Katharine: "So, so I think, have I moved to that next level? Yes, so stopping at that senior associate AD level with the particular athletic director that I have now who does seem to value work-life balance more. It's something that I've been able to handle, don't know if it would have been the same under a prior or different personality."</p> <p>Judith: "I probably wouldn't have changed anything and only simply because being a single parent, and I was closer to my family. So, I stay here because of that. I think if you had a support system, then you have to go where you can get the job that is going to help you get whatever you need. So, you have like work-life balance, you go wherever you can go to get whatever you need."</p> <p>Terilyn: "I think for me personally, it's the balance of time, of the balance of time and work-life integration. I have a small child, I'm a single parent, and so that's one thing that you know athletic directors are asked to be pulled in a lot of different directions, in any one day, in any one year, it can be pulled in a lot of different directions and as a single parent, I think it's just important for me to be in</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
			a space whether that's as an athletic director or not that has the correct amount of support."
			Valerie: "I mean, and this is being completely honest, but I'm not speaking for anyone or any particular gender, but I know for women, those of us who you know are moms and wanting to be a part of your child's life and recognizing that this business takes such a full commitment, a full family commitment, that my husband who was also working in college athletics as a football coach between all those when our son was born, I can't tell you my son's first steps, because I was gone, I spend so much time on the road, working late hours, doing all of that there were times I'm like I don't think I need to do this anymore because I'm not present for him."
Money, Finance, Budget, Fundraising	Integral, especially in Power Five FBS and to the AD position	7 / 12	Katharine: "A lot of most departments, they're internal, so you know, learning about fundraising, the external piece from the ticket office, which is really entwined with the money too."
			Valerie: "You find more men on the external piece; they are the fundraisers; they are the marketing people. They are the type of things I would say from a gender barrier perspective, you will see that, you will also see very few women overseeing football because God forbid we didn't play the sport, but apparently, the money is different, the budgets are different."
			Melanie: "I did budgets."
			Aisha: "But you don't see a lot of people from underrepresented backgrounds and fundraising, or development, or the external facing, which is but historically that's where presidents and chancellors

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrence	Evidence & subcategories
Compliance	Necessary component of the AD position	8 / 12	<p>have hired athletic directors is from those external operations.”</p> <p>Karen: “I was compliance coordinator for 2 years.”</p> <p>Terilyn: “So I think it’s super important that if you want to be an athletic director, you’ve got to have a breath of experience if you, you need to know how to budget, you need to know, you need to have compliance rules or have an understanding of the compliance rules as an athletic director.”</p> <p>Aisha: “College athletics is ever evolving based on what is going on at the present moment. So, right now, a lot of people are taking on name, image, likeness. That’s another thing that we have had to add to our plates and compliance, which wasn’t a thing when I got started 18 years ago.”</p>
Meeting All Requirements	Men don’t always meet all requirements	6 / 12	<p>Judith: “If there’s something missing that you don’t have, do not let that stop you from applying for those jobs [be]cause nobody stops from applying for those jobs. Let them tell you that you didn’t qualify; you don’t say to yourself that you’re not qualified.”</p>
Representation	Someone who looks like me	12 / 12	<p>Aisha: “We talk a lot about the importance of representation and how, if you can see it, you can be it.”</p> <p>Cynthia: “I was into administration and only because I didn’t see it as administration because I didn’t see it for myself, but, also, I didn’t see a lot of role models who look like me in this position. I would say the representation of Asian administrators is probably where it was when I began.”</p>

*Note.* All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities.

### *Coding Matrix for Research Question 3*

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers?

Table 5 presents the coding matrix data for Research Question 3.

**Table 5**

#### *Coding Matrix for Research Question 3*

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrences in	Evidence & subcategories
SWA Pathway	Does designation ensure a gateway to AD	9 / 12	<p>Patricia: “A lot of people don’t realize it’s an appointment. It’s an appointed position that has the most senior level administration, and it happens to be female, and who appoints that position, the president.”</p> <p>Katharine: “I never thought of it that way, to be honest, so let me think about that. I think one of the good things about that position is access. She would attend conference meetings, so she would know things that [are] a higher level maybe than what a senior associate person in their own little area would know.”</p> <p>Judith: “It depends on where you are, who you’re working for, and your institution, but I think it can be.”</p> <p>Karen: “I do think we need to have the title of SWA because, in my opinion, why give it to just one person? I don’t see them as the SWA position isn’t important, but I don’t know that it automatically puts you in the pipeline to become athletic director.”</p>
Search Firms	Would do blind hires	2 / 12	<p>Cheryl: “Search firms put you in [a] position to get in areas that traditionally White men get in programs like Lead 1, Fellows, Sports Management, and Pathways.”</p> <p>Aisha: “We’ve called on our search committees and said you all have a responsibility in this as well. Search committees will say, oh, well, our</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrences in	Evidence & subcategories
Committees	Important to serve on a variety to gain knowledge	3 / 12	<p>job is to identify candidates we don't really know, we're not involved in the decision. But yes, you are in this, in the decision. So, you know, we've really challenged search firms to get outside their boxes and identify diverse talent pools, and not for the sake of checking a box to say, well, we had a diverse candidate in the pool, but to really set that person up for success so that it causes those presidents when they're making the decision to really think like man, this person's really talented, I want to bring this person in on my staff because I feel like a lot of times, the president or the chancellor, or whoever is in the hiring position, will say we tried, there is no one out there. So, then, it's up to search firms to identify diverse talent that is qualified to be in that chair."</p> <p>Patricia: "I was given the opportunity to be on the council, after two and a half years of service, was renewed to remain on the committee because the committee council felt that I brought value to the table, that I made sure they were given knowledge, knowledge that would help them make better decisions related to the entire scope of the division."</p>
Networking	With a variety of people	11 / 12	<p>Valerie: "The SWA position allows, is a seat at the table, also on the conference level and access to NCAA committees because a lot of times, NCAA committees are relegated to administrator positions which would be AD or SWA, so that designation sometimes allows you to be in spaces with conference commissioners, presidents, chancellors, and other ADs, etc."</p> <p>Valerie: "You know Candice, Carla, and Nina have platforms at this point, if they are able to help other women, and, whether it's putting calls in for their names, putting them in places where their faces and names are public. Now, they are known, presidents and chancellors are seeing them. That has to happen, we have to have more sponsors, more advocates to advance that."</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrences in	Evidence & subcategories
Positive Mentor	Who supported them	11 / 12	<p>Brenda: "I would have developed some relationships with women and people of color a lot sooner than I did."</p> <p>Aisha: "I would offer to really invest in identifying a network to support you."</p> <p>Cheryl: "You need someone who will speak for you when you're not around."</p> <p>Patricia: "Dr. CH, she was a supporter of mine. And of teaching women that we can be directors of athletics, championing our calls, helping us to understand what it takes, we just have to be brave and fearless enough to walk through the gate and just do so."</p> <p>Judith: "When I first started as an athletic director, my first supervisor made sure it wasn't necessarily him because I think he didn't really know how to, how to support me but made sure I could go to the NCAA."</p> <p>Karen: "I had mentors on the legal side and then I had mentors on the sports side, or the college athletic side, ironically, my mentors were all males."</p> <p>Terilyn: "Currently, it is about making sure you have employees underneath you. So, hiring people that are able to represent you when you can't be there, and also can handle the work."</p>
Additional Comments			<p>Cynthia: "Collect stories of your career and learn to tell them. I had the privilege to work for, and they were White men, to be honest, who had this amazing ability to relay their experiences in a storytelling form that captivated everybody and, like, I think of Ronald Reagan, but you know what, he might have been the best president for you or not the best president, but his acting ability and his ability to tell a story was really certain. My previous boss and a coach I used to work with</p>

Themes	Descriptions	Occurrences in	Evidence & subcategories
			had this amazing ability to captivate an audience [by] sharing their experiences in a great storytelling way. I don't know that a lot of women that I've been exposed to have that skill. But it's supercritical and makes you memorable."

*Note.* All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

## **Cheryl**

Cheryl's career encompassed both the athletic and legal spectrum. As noted in the demographic data, Cheryl holds a JD degree. She revealed that her current position was developed with thought to her expertise in both occupations.

Cheryl currently serves as her institution's deputy director of athletics for leadership strategy. In addition, she wears many hats as she also administers guidance and leadership for diversity, equity, inclusion initiatives, student conduct, human resources, and compliance. Cheryl is also the liaison to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX, the Office of General Counsel, and the Office of Student Advocacy and Accountability. She revealed in the interview that her current position was "created with me in mind." Her previous experience includes administrative guidance for strategic assets in talent management and organizational change. Other portions of her career path consist of supervision of safety and risk management, civil liberties, and Title IX. Cheryl also served as senior associate AD, SWA, and Title IX coordinator. Furthermore, Cheryl served in the following capacities: director of membership services and academic certification and review with the NCAA and as assistant director of compliance and legal assistant for one of the NCAA's conferences.

**Patricia**

Although currently unemployed, Patricia amassed a variety of experiences and careers within the NCAA athletic departments. She became involved in the NCAA during her first husband's coaching career. She explained that all NCAA institutions are required to identify someone for the designation of SWA. She further explained that the role of SWA is to ensure "women had an opportunity to voice their concerns, but also have a female presence and oversight of so many women sports teams who has solely male coaches."

Patricia has extensive experience in DI and DII athletics. Patricia became the first female athletic director at one of the collegiate institutions and was employed in that capacity for more than 8 years. She spent an additional 5 years as the director of athletics and more than 18 years working in athletic administration and coaching. She previously served as director of athletics and has been instrumental in experience, wellness, and academic success for student-athletes. Patricia is herself a former student-athlete.

She was influential in establishing partnerships within her community, spearheading facility improvements, and improving the fiscal responsibility of the athletic department by establishing and introducing fundraisers to honor outstanding alumni, coaches, and athletic supporters. Patricia also assisted in securing the yearly addition of more than one million dollars in revenue.

She is continually active within the NCAA community serving on numerous committees, including the NCAA Division I Council, the NCAA Division I Competition Oversight Committee, and the National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA).



**Katharine**

Katharine said, “I may not be the typical person.” Unlike some of the other participants, she had no aspiration to become an AD. However, Katharine revealed, “This is my third athletic director since I’ve been in the department, very different people, all three of them.”

Katharine is currently the senior associate AD at her institution. She also wears the additional hat of the chief financial officer for the athletic department. She is responsible for the oversight of the athletic department’s business, finance, team travel, and information technology areas. Additional responsibilities include short-term and long-term financial forecasts, appropriation, and reports for operations and capital projects and the development and execution of departmental initiatives.

Previously, Katharine served as assistant AD for business and finance. She also previously served as associate AD. Unlike some ADs, Katharine “came to the university in a couple of different roles before athletics and fell into the role by accident.” She worked for the communications department and budget office. In those departments, Katharine served as the department’s AD of operations and business officer. Her previous career consists of considerable experience in fiscal management and analysis, planning and budgeting, business process improvements, and efficiencies.

**Judith**

Judith loves the state where she resides. Of her institution, she stated, “It has treated me well, I get to see things, I get to go places, I can be in any area of being an athletic director that I choose, and nobody keeps me out.” She expressed the importance of communicating with other women in the field and discussing the pros and cons of what was successful.

Judith's career spans 25 years in athletic administration, and she presently serves her collegiate institution as executive senior associate AD and SWA. Judith is a former student-athlete. She has operated in the following capacities: advisor for academics for women's athletics and for football. She has also served as director of life skills, associate AD, SWA, and assistant academic advisor. Judith is also involved in other facets of the institution that works in conjunction with the athletic department. Judith expressed, "I've never really wanted to sit in the athletic director's seat." Instead, she said, "I just like doing different parts of, yeah, in the athletic department."

### **Karen**

Karen conveyed that people inquire about her position. She responded and said, "People like, oh my gosh, that's cool, what do you do?" She stated, "I tell people, I said, the best way to explain my job is I just make sure everyone plays nicely in the same box."

Karen is the current assistant AD of culture and oversees the following aspects of athletics: human resources, including payroll, recruiting, retention, benefits, etc. When questioned about desiring but deciding against pursuing a leadership position, Karen declared, "I've desired it, but this was the first opportunity received." In the past, she has held the position of executive director of athletics human resources, executing policies and procedures that involve Title IX, staff relations, badgering, unethical behavior, and other areas of misconduct. Previously, Karen spearheaded and provided leadership for the growth of diversity, equity, and inclusion at a former institution and served on the conference's committee for racial and social justice. While at her former institution, she served in the capacity of athletics compliance coordinator. The position required assistance with interpreting rules for those in athletics and overseeing the recruitment of specific teams and the activity logs for athletics.

Karen earned her bachelor's degree and later received her JD. During her law school career, she studied law as it related to sports. Later, she interned, completing higher education and collegiate institutional compliance.

### **Terilyn**

Terilyn acknowledged, "So, I started out in college athletics fresh out of college." She interned in communications. She indicated she "had really great mentors that told me, if, if you love it here, there's the opportunity for you, so I came through the communication side of things."

Following a stint as executive senior associate AD, Terilyn was promoted to deputy AD and chief operating officer. Her current position administers leadership, awareness, a plan of action, and guidance for both professional and support staff. The role is also comprised of supervising business operations, employee recruitment and management, diversity, equity, and inclusion, athletic facilities, athletic events, and obligations on campus. Furthermore, her duties include supervising policy improvements and strategic planning elements.

Roles prior to this institution consisted of the senior associate AD of external relations. During her time as a leadership team representative, Terilyn was responsible for overseeing communications (a major portion of her professional career), marketing, and corporate sponsors. Improving the athletic programs is of immense importance to Terilyn. Previous institutions benefited from her commitment to devising ways to improve the department, its program, and its brands.

### **Valerie**

Valerie revealed that although she loved sports information, it was demanding. She stated, "I knew there was so much more for me." A position became available in the Ivy League,

where Valerie said, “People do not leave the Ivy League at all.” Instead, the individuals in those roles either retire or die. Valerie accepted the role in the Ivy League and stated, “Because again, very few people that look like you and I are sitting at the table.”

Valerie serves her collegiate institution as the deputy AD for internal affairs, the designation of SWA, and is also a member of the athletic department’s executive leadership team. She is also the administrator of sports for several women’s athletic programs, including basketball, bowling, soccer, and tennis. Valerie provides oversight for internal affairs and compliance issues. Additionally, she oversees athletic achievement, the athlete’s emotional and mental health, sustenance, physical condition, workouts, and the overall growth of the student-athlete. In addition to those responsibilities, she also performs duties as the Title IX intermediary and dean of students.

Valerie’s prior job titles included senior associate AD, the designation of SWA, executive associate AD, and SWA. Valerie has experience working in Division I, II, and III of the NCAA. She articulated, “So, in terms of my career path to date, as I mentioned earlier, primarily, Division II institutions, actually historically Black institutions.” Valerie has held a variety of positions in her athletic career, including the director of sports information. At this point in her career, she stated,

I’d already had two bachelor’s degrees and a master’s ... after six and a half years, I really wanted to move to an administrative role and, excuse me, my alma mater could not see me past being a student, which is very hard to, you know, swallow!

Valerie’s extensive career includes serving as an associate and senior associate AD, executive associate AD, SWA, faculty athletics advocate, AD, and the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) Management Council.

**Melanie**

Melanie said that when she took on an internal role, she did not feel like that was something she could handle and was not sure she possessed the confidence for that position. However, she later realized that she could perform those duties. But, “due to the evolution of athletics,” she stated, “So, I think, I just wanna just be a great support for my AD.”

Melanie currently serves as the senior associate AD for student-athlete experience. Previously, she served as the director for athletics academic support/life skills. She previously served 5 years at Jackson State University as the associate AD of academics/SWA. Melanie’s duties consisted of oversight of academic support employees, academic advancement, and every facet of the life skills agenda. In conjunction with the student-athlete experience, she was charged with academic support in the form of course loads, academic policies, and individual and professional contingencies for growth. Moreover, Melanie was responsible for equipping athletes with the ability to recognize adaptable skills they could utilize in life following their student-athlete careers.

Melanie has performed the duties of AD during their absence. In doing so, she was tasked with managing the athletic department, which consisted of human resources, fiscal responsibilities, athletic events, travel, and Title IX. She shared, “So, I, I always wanted to just be a really good support person.” Melanie obtained her master’s degree in sports administration and a doctorate in educational administration.

**Tracey**

Tracey serves as deputy AD, internal operations/SWA. She has provided oversight for numerous sports, human resources, Title IX, business operations, compliance, gender equity and

diversity, and student-athlete well-being and advancement. Furthermore, she was “responsible for overseeing all the community outreach career development and personal development.”

When asked if there was ever a time she decided against pursuing a leadership position, she stated, “Yeah, I did have an opportunity and decided against [it].” When asked to elaborate, Tracey stated,

It was another division, one institution I had an opportunity to go there. It was, I would say, a lateral move. However, there might have been, and I, because I don’t know the guarantee to grow a little bit higher and decided to stay at my current institution because of [the] opportunities that were presented to me.

### **Brenda**

Brenda’s experience spans over 20 years in intercollegiate athletics. Presently, she serves as assistant vice chancellor, the athletic department’s chief diversity officer, deputy AD responsible for the health and wellness of student-athletes, and SWA. Additionally, her duties include membership in the leadership and executive staff along with the athletic department’s sports administration group. In her current position, she supervises men’s and women’s track and field and cross-country athletic programs, and student-athlete development, strength, conditioning, and training, and mental, physical, and nutritional programs.

When asked about her entrance into the AD’s role, Brenda stated,

So, I kind of stumbled into athletics, so this wasn’t my destination when I started. It just kinda happened, and I thought, well, I’ll do it until I figure out what I’m really gonna do when I grow up. And, so, but to answer the question as written, given that I have been an athletic director, I will tell you that it was, an opportunity arose, and I thought to myself,

well, let me try this now because it's an opportunity to see if it's something I do want to do. I don't think like I ever set out to be an athletic director.

Prior to her current position, she served as senior associate AD and SWA. Previous experience includes oversight of football, both women's and men's soccer, tennis, cross country, track, and basketball. She was also tasked with Title IX responsibilities and key planning for the athletics department. Brenda has served as a member of several conferences and national-level committees. Brenda holds a master's degree in clinical psychology and began pursuing two Ph.D.'s, one in clinical psychology and the second in educational policy study and evaluation.

### **Aisha**

Aisha is a former track and field student-athlete and the executive senior associate AD. She manages institutional, C-USA, and NCAA compliance. Additionally, Aisha received the SWA designation, she is the Title IX deputy coordinator and chief diversity officer, and she provides oversight for both the men's and women's cross-country/track and field programs. Aisha chairs the NCAA Division I Progress Toward Degree Waivers Committee and the NCAA Division I Track and Field and Cross-Country Group. She is a board member of the Minority Opportunities Athletic Association and serves on the Legislation and Governance Committee.

Aisha began her athletics career on the conference level. Her previous experience included compliance and fiscal responsibilities, being assistant director of academic affairs, and overseeing legislative interpretation and process. Additionally, Aisha was responsible for managing numerous sports and Title IX.

Aisha received a bachelor's in business. Her master's degree is in sports and fitness management. Aisha recently accepted a position at another university. She stated, "I really was impressed by them and the opportunity they're offering; they recruited me." She is currently in

the process of moving to a university in another state and within the Power Five athletic conference.

### **Cynthia**

Cynthia discussed the fact that she was not necessarily interested in sitting in the AD's chair. She stated, "I wouldn't say I, I don't want to do it, I'm not sure if I if that's truly my end goal." She expressed concern about time away from her family.

Cynthia is currently the associate AD of administration. Additionally, she is the associate AD of culture, diversity, and engagement. Cynthia's responsibility consists of serving as the intermediary between the collegiate institution, the conference, and the NCAA to ensure inclusivity in the form of communication, education, and positive activities. She is also responsible for correspondence supporting the athletic director and supervising the AD's speaking engagements.

Cynthia's professional background consists of being AD of athletic communications for a collegiate institution, press officer for the U.S. Women's Baseball Team, and public relations for major league soccer. She holds a bachelor's degree.

### **Identification of Themes**

Establishing themes was determined by completing several steps. The steps in the process consisted of accumulating the data, organizing the data, seeking the commonalities of, and coding the data, identifying themes from the data, recording, summarizing, describing, and finally, confirming the authenticity and integrity of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Themes were identified in accordance with the interview questions asked of participants. The themes were then utilized to express the subject's responses regarding their experiences in NCAA DI leadership. Several themes materialized from the data.



The themes for the first research question consisted of prior experience, confidence, and the decision against becoming an AD. The participants relayed prior leadership experience in several areas. They expressed their desire to become ADs and the reasons they chose not to pursue the position.

The second research question elicited the following themes: barriers for women, desire to sit in the seat, calling, barriers for race, the barrier to self, barrier to moving, culture, work–life balance, fiscal responsibilities, compliance, meeting all the requirements, and representation. The women described various barriers they believed they encountered and other women could encounter while pursuing the AD’s seat.

Research Question 3 revealed the following themes: SWA pathway, search firms, committees, networking, leadership training, and positive mentors. The participants suggested several ways women could enhance their chances of becoming ADs.

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organization level?

Each participant was asked the following questions.

- a. Describe your career path to date. a. Job titles b. Responsibilities
- b. At what point in your career did you consider a career as an athletic director?
- c. What factors led you to decide for or against an athletic director’s career?
- d. What support systems did you have to assist you in your career paths?

## **Evidence**

Evidence of Research Question 1 is presented in Table 6.

## **Table 6**

### *Research Question 1 Evidence*

Recurring remark/theme	Description	Occurrences	Evidence
Prior Experience	Leadership Experience	10/12	Administrator Coordinator of Student Athletes Director to Assistant AD Three leadership positions in DI
Confidence	To sit in the chair	10/12	Wanted to be in athletics/internships Possessed leadership skills Opportunity, felt qualified Possessed self-confidence
Decided Against	Chose not to pursue	9/12	No desire to pursue Two people in the position, if accepted Not sure of being ready Spiritual, follows and trusts in God

### ***Prior Experience and Leadership Experience***

The women in the study possessed an abundance of experience within the NCAA and the private sector. They hold a variety of degrees ranging from bachelor to EdD, Ph.D., and JD. Several were student-athletes; however, none served as a DI coach. Many of the participants have several job duties and titles in addition to their main roles.

To support this theme, Valerie mentioned she began in college athletics and had an opportunity to get involved in athletic administration. She stated, “They called and reached out, I will say I wasn’t looking for an administrative job, but they say that your work speaks for you.” Melanie served in the capacity of coordinator of student-athletes. She reported that she currently holds the position of associate AD for student-athlete support. Melanie also stated, “I was also designated as the senior woman administrator, I served as director of academics, and currently, I am serving as senior associate AD.” Tracey identified herself as the coordinator and assistant AD for life skills and community outreach and remarked that she “was responsible for overseeing all of the community outreach center, development, and personal development.”

*Confidence: To Pursue Job, To Sit in Seat*

When presented with the question regarding their confidence and their desire to pursue an athletic directorship and sit in the seat, Karen, Terilyn, Valerie, and Brenda, all accepted the challenge.

Karen stated,

I knew I wanted to be in athletics, but knew that I also wanted that legal background, knew it would be helpful to be able to get back into college athletics. But wasn't for sure how I was gonna break back into it, so, I had internships along the way. How do you navigate higher education space, what avenues are available that I could tap into? I had a passion for compliance, and so I figured, hey, I will shoot my shot, and I want to work in compliance. After law school, I attended a sports institute for 6 weeks where you could go and you could actually, essentially, what they did was update your basic legal principles.

Terilyn was confident she possessed leadership qualities. However, she was not sure it would be in the role of an AD. In contrast, Valerie understood that Ivy League athletic administration personnel do not resign; instead, their positions become available when a person retires or passes away. So, when a senior AD position became available, she felt confident she could do the job, was excited she would not have to move, and applied for the position. Brenda said,

There [are] definitely times in these 27/28 years where I have clashed with the culture, and the older I've gotten and the more experience I've gotten and confidence in myself unless I try to negotiate saying what I think, so I try to give it to a way it is now, is that

difficult, not for me, I mean probably the most difficult thing is making the decision from one moment to the next.

***Decided Against or Chose Not to Pursue an AD Position***

Patricia applied for a position and said,

My executive coach, who happened to be a female, she shared that I was, you know, number one. That was difficult was the fact that the current sitting AD had a contract, and if they shift[ed] leadership, the university would have to pay out his contract and figure out how they can financially afford to have two people in that world. Well, not in the role, but the fact that you had to bring that individual and move him into another position and be able to pay that person, but you know, as I listened, you know, I came home after the interview and said which was an hour drive, it is no way if I'm offered, I could accept the opportunity.

Katharine noted that her path was different from others as she did not have the desire to be an AD. Valerie channeled her spirituality and stated, "I'm like, God, whatever you do, I trust you, and I just followed his lead, and here I am, wow!" Melanie said she did a lot of thinking and stated a need to "be metabolic." Also, she was unsure if she was on track to "really emerge like that and go full blaze playing director." Brenda felt her role was best suited as something other than being the face of the organization. She believed, "There are times and ways that not being the athletic director can allow you to contribute in ways being the athletic director won't allow you." Brenda also believed it was not important for her to sit in the AD's director seat but to "be in spaces where I can impact people in a way that other folks aren't necessarily looking at a lot."

**RQ2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position?

Each participant was asked the following questions.

a. What barriers, if any, did you encounter that challenged your career journey? a.

Personal b. Gender c. Race d. Resources e. NCAA f. Collegiate institutions g. Culture

b. What impact does intersectionality (race and gender) have on athletic director applicants?

Table 7 presents the evidence from Research Question 2.

**Table 7**

*Research Question 2 Evidence*

Recurring remark/theme	Description	Occurrences	Evidence
Barriers for Women	Based on gender	12/12	Unusual to have female executive staff No one wants to hear your opinion Not viewed as qualified
Desire to Sit in Seat	Did you want the position	10/12	No desire, be in space to make impact In goals, clear path to position Opportunity arose, capitalized on it Not the end goal
Barriers for Race	Based on race/ethnicity	12/12	Not enough representation Prevents people from applying Upper echelon very male and White Not many from underrepresented backgrounds have external operation experience
Barrier–Self	Based on disbelief	8/12	Am I ready Desire Do I qualify Content
Barrier to Moving	Dislike some areas	3/12	Not willing to relocate Afraid of different geographic regions
Culture	Of the institution	12/12	Male-dominated Good ole boy system Sports is male-oriented

Recurring remark/theme	Description	Occurrences	Evidence
			Naysayers
Work–Life Balance	Boss, wife, mom	12/12	Does supervisor support Single parent Time with family or children
Money, Finance, Budgeting, Fundraising	External operations	7/12	Really intertwined with the position More men with external experience Experience with budgets Fundraising important
Compliance	Important to position	8/12	Compliance coordinator Need to understand compliance rules Ever evolving. Need to stay abreast
Meeting all Requirements	Men don't	6/12	Won't apply if missing one requirement Men apply regardless Want to check all of the boxes
Representation	Someone who looks the same	12/12	Still a long way to go If you can see it, you can achieve it. May not apply if it does not appear attainable

### ***Barriers for Women Based on Gender***

When asked about barriers for women based on gender, Katharine commented, "My current boss has our executive staff, about 50% female, which is very unusual. So this is very unusual to have that many females; you're in the Power Five conferences, so that's even more very unusual. We had a retreat, the executive staff retreat, where an outside company came in, and that was the first thing he said, I've never seen this many females in, in an executive staff of an athletic department."

Judith's answer supported the emerging theme by revealing that she encountered barriers by being the only one. Judith stated, "When I first started my career, I was the only Black person, male or female, sitting at the table." She believed that although a person may have a seat at the

table, whether or not they have a good opinion, no one wants to hear that opinion. Valerie shared that she had a bachelor's and master's degree, and after 6-plus years in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Division II institutions, her alma mater "could not see past me being a student."

Aisha reported,

There are several men out there that have never coached or played football that they are given the benefit of the doubt because they're male, right? So, I do think intersectionality of race and gender has played a role. Especially when you think about oftentimes, people say that Black women are the most disrespected.

***Desire to Sit in Seat/Is it Something You Wanted***

When asked about the desire to sit in the seat or if it was something she wanted, Valerie reported,

Let me put it this way, junior year of college, you know. Back then, they used to make you write out your short-term and long-term goals, tell you how naïve I was, I said to myself, "My goal, I want to graduate college, I want to be the sports information director at Division I school for 5 years and then I want to come back to Division II school and be an athletic director."

Brenda said,

So one, I kind of stumbled into athletics, so this wasn't my destination when I started it, it just kinda happened, and I thought, well, I'll do it until I figure out what I'm really gonna do when I grow up. And so, to answer the question as written, given that I have been athletic director, I will tell you that it was an opportunity arose, and I thought to myself,

well, let me try this now because it's an opportunity to see if it's something I do want to do.

Cynthia commented,

I want to work closely with our athletic director, and I see her schedule, and I see all the things that she's involved with, and I'm not quite sure I wanna do it, but, I wouldn't say, I don't want to do it, I'm not sure it is my end goal.

### ***Calling: Was This for You***

Karen had a passion for compliance. However, she believed, "Sometimes God works in mysterious ways, and you don't really know what path he has set for you." She felt that until He directed her to another path, she would continue to keep doing what she was doing. Valerie, also a spiritual person, places her faith in God. She said, "I'm like, God, whatever you do, I trust you, and I just followed his lead, and here I am, wow!"

### ***The Barrier of Race Based on Race or Ethnicity***

When asked about the race and ethnicity barriers, Katharine replied,

I, I think cause gender and race has a lot to do with, I feel like we don't, we don't have enough of either of those at the top making those decisions and people still tend to hire and promote who they're comfortable with and who they see themselves in you know that's just the person, they're just naturally comfortable with and so, because that person is usually a White male, not female, not a minority.

Judith's views on the impact of race and gender included the belief that it sometimes prevents those who are interested in the position from applying for the job. Brenda reinforced the fact that the upper echelon of DI administration is White male-centered and "as a Black female in that space, I think there are more than a few barriers."



Aisha commented, “You don’t see a lot of people from underrepresented backgrounds and fundraising, or development, or external facing, which is historically, that’s where presidents and chancellors hire athletic directors, from those external operations.”

***Barrier–Self: Based on Disbelief***

When asked about the barrier of self, Patricia reported,

I never really sought out directorship until it was 2013 when I actually started to say I’m ready. My cousin got on me, [and] she said, why are you always encouraging and coaching everyone else up, but you’re not willing to do it yourself? And so, I think a lot of barriers were myself. The fact that I wasn’t a physical education major, I wasn’t in sports other than from the perspective of I was an athlete myself. Lack of confidence, you know, I know what I know, but I’m not confident enough to want to tell everybody else.

Brenda was forthcoming by mentioning that often a job description may include the requirement of 10 qualifications. However, if someone possesses only eight of those, they will not apply. Brenda stated, “I tell people all the time, don’t tell yourself, no, there are plenty of people out there waiting to do that.”

***Barrier–Moving: Dislike Some Locations***

When asked about the barrier to moving, Valerie replied,

Don’t be afraid to move to different positions or to like different geographic regions. I can’t tell you the number of people who have said to me they want to pursue a career or they want my help in getting a position and provid[ing] all of these limitations and restrictions. I can’t live on the west coast; I don’t like snow.

### ***Culture of the Institution/NCAA***

Regarding the culture of the NCAA, Cheryl revealed, “Collegiate institutions have few women, few persons of color.”

Patricia said,

I felt in my inner peace that [the] link at university was going to be my first director’s role, [and it] became a fearful atmosphere, just being honest because of all of the naysayers. I think it’s very difficult for women to obtain an AD’s chair because I still think it’s a good old boy system no matter where you look.

Aisha mentioned that athletic administration remains “very male-dominated as far as our industry.” She also mentioned that, in her opinion, when a female or a person of color is given an opportunity for an AD position, it normally follows an incident at the university that has caused a blemish on the institution.

### ***Work–Life Balance: Being a Wife, Mom, or Boss***

Katharine disclosed that work–life balance could likely be difficult under someone who does not value an employee’s work–life balance. She asserted that the current AD “does seem to value work–life balance more.” However, she did not know if she would feel the same working for someone with a different personality. Judith expressed the importance of having a family as a support system. She chose to stay in her current location because of being a single parent and the support of her family. She suggested, “You have to go where you can get the job and whatever you need.” Terilyn mentioned that ADs are often pulled in many directions and that as a single parent, it is crucial “to be in a space, whether that is an athletic director or not, that has the correct amount of support.” To offer support for the work–life balance theme, Valerie noted that you often have to sacrifice important events for the job that takes a full commitment. She stated,

“I can’t tell you my son’s first steps because I was gone.” Valerie questioned her choice based on the fact she felt she was not present for her son.

***Fiscal Responsibility Especially in Power Five, FBS, and AD Positions***

Fundraising is an important aspect of the AD’s position. The fiscal responsibility area is one that shows the inequity in AD candidates. Aisha noted that individuals from underrepresented backgrounds lack the external facing of fundraising or development. However, according to Aisha, historically, presidents and chancellors hire athletic directors from external operations. Valerie noted, “You find more men on the external piece, they are the fundraisers, they are the marketing people.” Fundraising is vital to FBS institutions. According to Valerie, there are “very few women overseeing football because God forbid we didn’t play the sport, but apparently the money is different; the budgets are different.”

***Compliance: Necessary Component of AD Position***

When asked about compliance, Terilyn said,

So I think it’s super important that if you want to be an athletic director, you’ve got to have a breath of experience if you, you need to know how to budget, you need to know, you need to have compliance rules or have an understanding of the compliance rules as an athletic director.

Since name, image, and likeness (NIL) has become a part of intercollegiate athletics, it is vital that ADs are aware of the changes in compliance.

Aisha noted, “College athletics is ever-evolving based on what is going on at the present moment. That’s another thing, that we have had to add to our plates and compliance, which wasn’t a thing when I got started 18 years ago.”

***Meeting All Requirements/Men Don't Always Meet All Requirements***

Judith offered advice to women who may seek an AD position and voiced the following observation,

If there's something missing that you don't have, do not let that stop you from applying for those jobs [be]cause nobody stops from applying for those jobs. Let them tell you that you didn't qualify; you don't say to yourself that you're not qualified.

Valerie supported that observation by saying,

A lot of times, we will see the criteria that say 10 things we need to have, and we go through and see if we have those 10. We made nine out of 10 and decide not to apply because we don't have that one piece, men will have zero out of 10 and will apply. That would be. My advice is my last piece of advice is [to] apply for the position.

Melanie disclosed that women want to check all the boxes, "We wanna make sure we understand, you know, how everything works, and we want to be perfect at it." On the other hand, male counterparts do not have to check all the boxes. Instead, "they just go into it thinking that they can do it, and they do it."

Brenda commented,

I think there are more than a few barriers, some of them constructed in our minds and maintained there. Some real outside of us, the ones that I feel like we maintain in our own mind, is that we aren't ready for positions, or we're not qualified, or whatever. We've got a job description that has 10 things on it all the time; don't tell yourself no; there are plenty of people out there waiting to do that.

***Representation: Someone Who Looks Like Me***

In employment, representation matters. To support the representation theme, Karen noted,

I wouldn't say gender challenged me by much because I was fortunate enough to see people in the previous institution was very heavily staffed with women, so that was exciting to see. And then we also did have women in leadership roles, and so, I think that was very refreshing to see as well. Race, the race one is tricky because you don't see a lot of minorities in athletics.

Some strides have been made in appointing minority women ADs: Carla Williams at Virginia, Candice Storey at Vanderbilt, and Nina King at Duke, all of which are in Power Five Conferences, specifically the ACC, Virginia, and Duke and, the SEC, Vanderbilt. However, Terilyn stated, "I think that you know we've been seeing women attaining positions a little bit more regularly now, but there's a long way to go." Aisha mentioned, "We talk a lot about the importance of representation and how if you can see it, you can be it."

Cynthia stated,

I was into administration, and only because I didn't see it as administration because I didn't see it for myself, but also, I didn't see a lot of role models that looked like me in this position. I would say the representation of Asian administrators is probably where it was when I began.

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers?

Each participant was asked the following questions.

- a. Would you change anything related to your career choice or strategies?

- b. Explain your thoughts on whether the SWA position is an appropriate gateway to the position of athletic director.
- c. What advice would you offer women currently pursuing a career as an athletic director?
- d. Would you offer different advice to minority women? If so, what advice would you give?
- e. There has been an increase in Division I women athletic directors. What will it take for more minority women to be appointed to this position?

Table 8 presents evidence from Research Question 3.

**Table 8**

*Research Question 3 Evidence*

Recurring remark/theme	Description	Occurrences	Evidence
SWA Pathway	Is it a gateway	9/12	It is an appointment Provides access Isn't necessarily a pipeline Can be
Committees	Important to gain knowledge	3/12	Seat at the table opportunity Help to make decisions
Networking	Various people	11/12	Other women can provide assistance Lets people know who you are Identify people who can and will be supportive
Positive Mentor	Who supports	11/12	Someone who will teach and direct Speak for you in your absence Hire people who can represent you in your absence

### ***SWA Pathway: Does Designation Ensure a Gateway to AD***

Many do not know or understand that women do not apply for the position of SWA. According to Patricia, “A lot of people don’t realize it’s an appointment. It’s an appointed position that has the most senior level administration, and it happens to be female, and who appoints that position, the president.”

Katharine explained that the importance of being the SWA is the access it provides. Judith believes, “It depends on where you are, whom you’re working for, and your institution, but I think it can be.” Karen’s views differed. She offered,

I do believe we need to have the title of SWA because, in my opinion, why give it to just one person? I don’t see them as the SWA appointment isn’t important, but I don’t know that it automatically puts you in the pipeline to become athletic director.

### ***Search Firms Would Do Blind Hires***

Aisha’s views on search firms conducting blind hires consisted of the following, We’ve called on our search committees and said you all have a responsibility in this as well. Search committees will say, oh, well, our job is to identify candidates we don’t really know; we’re not involved in the decision. But yes, you are in this decision. So, you know, we’ve really challenged search firms to get outside their boxes and identify diverse talent pools, and not for the sake of checking a box to say, well, we had a diverse candidate in the pool, but to really set that person up for success so that it causes those presidents when they’re making the decision to really think like man, this person’s really talented, I want to bring this person in on my staff because I feel like a lot of times, the president, or the chancellor, or whoever is in the hiring position, will say we tried, there is

no one out there. So, then, it's up to search firms to identify diverse talent that is qualified to be in that chair.

***Committees: Important to Serve on a Variety to Gain Knowledge***

Knowledge was a particularly important theme. Patricia noted that the council believed she was a valuable asset. She ensured that the committee was given information and knowledge that assisted them in making the best decisions regarding the complete scope of the division.

***Networking With a Variety of People***

When discussing networking with a variety of people, Valerie commented,

You know, Candice, Carla, [and] Nina have platforms at this point. If they are able to help other women and whether it's navigating certain or putting [a] call in their names, putting them in positions where their faces and names are public. And then now they are, you know, presidents and chancellors are seeing them, needs to happen, we have to have more sponsors, more advocates to help advance that.

Tracey stated,

I think networking is still very key, and so the more you can network and, and you know what, sometimes it is about picking up the phone and calling and saying, hey, I just need to talk, can I come by and meet with you? Really, you know, get to really network and get out there and make sure people know who you are.

***Leadership Training/NCAA***

Aisha discussed leadership training and said,

Dr. Charles Wickham of the leadership institute for ethnic minorities males and females is one that I participated in, and it is designed to try to speak directly to the diversity in



college athletics, particularly in senior positions. I've done their institute for administrative advancement, I've done the executive institute.

***Positive Mentor: Who Supported Them***

In regard to the theme, Cheryl noted, "You need someone who will speak for you when you're not around." Patricia revealed that Dr. CH was a mentor who taught women that they could be directors of athletics, which helped them to understand what is required of that position and how to understand the need to be brave and fearless to take that chance. Judith expressed that although her first supervisor did not know how to support her, he ensured she had someone to mentor her so she would be prepared for the NCAA. Karen commented, "I had mentors on the legal side and then I had mentors on the sports side, or the college athletic side; ironically, my mentors were all males." Terilyn emphasized, "Currently, it is about making sure you have employees underneath you. So, hiring people that are able to represent you when you can't be there, and also can handle the work."

***Additional Comments***

Following the initial interview questions, the women were asked if they had any other advice to offer. Cheryl stated, "Be intentional when choosing mentors, make intentional connections beyond people who look like you, and form legitimate, authentic, organic relationships."

Karen commented, "We need more male allies championing minority women, period." Valerie shared,

The pressure that I know Carla, Candice, and Nina are under, it is, it's a lot, but they continue to be successful, then other women will be successful, and other people will be willing to give them, give other minority women opportunities in those positions.

Brenda revealed,

The number two or the layer just under the athletic director is, I think it is a great place, it is a great place to have a career, I think it is a great place, it is not the place for everybody. But it is a great place, and I can remember serving on a panel while I was athletic director, and it was just a round table of young people who thought they wanted to be athletic directors, and I said, the first thing I'm gonna say is it's okay to not want to be an AD, and there was literally like four people who just exhaled, hammam. And I said there can't be great athletic directors without great deputy ADs, senior associate ADs, or greater assistant ADs. They have to have great structure around them.

Cynthia revealed,

Women, I would offer similar advice, but I would also add everything that makes you everything that is part of your identity as a minority woman is one, so bring it all with you, like don't leave it at the door. I feel women in sports, especially at the college age, like they're looking for us, you know, looking for us to reach out, to engage, to talk to them, to model what it looks like, so bring it all with you. Collect stories of your career and learn to tell them. I had the privilege to work for, and they were White men, to be honest, who had this amazing ability to relay their experiences. My previous boss and a coach I used to work with had this amazing ability to captivate an audience [by] sharing their experiences in a great storytelling way. I don't know that a lot of women that I've been exposed to have that skill. But it's supercritical and makes you memorable.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 focused on the findings from the study and the perception of participants based on their lived experiences. The women chosen for the study conveyed individual perspectives

related to their experiences and the research and interview questions while they shared individual viewpoints, and many shared common viewpoints. The women discussed the themes of prior experience related to the direction taken in their careers. In addition to their previous experience, having the confidence or not to pursue the athletic director position was an area they discussed. Several individuals revealed reasons for deciding against pursuing the position of AD.

Several participants expressed the themes of the barriers of race, gender, self, and moving being a factor that prevented minority women from attaining an AD position within DI. Additional themes included the actual desire to sit in the seat, the culture of the organization, work–life balance, fiscal responsibility, compliance, meeting all of the requirements, and representation. Other themes involved the SWA pathway, search firms, committees, networking, leadership training, and positive mentors as factors that affected minority women’s quest for an AD position.

Chapter 5 will expound on the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations from the study’s results.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the factors that women of color in the athletic department's administration perceive to be contributors to their underrepresentation in DI AD leadership positions. Individuals participated in the phenomenological study following their selection from a pool of DI minority women ADs. The study allowed the participants to express their experiences regarding the pursuit, attainment, or unmet desire to become an AD in DI of the NCAA.

Results from the qualitative study revealed numerous barriers the women encountered. Challenges included a barrier due to their gender, a barrier due to their race, a personal barrier (barrier to themselves), the culture of the organization or institution, work-life balance, fiscal knowledge (most notably in Power Five FBS institutions), meeting all the requirements, and a lack of representation. They expressed the hesitancy of a woman's ability to step into what has historically been a male-dominated field. The lack of representation brought to the surface the idea that people were hired by those with whom they had a resemblance. Therefore, there are not many minority women in the AD position or as presidents or chancellors of an institution. Hence, few, if any, of those in hiring positions resemble minority women applicants. Presidents and chancellors need to embrace hiring policies and protocols focused on increasing the existence of leaders from underrepresented groups in athletic departments who are committed to diversity (Singer & Cunningham, 2018).

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Chapter 5 consists of the interpretation of the findings from the research. Additionally, this chapter includes suggestions for future research studies. The study recommends a closer look into the reasons minority women are marginalized in the field of athletic administration,

specifically the AD position in DI athletics. The need for research and progress is revealed, and Chapter 5 concludes with summaries and my reflections.

### *Comparing Studies*

By utilizing guided protocol and semi structured interviews, 12 respondents from a pool of 42 women participated in the study, answering questions regarding their experiences as an AD or pursuing an AD position. They offered their views on pursuing the title and the challenges they experienced. The women also offered suggestions for anyone interested in pursuing an athletic directorship. The respondents were asked questions regarding their career paths, support systems, barriers or challenges they faced, and what strategies they perceived as beneficial in pursuing an AD position.

All participants stated they faced barriers in their quest for an AD position (see Table 4). Ten of the 12 participants revealed that a desire to sit in the AD's seat was indeed a barrier. All women noted race as a barrier. Eight of the 12 respondents suggested that based on disbelief, some were barriers to themselves. All women considered the culture of the organization to be a barrier. The 2019 TIDES report revealed that Whites represent 84.5%, 89.8%, and 92.5% of AD positions across Divisions I, II, and III, respectively (Lapchick, 2021).

Previous research suggested that race and gender play an important role in the underrepresentation of minority women in athletic leadership positions in DI athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Hancock & Hums, 2016; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Norman, 2013). According to Burton (2015), women are underrepresented in sports management across the globe. Furthermore, Burton (2015) argued that such a widespread underrepresentation is not linked to competency factors only. Instead, it is based on gender-based inequality. Despite the severe shortfall of women in the principal leadership positions in the NCAA organization,

Burton et al. (2009) also agreed with the findings that women's underrepresentation within the sporting sector is not taken seriously by its stakeholders.

**RQ1:** What barriers do minority women encounter in obtaining an AD, deputy AD, or associate AD leadership position at the NCAA organizational level? Research Question 1 was answered utilizing the guided protocol and semi structured interview questions of the 12 participants. Each respondent was asked about their career path to date, what point did they consider an AD position, what factors led them to decide for or against the AD career, and what support systems did they have to assist them in their career paths? Findings from the study supported other research. It was interesting to note the different career paths of the participants. Specifically, those that did not necessarily begin with ideas of careers in athletic administration. Also interesting were the reasons some chose not to pursue the AD position after getting involved in athletics.

**RQ2:** How has the intersectionality of race and gender affected the pursuance of a DI AD position? Question 2 delved into barriers the women faced in the following areas: personal, gender, race, resources, NCAA, collegiate institutions, and culture. Gender, race, culture, work-life balance, and representation were other factors. All women cited the preceding reasons as barriers to pursuing the AD position. They spoke of being the only one, women bosses who failed to support them, men bosses who felt they were not qualified, and how work-life balance was integral in not pursuing their dream. They spoke on the intersectionality of race and gender. They revealed what it meant to be a minority woman seated at the table versus their White counterparts. The women acknowledged that sometimes personal barriers based on disbelief prevented women from pursuing the position. Self-doubt was an issue because the women referred to instances where women would not apply if they did not meet every requirement. They

explained this was in contrast to male counterparts who may not possess any requirement but who would apply for the position anyway. Another barrier included those who were underrepresented and tended not to be well-versed in the financial or external side of athletics. A background in compliance was also deemed important as an AD.

**RQ3:** What strategies do minority women perceive as beneficial toward advancement in their athletic leadership careers? The participants offered substantial information regarding strategies to employ in the advancement toward becoming an AD. During the research and interviews, I learned that the SWA position is an appointment or designation and not one a person applies for. Ironically, there was no consensus on whether the SWA appointment or designation was a pathway to the AD position. Some felt the position would pigeonhole a person into a role in just compliance. Others believed it could be a segway as it allows information on a higher level.

A couple of the women suggested using search firms to conduct blind hires. They believed this would allow the best candidate to be hired. They also suggested being involved in as many committees as much as possible to gain a variety of experiences. Networking was revealed to be an important aspect of advancement. They suggested having a variety of people in their network, including positive mentors, those a person resembles, and those who do not.

### **Recommendations for Action and Further Study**

Although changes have been made, women of color continue to lag behind their DI athletic leadership counterparts. Research shows that minority women, specifically Black women, are hired to athletic leadership positions less than others (Kihl & Soroka, 2013). There is limited research related to SDT and CRT as it relates to minority women in intercollegiate athletic leadership. The use of the phenomenological study to gain insight into the experiences of

women who have attained this position gave rise to the issues women of color continue to face. The sports world in intercollegiate athletics continues to be dominated by men, specifically White men. There is progress. However, the progress is slow. Currently, there are three minority women, specifically Black women, in the top DI AD position. All three are Power Five institutions, two in the SEC and one in the ACC. Although Title IX was designed for equality in many areas, including sport and representation of minority women in leadership continues to be subpar.

The need exists for further research into the underrepresentation of minority women in DI athletic leadership and to examine why this continues to be a male-dominated industry since the emergence of more women in sports. Due to their intersectionality of race and gender, minority women are subjected to additional discrimination. More research should be conducted to understand intersectionality and the lived experiences of these women seeking leadership in athletic administration. Future research should include how their male and female counterparts perceive the underrepresentation of minority women in DI AD positions. Many of the participants' experiences were similar in nature regarding the negative and positive. Negative experiences included barriers. Positive experiences included positive mentors and opportunities. An additional recommendation includes research to compare the incidence of minority women in Division II and III compared to DI and minority women ADs at HBCUs and those at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). In addition, a research study should be conducted on the three minority women who have achieved AD positions at DI PWIs and their journey and subsequent careers as DI ADs in a Power Five institution. Additionally, all minority women should be considered in a study to provide a vast population of participants.



## Conclusion

The phenomenological study was conducted to understand the experiences of minority women's pursuit of a DI AD position. Additionally, the study sought to gain insight into the barriers the women encountered, their views on the intersectionality of race and gender as it pertains to the position, and the strategies they perceive as beneficial to pursuing a DI AD position. Numerous themes emerged during the study. The themes included prior experience, confidence, deciding for or against pursuit, barriers for women, the desire to sit in the seat, calling, barrier for race, barrier for self, barrier to moving, culture, work-life balance, fiscal responsibility, compliance, meeting all requirements, representation, SWA pathway, search firms, committees, networking, leadership training, and positive mentors.

The participants were readily accessible and willing to discuss their lived experiences, both negative and positive. While some may have had all positive experiences, they were not immune to the fact that some women face negative experiences. They were also cognizant of the fact that discrimination and underrepresentation continue to exist despite the strides that have been made. They understood the experiences related to the intersectionality of their race and gender. Some studies have shown that minority women face discrimination when applying for or being considered for AD positions within DI FBS. The small number of these women was palpable. The underrepresentation of minority women ADs in DI intercollegiate athletics will continue to be an issue unless the problem is seriously evaluated and steps are taken to change the narrative and the culture.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. Describe your career path to date.
  - a. Job titles
  - b. Responsibilities
2. At what point in your career did you consider a career as an athletic director?
3. What factors led you to decide for or against an athletic director's career?
4. What support systems did you have to assist you in your career paths?
5. What barriers, if any, did you encounter that challenged your career journey?
  - a. Personal
  - b. Gender
  - c. Race
  - d. Resources
  - e. NCAA
  - f. Collegiate institutions
  - g. Culture
6. Would you change anything related to your career choice or strategies?
7. Explain your thoughts on whether the SWA position is an appropriate gateway to the position of athletic director.
8. What impact does intersectionality (race and gender) have on athletic director applicants?
9. What advice would you offer women currently pursuing a career as an athletic director?



10. Would you offer different advice to minority women? If so, what advice would you give?
11. There has been an increase in Division I women athletic directors. What will it take for more minority women to be appointed to this position?
12. Are there other comments or issues important to your career development or this subject that you would like to share?

## Appendix B: NCAA Content License

### NCAA Content License

Subject to these terms and conditions (“Agreement”), the National Collegiate Athletic Association (“NCAA”), as of the date of execution below, grants you (“Licensee”) a non-transferable, non-exclusive, royalty-free limited license to use the NCAA trademarks, logos, copyrights, web pages, screen shots, or other distinctive features (“NCAA Content”) set forth in your NCAA Content Request Form (“Request Form”), attached hereto as Exhibit A and incorporated herein, for the sole purpose and only for the materials set forth therein.

You acknowledge that the NCAA owns all proprietary rights in and to the NCAA Content. You agree to comply with the NCAA Content Guidelines attached hereto as Exhibit B (the “Guidelines”). Any use of the NCAA Content must be accompanied by a notice that clearly indicates the NCAA owns the NCAA Content.

Except as set forth above, nothing herein grants or should be deemed to grant to you any right, title or interest in or to the NCAA Content. Your use of the NCAA Content will inure to the benefit of the NCAA. You agree not to challenge or assist others to challenge the NCAA Content (except to the extent such restriction is prohibited by applicable law), and you agree not to register or attempt to register any domain names, trademarks, trade names, or other distinctive brand features that are confusingly similar to those of the NCAA.

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You may not assign your rights or delegate your obligations under this Agreement without the NCAA’s prior written consent. This Agreement is not intended to benefit, nor shall it be deemed to give rise to, any rights in any third party. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Indiana, without regard to conflict of law principles. The venue for any dispute or claim arising out of or in connection with this Agreement shall be in Marion County, Indiana. The parties are independent contractors. Neither party shall be deemed to be an employee, agent, partner or legal representative of the other for any purpose and neither shall have any right, power or authority to create any obligation or responsibility on behalf of the other.

The NCAA reserves the right in its sole discretion to terminate or modify your permission to display the NCAA Content and to take action against any use that does not conform to these terms and conditions, infringes any NCAA intellectual property or other right, or violates applicable law. The waiver by the NCAA of a breach of any provision hereof shall not be taken or held to be a waiver of the provision itself. If any provision of this Agreement is held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be contrary to law, such provision shall be changed and interpreted so as to best accomplish the objectives of the original provision to the fullest extent allowed by law and the remaining provisions of this Agreement shall remain in full force and effect.

This Agreement, the Guidelines, and the Request Form constitute the entire agreement between the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof. This Agreement supersedes any prior written or oral agreements between the parties.

This Agreement shall commence as of the date of signing below and shall last until the expiration set forth in Exhibit A. Upon termination or expiration of this Agreement all rights granted to you hereunder will cease; provided that you may fill existing orders and sell off existing copies of product containing NCAA Content then in stock. The NCAA shall have the right to verify the existence and validity of the existing orders and existing copies of product containing NCAA Content then in stock upon 30 days written notice.

**Licensee**By: Jacquelyn TimmonsName: Jacquelyn TimmonsTitle: Student: Abilene Christian UniversityDate: February 22, 2023**National Collegiate Athletic Association**By: Jeffrey P. SmithName: JeffTitle: Associate Director. NCAADate: March 14

Exhibit A

## NCAA Content Request Form

Name:	Jacquelyn Timmons
Title:	Student – Abilene Christian University
Production Company:	N/A
Production Title:	Dissertation
Phone Number:	[REDACTED]
Address:	[REDACTED]
Production Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> TV show <input type="checkbox"/> Film <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Book <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Email Address:	[REDACTED]
NCAA Content Description:	Request the use of the NCAA Division I Athletic Director graphic to be included in the dissertation.
Territory:	Texas
Languages:	English
Quantity or Viewership:	Unknown
Distribution Details:	For dissertation purposes
Release Date:	February 22, 2023
Expiration:	February 22, 2024

## **Exhibit B**

### **NCAA Content Guidelines**

When you use any of the NCAA Content, you must always follow the following rules for proper usage set forth below. In addition, the NCAA may provide you with written requirements as to the size, typeface, colors, and other graphic characteristics of the NCAA Content, to the extent applicable. If the NCAA provides these requirements to you at the time of approval, you must implement them before using the NCAA Content. If the NCAA provides such requirements to you after the NCAA initially gave its permission, you must implement the requirements within a commercially reasonable timeframe.

#### **Things you must do when given permission to use NCAA Content:**

- All NCAA Content must be accompanied with appropriate source line attribution, to the extent applicable (e.g., © [Year] National Collegiate Athletic Association).
- If you are using an NCAA trademark, distinguish the trademark from the surrounding text in some way. Capitalize the first letter (if using “National Collegiate Athletic Association”), capitalize or italicize the entire mark (if using “NCAA”), place the mark in quotes, and use a different type style or font for the mark than for the generic name.
- Use the trademark only as an adjective, never as a noun or verb, and never in the plural or possessive form.
- Use a generic term following the trademark, for example: NCAA championship, NCAA playing rules.
- Use only NCAA-approved artwork when using the NCAA’s logos or other indicia.
- If you are using an NCAA logo on a web page, there must exist a minimum spacing of 25 pixels between each side of the logo and other graphic or textual elements on your web page.

#### **Things that are not permitted when using NCAA Content:**

- You may not use the NCAA Content in any production or manner that (i) causes actual or perceived harm to student-athlete health, safety, and welfare; (ii) brings discredit to the purpose, values or principles of the NCAA; or (iii) negatively impacts the best interests of intercollegiate athletics or higher education.
- You may not remove, distort or alter any element of NCAA Content. That includes modifying an NCAA trademark, for example, through hyphenation, combination or abbreviation. You may also not shorten, abbreviate, or create acronyms out of NCAA trademarks.
- You may not display NCAA Content as the most prominent element in your production.
- You may not display NCAA Content in any manner that implies a relationship or affiliation with, sponsorship, or endorsement by the NCAA, or that can be reasonably interpreted to suggest editorial content has been authored by, or represents the views or opinions of the NCAA or NCAA personnel.
- You may not display NCAA Content in any production that is not yet rated or above rated R, contains or displays adult content, promotes gambling, involves the sale of tobacco or alcohol, includes NCAA-banned substances (e.g., stimulants, anabolic steroids, testosterone products, marijuana) or impermissible nutritional supplements that NCAA member institutions may not provide to student-athletes (e.g., creatine, amino acids, ginseng, energy drinks) (NOTE: the list of NCAA-banned drug classes is available at [www.ncaa.org/drugtesting](http://www.ncaa.org/drugtesting)), or otherwise violates applicable law.



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- You may not display NCAA Content in any production that includes the name, image, or likeness of a currently eligible NCAA student-athlete.
  - You may not display NCAA Content in any production or manner that is in the NCAA's sole opinion misleading, unfair, defamatory, infringing, libelous, disparaging, obscene, violent, profane, vulgar, offensive, disrespectful or otherwise objectionable to the NCAA.
  - You may not display NCAA Content in any manner that violates any law or regulation.
  - You may not incorporate NCAA Content into your own product name, service names, trademarks, logos, or company names.
  - You may not copy or imitate the NCAA's trade dress, including the look and feel of NCAA indicia, including typography, graphic designs, product icons, or imagery associated with the NCAA.
  - You may not adopt marks, logos, slogans, or designs that are confusingly similar to NCAA Content.
  - You may not use or register NCAA trademarks as or incorporated in social media account names, profiles, or monikers.
  - You may not register NCAA trademarks as second or third level domain names.
  - You may not use NCAA trademarks in a way that suggests a common, descriptive, or generic meaning.
  - Trademark rights vary from country to country. Some countries have severe criminal and civil penalties for improper use of the registration symbol. Therefore, you may not use the registration symbol (®) in countries where the mark has not been registered.

## Appendix C: IRB Approval

### ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout  
the World



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103  
Abilene, Texas 79699-9103

May 23, 2022

Jacquelyn Timmons  
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Jacquelyn,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled, "A Phenomenological Study of the Underrepresentation of Division I Minority Women Athletic Directors" (IRB# 22-061) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs