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A Phenomenological Examination of Female Interscholastic Athletic Directors' Career Paths

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There is an underrepresentation of women in the role of athletic director in the interscholastic sport setting. Utilizing a phenomenological methodology, this study explored the career paths of female interscholastic athletic directors. Through a combination of sampling techniques, 13 female interscholastic athletic directors (FIADs) took part in semi-structured interviews. Emerging ideas from the lens of current female interscholastic athletic directors offer implications about direction and information needed to assist inspiring young females as they ascend the career ladder in becoming interscholastic athletic directors.

Keywords: interscholastic athletics, athletic director, Title IX, career paths

An entrenched cultural stronghold is masculine dominance in athletics, especially among the leadership position of *athletic director* (Cashmore, 2010; Coakley, 2009; Guttmann, 1978). Accordingly, the position of athletic director is “commonly stereotyped as masculine” (Welty Peachey et al., 2015, p. 573) and women are less likely to be hired in the role (Burton et al., 2011). Even after the 1972 passage of federal amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965—with a section ubiquitously known as Title IX—the persistence of men serving in positions of athletic leadership endures (Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, 1972). While Title IX aims to provide equitable opportunities for men and women in both interscholastic and higher education, after five decades further research is necessary to fully understand the career paths of female athletic administrators (Welty Peachey et al., 2015).

Functionally, Title IX increased female athletic participation opportunities in a greater amount than any other preceding legislation or action. Increased participation opportunities found women taking part in greater numbers on both the intercollegiate and the interscholastic levels of competition (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Currently, men and women compete in interscholastic athletics on a near equivalent ratio (1:1.3) (NFHS, 2022), a drastic improvement from the pre-Title IX era (1:12 ratio) (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). While the number of women participating in athletics since the enactment of Title IX has increased, women remain underrepresented in coaching and leadership positions in both interscholastic (Mather, 2007; Moore et al., 2005; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Whisenant, 2003, 2008) and intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2007, 2014).

While Title IX increased female interscholastic athletic participation (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NFHS, 2022), it did little to increase opportunities for women in interscholastic athletic leadership (Whisenant, 2003, 2008). Referencing athletic leadership positions, Moore et al. (2005) stated, "the 'old boys' system still exists, and women are not navigating it well" (p. 16). In respect to athletic leadership opportunities, "women have not been granted the opportunity to fully capitalize on the growth of interscholastic sports" (Whisenant et al., 2010, p. 113). Accordingly, the lack of female representation among interscholastic athletic director positions is striking, with extant literature finding under 15% of interscholastic athletic directors are women (Fowler et al., 2017; Whisenant, 2008).

Although an intent of Title IX was gender equity in sport, the effect on opportunities for women in athletic leadership roles seems to have been minimal (Acosta & Carpenter, 2007, 2014; Borland & Bruening, 2010; Bower & Hums, 2013a; Bower et al., 2015; Burton, 2015; Heilman, 2001; Mather, 2007; Miller et al., 2007; Whisenant, 2003, 2008; Whisenant et al., 2010). In addition, investigations of female interscholastic athletic directors (FIADs) and their experiences in the role are intermittent and limited in the five decades since the passage of Title IX (Fowler et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2005; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant, 2003, 2008; Whisenant et al., 2005; Whisenant et al., 2010). Accordingly, this phenomenological exploratory study sought to examine FIADs career paths and navigation through the male-dominated field of interscholastic athletic administration. Subsequently, the following central research question spearheaded this study's investigation:

- What are the career paths of female interscholastic athletic directors?

Research Context

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Hegemonic masculinity finds its roots deep in societal ideologies that privileged men's athletic experiences for leadership exceed over women's experiences (Cashmore, 2010; Sage, 1998). Mather (2007) defined hegemonic masculinity as "when the attributes of masculinity are viewed as superior to femininity and men hold more power over women by reinforcing the dominant ideology" (p. 35). Whisenant et al. (2002) defined hegemonic masculinity as "the condition in which certain social groups within a society wield authority—through imposition, manipulation, and consent—over other groups" (pp. 485–486). Additionally, Sage (1998) explained "hegemonic ideologies require social institutional and cultural practices to reinforce and reproduce themselves" (p. 30). In interscholastic athletics where men dominate athletic administrative positions, hegemonic masculinity presents a stronghold that men are superior, in control, and more suited to conduct duties of the athletic director—a forbidden place for women (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Whisenant, 2008; Whisenant et al., 2005). Pedersen and Whisenant (2005) offered a simpler definition, "a society's simple acceptance of the status quo" (p. 180).

Miller et al. (2007) conducted a 2-year analysis of interscholastic athletic directors' job announcements from listings on a "Job Board" in Texas (p. 77). The study sought to determine if systematic hegemonic masculinity existed. An

examination of the 301 THSCA website announcements revealed 220 (73%) required the applicant to "coach a boys' sport" (p. 77). Additionally, 68% of the announcements required the applicant to serve as varsity football coach, in addition to performing athletic administrative duties. Miller et al. (2007) concluded "hegemonic masculinity is sustained through such systemic practices" (p. 73). These findings coincide with an earlier study piloted by Pedersen and Whisenant (2005). If present or populated in the system and job applications associated with football coaching, Pedersen and Whisenant (2005) commented "women are systemically disqualified, eliminating even the opportunity for consideration" (p. 184).

Whisenant (2008) implemented a quantitative design using the chi-squared goodness of fit statistical test to find if athletic departments supported hegemonic masculinity environments among 480 high schools from *The National Directory of High School Coaches*. Whisenant presented evidence that male control continued in both principal and athletic director leadership settings. "At the principal position, men held 75.6% ($n=363$) of the positions while women only held 24.4% ($n=117$), which differed significantly: $X^2(1, N=480) = 126.08, p < .000$ " (p. 775). Study results suggested hegemonic masculinity existed. Hegemonic masculinity presents a problem of gender equality for women in athletic leadership. Title IX increased women's participation in sports but not for women in athletic director positions. As Pedersen and Whisenant (2005) suggested, "until women are given a chance, hegemonic masculinity will continue to dominate and control interscholastic athletics" (p. 184).

HOMOLOGOUS REPRODUCTION

Initially introduced by Kanter (1977) in her book *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Kanter described homologous reproduction as “similarity of social background and characteristics, or similarity of organizational experience” within the structural makeup of the workplace (p. 50). Stangl and Kane (1991) defined homologous reproduction as individuals replacing themselves with other beings that have similar beliefs and physical characteristics. Selecting the male gender for the position of athletic director over the female gender by former male colleagues creates homologous reproduction and a barrier for women looking to become an interscholastic athletic director. With the athletic director’s position taking on responsibilities that encompass complex daily decisions, hiring today’s athletic directors should reflect exceptional personal and professional skills as suggested by Stier and Schneider (2000), rather than gender biased hiring practices (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Miller et al., 2007; Whisenant et al., 2005).

Historically, athletics immerses itself in masculine domination (Burton, 2015; Cashmore, 2010; Coakley, 2009; Fowler et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2005; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Whisenant, 2003, 2008; Whisenant et al., 2005). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) longitudinally tracked Title IX’s influence on the numbers of intercollegiate female athletes and athletic leaders for over 41 years by collecting statistics and compiling a report, funded by Smith College’s Project on Women and Social Change and Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. Although women controlled most women’s programs prior to Title IX, only 22.3% of women held intercollegiate athletic director positions in 2014, while men held 77.7% of the athletic director positions (Acosta & Car-

penter, 2014). Evidence of homologous reproduction likewise exists on the interscholastic level (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant, 2008).

Stangl and Kane (1991) randomly selected 937 Ohio public school directories during three separate Title IX time periods, to explore and analyze the effects of Title IX on the hiring of female coaches when compared to the sex of the athletic director. Years consisted of 1974 (302 schools), 1981 (312 schools), and 1989 (323 schools), producing response rates of 32.23%, 33.30%, and 34.47%, respectively. All three observations presented results showing a decrease in female coaches when athletic directors were men. However, schools that housed female athletic directors kept and hired more female coaches (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Conclusions found by Stangl and Kane supported homologous reproduction existing in interscholastic athletics.

Supporting Stangl and Kane (1991), Lovett and Lowry (1994) randomly selected 25% of 1,106 schools in Texas to investigate gender correlations of principals and athletic directors in the hiring of female coaches. When both principal and athletic director were men, lower percentages of female coaches existed; when both principal and athletic director were women, higher percentages of female coaches existed. Interestingly, as Lovett and Lowry remarked, "women are not totally without opportunity to reproduce themselves, creating a network of their own homologous reproduction (p. 32).

The sport industry is known for being a "gendered institution" (Burton, 2015, p. 156). Individuals pursuing a professional career path face challenges regardless of gender. However, women may face more career path barriers, such as hegemonic masculinity and homologous reproduc-

tion. Although Title IX increased women's participation in athletics on both the intercollegiate and interscholastic levels, barriers as such may be the contributing factors as to why women only represent small percentages as interscholastic athletic directors in the United States (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Whisenant, 2003).

Methodological Approach

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Since this study investigated the career paths of female athletic directors, purposive sampling was applied to obtain female participants for this investigation in one southeastern state of the United States. From an examination of athletic web pages, gender of each school districts' athletic director was identified. By using a purposive sampling technique, the exact homologous sample needed for studying the phenomena of FIAD career path experiences was able to be recruited. As individuals agreed to participate, they completed a demographic data sheet, which provided information concerning their gender identification. Secondly, snowball sampling was implemented. As the first candidates received invitation emails, inquiries were made to acquire names of active female athletic directors within the state. Due to a low response rate, additional purposive sampling was conducted by recruiting participants through a global website membership of female athletic directors. The second attempt at purposive and snowball sampling produced 15 respondents and comprises the participants of this study.

This principal investigator scheduled interviews during the spring of 2022 with 15 FIADs to investigate their

career path and career path experiences. As this study focused on women *actively* employed as interscholastic athletic directors in a private or public educational setting, one participant did not meet the active employment criteria. Additionally, another participant failed to reschedule a second interview time. Therefore, this phenomenological study consisted of a total of 13 participants who responded to eight semi-open-ended interview questions.

To accommodate individual scheduling, participants selected a date and a 60-minute time slot, within a 2-week period, to take part in the audio and video recorded Zoom interviews. The interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 55 minutes in length. All interviews included a welcome segment, a confirmation of participant consent, and a confirmation of demographic information. Following IRB standards, participants received a full explanation of the study, a confidentiality clause, and an opt-out from participation clause. Additionally, an opportunity for participants to ask questions was provided. When given the option to choose a pseudonym, only one participant requested a specific pseudonym for the investigation. The remaining 12 participants received a pseudonym that assisted in supporting participants' confidentiality. The scripted interview started as participants provided the spoken word of "yes."

Researchers *bracketed* the focus of the study and accepted all statements as of equal value while extracting phrases from participants' narratives. Statements were extracted and aligned with each interview question. Repetitive and unrelated phrases were marked and excluded in transcription. Participant phrases were codified into themes that formed *clusters*. From these clusters, *imaginative variations* were applied "to arrive at structural descriptions of the ex-

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Race	Age	Highest Degree	Years as Teacher	Years as Coach	Years as AD
Angie	White	43-55	Master's	21	21	3
Beth	Black	32-42	Master's	6	8	2.5
Cathy	White	43-55	Bachelor's	12	20	5
Deb	Black	32-42	Master's	8	18	8
Ellen	Non-White	32-42	Master's	15	15	2
Ursuline	White	43-55	Bachelor's	5	15	26
Gracie	White	32-42	Master's	10	10	10
Hin	White	55 >	Master's	35	25	21
Isea	White	43-55	Master's	20	8	13
Joy	White	55 >	Master's	-	25	22
Kate	White	32-42	Master's	16	15	6
Linda	White	43-55	Master's	24	16	8
Mary	White	32-42	Master's	19	13	3

perience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). From the structural descriptions, statements were synthesized into *meaning* that described the phenomenological experience (Moustakas, 1994). The use of a four-member research team to assist in coding and creating themes supported triangulation for the findings of this study.

Findings

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Thirteen women actively employed as interscholastic athletic directors in a private or public setting participated in the study's investigation. Participants indicated their ethnic identity as White ($n = 10$), Black ($n = 2$), and Non-White ($n = 1$). All participants indicated a female gender identity and ranged from 32 to 55 years of age. Two participants held undergraduate degrees, 11 participants held post-graduate degrees, and one was currently enrolled in a doctoral program (see Table 1).

Women in this study not only came from a variety of geographic areas of the United States, but also served a diverse population of high schools relative to student populations.

CAREER PATHS OF FIADS

Two major themes emerged from analyzing the interview data: education and coaching (see Figure 1). From these themes, sub-themes emerged for each. Under the education theme, sub-themes of early influence and educational degrees emerged. For the second theme, coaching, sub-themes appeared as coaching entry and athletic director entry.

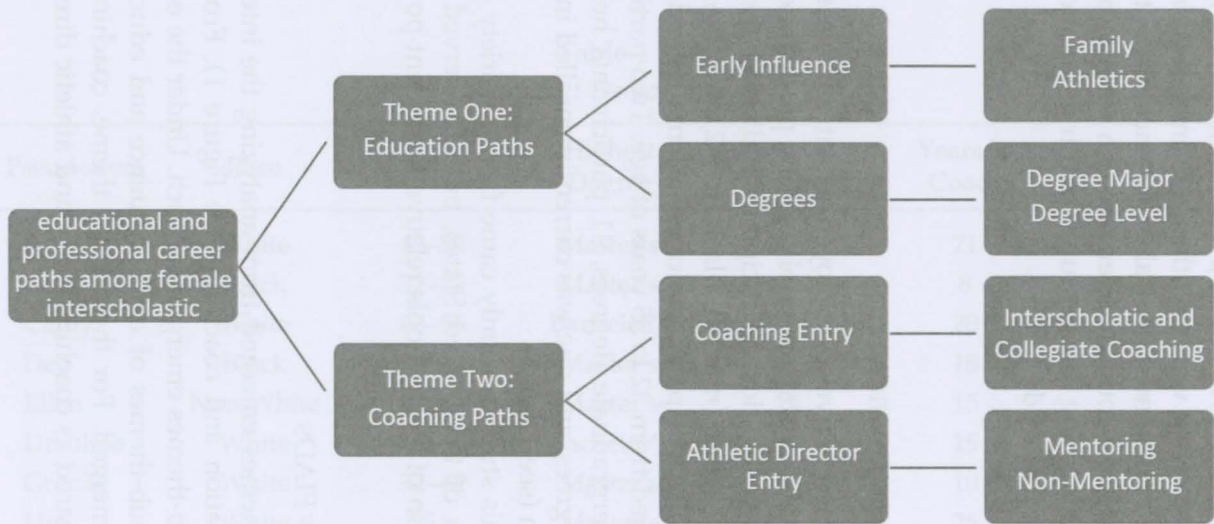


Figure 1. FIADs Career Paths: Emergent Themes and Sub-themes

Education Path

FIADs discussed their educational path experiences and influences. From the education theme, two sub-themes emerged: early influence and educational degrees. Moreover, these two sub-themes had supplementary sections. The early influence sub-theme discussed the impacts of family and athletics. The second sub-theme, educational degrees, discussed initial foundational credentials for women aspiring to become FIADs. **Early Influence.** FIADs in this study indicated family as an early influence in their educational career path. Cathy expressed, "as early as I can remember, because my dad became an athletic director when I was two." Therefore, to be around her dad meant "we spent all of our time at games." In addition, Cathy commented, "I just remember being a part of it and being there and being present" at the games. Likewise, Ursuline contributed her father as being both an influence and a role model. Similarly, Joy's father was an athletic director. As Joy stated, "athletics was always important in our family." Not only did Joy's father compete on the collegiate level and in the professional ranks, but also Joy's mother played basketball.

Kate supported other participant's comments by recapping how the family influences early educational learning for FIADs. Kate explained, "The really relevant part for me is that my dad was a high school athletic director," and "he was a teacher and football coach at the high school." Candidly speaking, Cathy compassionately stated, "I thought that this would be a really neat path because I always looked up to my father." Kate further commented that "while growing up, it was kind of already [like] [I] had that experience" before stepping into the athletic director's role. For these participants, their father played an

instrumental role in proving a lighted path of early influence.

Other individuals contributed to participants' early influences. Similar to Joy's mother, Grace's mother was instrumental and made contributions toward those early influences although Grace's mother did not play a sport to influence Grace. Grace explained, "My mother was the manager of our gymnastics clubs...the things that I saw her do all the time, weekly, daily, are things that I'm doing now." As demonstrated by Grace and Joy, the maternal side of the family can be supportive in the influence of ascending to the athletic director's role later in adulthood.

Often athletes have an extended family known as their athletic family, which consists of athletic directors, coaches, and teammates. Three participants indicated contributions made by their high school athletic directors. Cathy described her early influence by taking a high school class that offered her an opportunity to shadow a high school athletic director. While Deb indicated enjoying her athletic administrators as an athlete, Grace provided a detailed remembrance as she stated, "I had a great relationship with my athletic director. I really enjoyed watching him. I could tell he enjoyed doing his job by the relationships that he formed. I always thought that that was a really neat position." As described and demonstrated by these participants, athletic directors often act as role models for athletes to follow in becoming future athletic directors.

Playing sports at an early age and progressing into the upper collegiate and professional ranks made contributions toward the FIADs' early influences. Twelve of the 13 FIADs participating in this study expressed playing competitive sports. Hanna expressed, "I developed a love for athletics" through playing sports during the developmen-

tal ages. Three of the 13 FIADs indicated participating in sports at an early age. Mary stated, "probably since I was like 4 years old. I have been involved in some sort of sports." Additionally, Mary expressed that she continued playing as "a college division I athlete." Deb noted a heavy involvement with playing sports at age 5 and continued playing into college. Joy continued also as a college athlete after she began playing softball at the early age of 6. Before Joy's athletic career in college, she played four sports while in high school. A total of seven FIADs indicated participating in college athletics. From these seven, two identified themselves as being Division I athletes and two advancing into the professional arena.

Educational Degree. All FIADs in this study acquired an undergraduate degree. However, not all study participants identified as initially majoring in education. Three participants identified as non-education majors. Ellen earned an undergraduate degree in business and accounting. Angie described her abrupt change from the professional field to education. Angie stated:

I have a bachelor's degree in Political Science and human resources or human services with a concentration in social studies. So, I went down to the State Department. They said, yep, you check all the boxes, here you go. So, it was both feet forward. I was not formally trained as an educator.

Participants' descriptions provided evidence that not all athletic directors followed a traditional path as most did in the study.

Except for two participants who only earned undergraduate degrees, 11 FIADs held post-graduate degrees, with one earning two master's degrees. Mary stated, "I have two master's degrees. My second master's was in ed-

ucational leadership." While one participant indicated working toward a doctoral degree, FIADs mentioned completing their state's required athletic directors' certification courses as part of their education continuing attainment and pathway toward ascending into the AD's role. Mary asserted, "Like in my league, I am the most certified person through the NIAAA. I've attained the highest certification." Additionally, other FIADs indicated certification courses were a requirement as they accepted the AD position.

Coaching Path

Coaching was developed as the second theme under Research Question One. Two sub-themes also evolved from the coaching theme: (a) coaching entry, and (b) athletic director entry. Supplemented sections of traditional high school and collegiate coaching supported the coaching entry sub-theme. The sub-theme of athletic director entry generated a supplemental section of mentoring and non-mentoring.

Coaching Entry. Eight FIADs indicated interscholastic teaching and coaching experience before entering the role as athletic director. Angie expressed that she "had coached for 21 years." Hanna explained that she "was a physical education major with a minor in social sciences, and coached right away." Similarity, Cathy implied, "I've always coached from straight out." Both Ellen and Ursuline indicated teaching and coaching at their same school their entire career. Ellen told, "I've been at the school for on [sic] 15 years" and "I've been a coach the whole time here for different things from competitive cheer to soccer for boys and girls." Ursuline articulated, "I was hired here at Bonham, and I've been at Bonham my whole career. So, 28

years ago, when I walked in the door, my intent was to teach and coach." These participants supported the path of entering the profession as a teacher and began coaching as a traditional track as they advanced into the position of athletic director.

In discussing coaching career paths, study participants expressed dissimilar paths before becoming an interscholastic coach. Kate worked as an economic consultant before starting a coaching career. Being both a Division I and a professional athlete, Beth coached on the collegiate level for 2 years while Deb explained, "I ended up being a collegiate soccer coach. I started my coaching career when I was 22." Moreover, Grace's coaching career started at an earlier age than most. Grace explained, "I've always been in athletics. I grew up as a gymnast. And I started coaching as young as I possibly could. I was 12 years old when I had my first group of preschoolers. I coached competitively like I coached a competitive team when I was in high school." While trajectories differed among participants, coaching a team sport initiated an entry into the role of athletic director.

Athletic Director Entry. After serving as an athletic coach, the majority of FIADs in this study indicated entering the role of an interscholastic athletic director through some form of mentoring. Angie stated, "I became a little bit more involved in actually helping the athletic director out." Ursuline informed her athletic director, "Hey, you know, if you ever need any help, I'm happy to help you." Mary and Isea indicated they created an assistant athletic position for them to help, while Beth explained, "I asked to be an assistant athletic director." and "I started gaining experience." Mentoring under their current AD provided participants not only a prerequisite for the AD position,

but also allowed them to gain experience and insight into the logistics and demands of the AD's responsibilities.

As a result of gaining athletic leadership experience through some form of mentorship, participants ascended to the role of AD by two means: participants (a) applied for the role of the athletic director or (b) accepted an invitation to apply from their supervisors. After helping in the athletic office, Angie, Fran, Beth, and Mary all personally applied for the athletic director's position. Five of the participants accepted an invitation from their school supervisors to apply for the athletic director's position. Kate's principal approached her with the idea of becoming the athletic director as did Ellen's principal. Ellen described her staffing being based on the athletic department demonstrating a \$30,000 deficit in funds from the previous athletic director.

I have [coaching experience], but I also have a business and accounting degree. They were struggling financially here, so their main concern was putting somebody in place that had a background, who understood more about the financial business side of it.

Entry into the AD's job position provided an interesting point. While some participants applied for the position, as indicated from their quotes, other participants were recruited for the position. This type of job recruitment resembles previous recruitment of men who ascended into the role based on using the AD's position as a stipend to the football coach's position.

Discussion & Implications

Women face barriers while climbing career paths to becoming an athletic director. Cunningham et al. (2005) recommended that "strategies should be implemented to al-

leviate these barriers within specific organizations and the industry as a whole" (p. 134). Mather (2007) also suggested "long-term strategies need to be developed to get more women into leadership roles in interscholastic athletics" (p. 37). Hums (2010) listed the following strategies to increase women in athletic leadership: (a) networking, (b) mentoring, (c) educating sport management professionals, (d) conference and programs, and (e) policies and political action (p. 839). Studies on both the intercollegiate and interscholastic levels relate similar findings in the implementation of strategies for career path challenges.

Strategic tools and findings also are noted on the interscholastic level (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Moore et al., 2005). By using strategic tools to overcome career path challenges, women increase opportunities to become interscholastic athletic directors (Moore et al., 2005). Moore et al. (2005) surveyed 158 male athletic directors and 38 female athletic directors. Female participants showed that learning how to network, knowing "how to navigate the 'old boys' network," and mentoring with others in the field aided in overcoming career path challenges (p. 18). As noted by Moore et al., these strategies potentially provide "women with equal access to athletic leadership positions" (p. 6). Additionally, Burton and Leberman (2017) concurred with Moore et al. by indicating that inspiring young women requires information on strategies to help in overcoming barriers toward becoming athletic directors—continuing a catalysis for change in the underrepresentation of female athletic directors (Burton & Leberman, 2017).

Participants reported being influenced by family before any formal educational preparedness. FIADs commented on positive experiences such as "my dad was a high school

football coach," "my dad was an athletic director," or parents were former athletes. In addition, all participants indicated participation in athletic competitions that coincided with their formative education. Moreover, three women directly mentioned the positive influence an athletic director had on their career development while they were competing in athletics. Bower and Hums (2013b) found that playing intercollegiate sports not only provided essential leadership qualities, but also influenced athletes toward the role of an athletic director. Not surprisingly, seven of the participants in this study competed in collegiate athletics. As Cathy stated, "I just knew that I loved sports and so I changed my major to education." Such findings reinforce the influential nature of collegiate athletics with regards to career choice and development (Fitzgerald et al., 1994).

Previous experience within an interscholastic setting is often a prerequisite to becoming an athletic director (Stier & Schneider, 2000). Accordingly, the 12 participants in this study averaged nearly 16 years' experience in an interscholastic setting. FIADs also reported an average of 16 years' coaching experience, which corresponds to extant research identifying coaching experience as a necessary prerequisite to becoming an athletic director as well (Fowler et al., 2017; Mather, 2007; Stier & Schneider, 2000). The amount of professional experience among participants in this study supports Bandura's (1997) notations of "most competencies must be developed over a long period" (p. 86). FIADs reported a wide array of coaching experience in both traditional interscholastic sports (e.g., basketball, soccer, softball, track & field) and non-traditional interscholastic sports (e.g., gymnastics). Two participants indicated a brief stint at collegiate coaching before accepting an interscholastic coaching position. As coaching represented a pre-

requisite for entry into the role as an athletic director, other influential leadership scenarios made contributions (Borland & Bruening, 2010; Fowler et al., 2017; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Hums, 2010; Mather, 2007). Seven participants volunteered time in an athletic directors' office to gain experience before ascending into an athletic director position. This supports findings from both Borland and Bruening (2010) and Hums (2010) that mentoring increasing chances of women attaining the position of athletic director. Five participants were asked by their school administration to apply for a job after volunteering.

Limitations

During the early 2022 spring semester, interviews posed additional obligations for FIADs. Therefore, time presented a limitation. FIADs scheduled interview times between administrative paperwork, game attendance, and daily classroom instructional demands. Due to obligations, FIADs rescheduled interviews and indicated time limits for conducting interviews. Additional limitations out of the control of the researchers existed in this study and need recognition to minimize misinterpretation of findings (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Peoples, 2021). While purposefully sampling recruited participants from a global network membership, only 13 participants responded to eight semi-open-ended interview questions. Due to the study's small sample size, results may be deemed not to represent the entire global network membership of FIADs. This proposed a generalization threat. Additionally, participants in the study brought a range of individual experiences and perspectives based on whether serving public or private

institutions, their geographic location, and documented years in the profession.

Conclusion & Future Research

To build upon this research, more FIADs' voices need to be heard, thereby expanding and seeking out additional investigations on FIADs' career paths and career experiences, keeping and exposing the field to current and updated information. In replicating this study, dividing participants' ages, race, and numbers of years in the profession would assist in making comparisons and propose needed changes to improve numbers of female athletic directors. Since this study surfaced themes of education and educational path influences, future research focused solely on leadership qualities could provide implications for understanding the influences of how to ascend and maintain the position as a FIAD. As information is studied, women who serve as interscholastic athletic directors are given the voice needed to be catalysts for change, revealing that women can serve in traditionally male-dominated positions.

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