

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS AMONG FEMALE ATHLETIC
DIRECTORS IN THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA)

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DEDICATION

To Conner Elms, my amazing husband: The completion of this degree would not be possible without you. Your strength, support, encouragement, and motivation for me throughout this process has been unmatched. For this (and much more), I am eternally grateful. Thank you for walking with me through the ups and downs of life and for being my life partner and best friend.

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ABSTRACT

RACHEL ELMS

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS AMONG FEMALE ATHLETIC DIRECTORS IN THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA)

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Women's participation in sport has increased significantly; however, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels (Burton, 2015). While Title IX has been a monumental force for the increase of female sport participation (Coakley & Pike, 2009), the authority of women remains marginalized in sport (Walker & Bopp, 2011). Furthermore, current reports by Lapchick (2021) indicate that women now hold only 36.3% of upper management positions in sport. Furthermore, studies pertaining to the interaction between leader gender and leadership style in sport are also limited (Peachey et al., 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate leadership style in sport as it relates to gender, years in leadership positions, and effectiveness via a developmental perspective. Qualitative data was collected through individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews involving female athletic directors in intercollegiate sport. The study sample featured eight female athletic directors currently working in the NCAA divisions I, II, and III.

The open-ended interview questions focused on the women's career paths, perceptions of leadership within collegiate sport settings, and changes in leadership style over time. These questions were developed from the literature review yet altered to meet the objectives of the study. The term *effectiveness* was defined as a high-level of achievement within the leadership role. Achievement for this study indicates positive results as they refer to relationships and career goal fulfillment within the role of athletic director. Through the tedious process of coding and

data reduction and analysis, 10 dominant themes were established. The themes for RQ1 included *leadership style variance* and *the importance of collaboration*. The themes for RQ2 included *underrepresentation*, *gender-based stereotypes*, and *work-life applications*. The themes for R3 included *career viability* and *leadership support*. The findings of this research are valuable in the furthering of career options and opportunities for females seeking to pursue athletic director roles within the NCAA. The findings also suggest areas for improvement within the organizational environment of leadership within intercollegiate sport.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ability to lead and motivate is a valuable characteristic as leaders play a crucial role in determining the fulfillment of a group's goals (Slater et al., 2014). Researchers and practitioners are responsible for understanding and advising leadership processes as leadership is one of the most significant factors for those performing and operating in sport (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Previously, personality traits, behavioral applications, and models of leadership have aimed to determine leader effectiveness. Thus, leadership has been closely analyzed from a variety of lenses (e.g., trait, behavioral, contingency, relational, skeptic, information processing-based approaches), which has resulted in a large number of different leadership theories (Arthur et al., 2016). Yet, one area of research in sport organizations that appears to be limited includes that of leader succession and performance (Gammelsaeter, 2013). "Leader succession often occurs during organizational change processes, but the implications of leader succession, in terms of reactions to the change, rarely have been investigated" (Zhao et al., 2016, p. 2). Additionally, leader performance has been examining issues such as the impact of leader characteristics, self-perception, or leadership styles on organizational effectiveness, employees' job satisfaction, or occupational stress in addition to the qualities of transformational and transactional leadership behavior and the influences on effectiveness and organizational culture (Gammelsaeter, 2013).

Yet, to fully understand what constitutes success in leadership, it is necessary to examine the word as it pertains to both subjective and objective measures in sport. While personality type, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence all play an important role in defining a leader, a shift in understanding the measures of *success* is required for leadership in sport organizations to be

inclusive to differing views and objectives, as well as diverse individuals (Burton & Leberman, 2017). While traditionally in sport, success is a label termed to identify win-loss records, research suggests alternate implications for leadership roles in sport. In a study conducted by Lovelin and Hanold, the findings suggest that effective leadership is rooted in relationship building, which appeals to human qualities and aligns individuals through strategic challenges with inspiration and motivation to energize them to reach the end goal (2014). Historically, research has correlated these dynamic and effective leadership qualities to the success of an organization (Hambleton & Gumpert, 1982; Miner, 1963). Yet, while research has attempted to determine the actions necessary to be effective, it is also significant to examine leadership style and the changes of this leadership style and leadership theory within sport over time.

The impact of leadership theory on organizations, departments, and teams has been well established. One may presume that leadership styles and theories certainly influence job performance, overall satisfaction, and retention rate. Yet, it has been suggested that leaders seeking the best results should not rely solely on one leadership style (Goleman, 2001).

In Situational Leadership Theory, leader effectiveness is thought to be enhanced if a manager uses the style of leadership that best matches the readiness, ability and willingness of subordinates and that a good match between leadership style and subordinate readiness leads to a higher level of subordinate satisfaction and performance. (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005, p. 3)

Additionally, concerning leadership in sport management, the recognition of theories is rather preliminary as researchers seek to find the answer to the specified qualities exhibited in an “efficient” leader. While current literature focuses on the application of transformational leadership among women in business, little is known about the leadership style (theories) of

women in sport (Brown & Light, 2012). Yet, regardless of theory variation, scholars have recognized the significance of leadership on sport management literature through the decades. “A number of clear themes in sport management leadership research and conceptual thinking have emerged, with the proposed conceptual model advancing several antecedents and processes unique to sport” (Peachey et al., 2011 p. 570).

While researchers have formerly examined the transactional theory and transformational theory with applications for the sport management industry, revolutionary leadership theories such as the ethical leadership and leader member exchange theory are gaining attention and seeking continuous support (Babič, 2014). The research analyzing these theories has demonstrated that the myriad of leadership styles along with the distinct leadership traits in sport management relate to positive outcomes (Burton & Peachey, 2009). Naidoo et al. (2015) examined the relationship between leadership styles of sport administrators at tertiary institutions and organizational effectiveness. While the findings suggest the adoption of a transformational leadership theory by women in the industry, researchers also propose necessary leadership training and resources for the betterment of female leaders and organizational effectiveness (Gilley et al., 2009). Thus, this research will seek to analyze both leadership theories and implications for the sport industry as a whole and for the comprehension of leadership within sport.

Gender involvement in positions of leadership within sport organizations should be properly assessed to determine appropriate distinctions for findings while suggesting areas for improvement. Despite inequalities and bias, research has broadened to encompass investigations of what transpires when women attain these leadership roles. Specifically, research has sought to identify primary and secondary gender differences as well as similarities in leadership and

leadership style tendencies. The literature has assessed the manners in which male leadership differs from female leadership in terms of approach. For example, “the main body of research on leadership differences across gender concludes that men are task-oriented leaders, while women are relationship-oriented leaders” (Merchant, 2012, p. 36). Likewise, studies have analyzed these differences as they pertain to alternative factors such as demographic characteristics, management style, ability to cope in a crisis, and overall effectiveness as leaders (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). While data highlights the gender implications for female participation within sport, there is a limited amount of information demonstrating the true number of athletic leadership roles held by females. According to Pedersen and Whisenant (2005), there have been no findings of state or governmental records that store demographic data regarding interscholastic athletic administrators. Based on this research, leaders could observe the relationship between the under-representation of female sport leaders affecting female sport experience and vice versa. While in leadership style and tendency observations may be observed, this gender involvement role in sport should be assessed and documented by researchers and leaders alike in order to provide further documentation and support for these opportunities within a sport career.

Statement of Purpose

Ferkins et al. (2018) urge scholars to consider new and innovative approaches as sport leadership carries major significance for the field. It was proposed that the industry needs a “booster shot” of published research in sport leadership that is a step change in the evolution of leadership scholarship for sport management (p. 2). Initially, this review provides readers with former research relative to sport leader gender, leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and years of leadership experience. Furthermore, this literature uniquely contributes to the current body of research as it includes the varied perspectives and experiences of female, athletic

directors and their recollection of leadership patterns and shifts over time. However, the main purpose of this research is to examine the practices of female, collegiate athletic directors to determine the necessary actions and behaviors that lead to effectiveness.

Research Questions

The main research questions are:

1. What is the dominant style of leadership for female athletic directors within the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III?
2. What are the barriers and challenges (if any?) faced by female athletic directors?
3. What are the experiences of female athletic directors within the NCAA divisions I, II, and III?

The research ultimately sought to provide answers to the above questions to determine leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is a significant concept as it has been viewed as a direct and positive indicator of collective efficacy (Sudha et al., 2016). Thus, the term *effectiveness* was defined as a high level of achievement within the established occupational role. It has also been hypothesized that effective leaders (with high evaluations from superiors) also possess more “forceful” leadership qualities in crisis situations and more open consultation in noncrisis situations by their subordinates (Mulder et al., 1986, p. 568).

Significance of the Research

This study is significant for several reasons. First, studies conducted on female athletic directors often focus on the barriers faced by women occupying these administrative roles. The stereotypes, role conflicts, and job constraints all operate to construct the appearance that women are less qualified, and less interested in positions of athletic leadership, so that the narrow associations between sport, leadership, and masculinity remain unchallenged (Buzuvis, 2015).

Moreover, research has examined the underrepresentation of women as coaches and in other leadership positions in women's sport (Walker & Bopp, 2011). "While there has been a plethora of research examining the sporting experience of women and girls as athletes, this has not been the case with research into the experiences of the few women who do occupy influential and powerful roles" (Cooky, 2010, p. 227).

Second, much of the literature surrounding intercollegiate leaders in coaching or athletics is focused on "who are effective leaders." This research delves deeper into perceptions and experiences of female athletic directors while examining the shift of leadership style and traits over time. This qualitative format of research provides insight into the leadership experiences in specific settings while determining a wider range of epistemological viewpoints.

Third, the insights received from this study may be useful for providing recommendations for the advancement of females in intercollegiate athletics. Through this examination, the literature and research provide information that may influence initiatives for greater access to leadership opportunities for females in sport.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research, several terms will be utilized consistently. Before applying them to findings and results, it is necessary to create a clear definition of each term. Below is a brief definition of several significant terms. Each definition will be expanded, and their significance to the project discussed in the literature review.

Gender: refers to the socially constructed roles deemed appropriate for men and women (Cunningham, 2008).

Glass Ceiling: prevents women from advancing within an organization. An invisible barrier often associated with discrimination (Thornton & Etxebarria, 2021).

Leader Effectiveness: high level of achievement within the established occupational role.

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association

Sport Management: a field of study that focuses on the administration of physical education and athletic activities (Slack, 1996).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the simplest of definitions, leadership is the act of leading a group of people or organization. While leadership is necessary for building cohesive teams, there is a causal link between leadership and team performance (Hogan et al., 1994). While leadership is one of the most relevant topics in the human sciences, it is important for two reasons. “First, leadership solves the problem of how to organize collective effort; consequently, it is the key to organizational effectiveness. With good leadership, organizations thrive and prosper. When organizations succeed, the financial and psychological well-being of the incumbents is enhanced” (Hogan & Kaiser, 2004, p. 2). Thus, as the intentional behavior of leading will truly foster positive leadership development, effective leadership must be developed through education and experience while using career opportunities to encourage growth (Hughes et. al., 2009).

Concerning leadership development, research has sought to identify the personal attributes associated to charismatic leadership. “Identifying personal attributes of charismatic leadership is especially important from a leadership development perspective because of the heightened need for change-oriented executives for organizational innovation” (Jung & Sosik, 2002, p. 24). While values may vary among the specific type of leadership, common qualities include having a big picture vision, a commitment to capacity building, a willingness to take calculated risks when required, credibility, ethical principles, and a sense of responsibility (Hughes et. al, 1996). Additional key attributes of sport-specific leaders include the ability to emphasize vision, cultivate knowledge, evaluate and measure, and determine a goal focus. (Westerbeek & Smith, 2005).

Yet, to further understand the depth of sport leadership as opposed to management, Crust and Lawrence (2006) place emphasis on the specified goals and objectives of a leader while acknowledging the interaction between the leader and group members. This concept requires action as effective leadership often includes motivation, increased productivity, and positive group cohesion. However, research has argued that “expert leadership requires cognitive excellence given that optimal and consistent impact requires the conscious selection, combination, and deployment of leadership behaviors” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016, p. 2). Regarding these behaviors, the breadth of one’s leadership skills and application of leadership style is known to dramatically impact subordinate cooperation, retention, and goal achievement. Yet, regardless of the research, the question remains as to what makes an effective leader as there are no absolute truths regarding effective managerial leadership (Soucie, 1994).

The review of the literature is divided into the following subsections:

1. Sport Leader Gender

- Significance of Gender

- Gender Equity

2. Underrepresentation

- Discrimination and Stereotypes

- Forward Thinking

3. Leaderships Styles and Theories in Sport

- Transformational Leadership

- Transactional Leadership

- Ethical Leadership

- Leader Member Exchange Theory

4. Leadership Effectiveness and Performance

Sport Leader Gender

The data and research concerning the gender of sport participants is easily accessible. Yet, there appears to be a shortage of information regarding the number of women in interscholastic athletic leadership positions (Massengale & Lough, 2010). The research into this marginalization of women in sport leadership has primarily used a twofold categorical approach to gender (Erikainen et al., 2020) as there is a growing body of research focusing on women in the business sector using a transformational model of leadership (Brown & Light, 2012). Yet, to truly be successful, female leaders need the support of the systems that underpin their industry and career roles. While gender equity entails the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between men and women, sport is also seen as a necessary vehicle for achieving gender equality in a broader sense (Burton & Leberman, 2017). Moreover, while most research studies have sought to provide strategies for the improvement of barriers faced by women in the industry, recent research has focused on relational gender perspectives in sport leadership (Adriaanse & Claringbould, 2016).

Significance of Gender

Prior to discussing gender equity for females, it is necessary to examine how gender is perceived and constructed in the United States. Researchers currently use the word sex to refer to biologically based differences whereas gender is referred to the social establishment of variances between men and women (Marini, 1990). According to research by Delphy (1993), gender can be viewed as “content” while sex may be viewed as “container.” In other words, while the content may vary and shift, the container is considered unwavering as it is one with nature (p. 3).

The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to the long-standing feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny; sex is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meaning and form that the body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation. (Butler, 1986, p. 35)

Yet the term gender has also been utilized by scientists and researchers to discuss sex in a politically correct format as gender may be construed by some as a "less loaded term" (Torggrimson & Minson, 2005). However, "gender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form" (Butler, 1986, p. 36).

Gender Equity

Regarding gender equity, a variety of studies have been conducted for the purpose of determining hiring tendencies for female leaders, coaches, and athletic directors. In a recent report, The International Working Group for Women and Sport published results that investigated the global progress within women and sport leadership. The report determined that few actions have been taken to recruit, retain, and enhance females within sport leadership roles (Pike et al., 2018). In the 2019 Division I Leadership College Racial and Gender Report Card, Lapchick (2019) reports the lack of diversity within collegiate athletic leadership. According to the findings, white men still dominate positions of leadership in collegiate sport as a drastic underrepresentation of women in campus leadership programs persists. "The lack of representation of women and people of color has been a consistent issue within the arena of college sport" (Lapchick, 2019, p. 1). Lapchick's grade for gender was the same as the year 2018

as both years received an F. Lastly, concerning trends and fluctuation, the dominance of white men at the top has increased while the number of female athletic directors decreased.

As such, gender integration into sport is encouraging society to re-evaluate masculinity and femininity in addition to gender roles. “Contrary to focuses that use a constraints approach to study women’s participation, a resistance perspective is concerned with ways in which women’s participation can function to challenge socially constructed and narrowly defined gender role expectations supported by masculine hegemony” (Ross & Shiner, 2008, p. 53). While this resistance may exist within leadership and participation sport roles for women, it is possible that these gender issues in sport are ultimately concerned with power and control. As the trend of “girl power” has increased in recent years, media has the tendency to highlight the sport focus on masculine dominance and patriarchy. “Historically, men have enjoyed a privileged position over women in sport in terms of opportunities and rewards, grounded in the beliefs concerning the physical differences and abilities between genders” (Cooky, 2010, p. 227) This has then revealed itself as common knowledge that men are naturally superior to women.

The gaps in representation within sport are apparent. While the number of athletic directors of color (as of 2019) has increased, white males dominate the role of collegiate athletic director. According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) gender report card by Lapchick (2019), the number of women who held the role of athletic director decreased, scoring a grade of F. Therefore, recommendations have suggested the need for women-specific initiatives, improved inter-cultural knowledge, and the continuing awareness of organizational culture and structure (Pike et al., 2018).

Underrepresentation

While gender participation and involvement in sport has been widely reviewed in recent years, the application of sport leadership in relation to sex and gender is not only relevant to understanding the sport management industry, but is necessary for continued growth of female leadership involvement. Although female sport participation and female spectator involvement has increased, underrepresentation still exists (Depauw et al., 1991). “Despite a plethora of research, female representation within sport leadership still remains low, regardless of the growing evidence that greater gender diversity at the leadership level makes for success” (Gaston et al., 2020, p. 3). As one example, the 2020 Racial and Gender Report Card showed flaws within the major league soccer’s approach to gender hiring. While major league soccer tends to do very well with racial and gender hiring practices, the league earned 69.9 points for its gender hiring practices, down from 72 in 2019 (Lapchick, 2020). This not only marked a fourth consecutive year of declines in this category for the league, but it also made the lowest gender score across all professional leagues.

Discrimination and Stereotypes

Despite acts such as the Civil Rights Act of 1871, Title IX, and the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, discriminatory practices among females in sport organizations persist. While theories such as homologous reproduction, hemogenic masculinity, human capital theory, and other feminist theories aid in the understanding of the overwhelming number of men to women in sport roles, they fail to address the emotional cognitive processes of women as they encounter poor treatment within the sport domain (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). While the sport industry favors a masculine and competitive nature, it is the perception of sport that a male dominated force perpetuates ongoing discrimination (Massengale & Lough, 2010). According to

Casey Sudzina with Front Office Sports (2016, p. 1), “women can sometimes be disregarded when they voice their opinions, or rather males are more highly regarded, and women can become disregarded.” As current research tends to spotlight the barriers and obstacles for females seeking leadership roles in sport, sport continues to affirm this hierarchical culture through hiring and promotion discrimination.

While a variety of studies have in sport psychology have analyzed gender discrimination and stereotypes, one may wonder whether sport is sex-typed as research has confirmed that people perceive sport as more appropriate for males than females (Chalabaev et al., 2013). These perceptions clearly present challenges within a variety of facets. As stereotypes in sport have been suggested to obtain a wide myriad of additional characteristics, there are also challenges and complexities when applied at the individual, social, or cultural level (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). For example, socio-cultural views of “lesbian presence” in women’s sport have a troubling past and have been utilized to maintain climates of oppression (Kane, 2016).

Forward Thinking

According to findings by the International Working Group on Women and Sport, “without women leaders, decision makers and role models within sport, equal opportunities for women and girls will not be achieved” (Adriaanase & Claringbould, 2016). Thus, it is recommended that those in authoritative positions should strive to provide opportunities for women to gain leadership roles within sport organization. “As males numerically dominate boards of sport organizations that are at the top level of sport governance, and hold high-level positions, they play an essential role in enabling gender equity” (Sotiriadou & Haan, 2019, p. 3). In a study by Pike et al. (2018), recommendations for global progress within the women-and-

sport movement include women-specific initiatives, the need for continued consciousness raising regarding organizational culture, and enhanced inter-cultural understanding.

Leadership Styles and Theories in Sport

While the data indicates the variety of manners in which women lead, research aims to identify the style of leadership women exemplify in sport. There is often a distinguished relationship between the success or failure rates of sport programs in conjunction with apparent leadership behaviors (Sullivan et al., 2012). As an industry, sport management employs an array of leadership theories among a wide range of both established organizations and narrowed programs. Research surrounding the role of leadership traits and theories within the sport industry remains formative among those within management positions and roles. Thus, to examine this role of leadership within the sport industry, researchers have attempted to understand the meaning and purpose behind the assumption of leadership theories within establishments (O'Boyle et al., 2015). These scholars have utilized active research measures in addition to sport leadership studies. Since the 1970s,

scholars have developed and pursued numerous lines of leadership research situated in sport, investigating a myriad of leadership styles and behaviors and their relationships to individual, dyadic, group, and organizational outcomes in the context of both the on-the-field athletic team and the off-the-field conventional management of the sport organization itself. (Peachey et al., 2015, p. 570)

While theories including the transactional theory and the transformational theory have been examined previously and extensively, new lines of leadership research including ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006) and the leader member exchange theory (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011) are gaining in prevalence and pervasiveness among researchers and sport management professionals.

Regarding the significance of leadership and the application of theories to the industry, Wright and Côté (2003) propose that the demand for effective leadership to increase performance is an ever-present phenomenon within the realm of sport and management. Sport organizations tend to strive for quality service provision and deliverance of proprietary goals and objectives. The identification of these theories among hierarchy roles and sport management opportunities would allow for the presentation of potential recommendations for the overall improvement of leadership theory application in sport management.

Prior to comprehending a variety of leadership theories, it is foundational to assimilate the significance of leadership roles among sport management professionals. According to Soucie (1994), sport administrators are responsible for empowering subordinates to establish and achieve goals as the extent of their leadership skills will dictate the outcome of their actions. Traditionally, leaders were encouraged to focus on making relevant decisions, provide conflict resolution, and place task expectations on their followers.

Where leaders were once seen to control, plan and inspect the overall running of an organization, in today's more service-oriented industries, leadership roles are also to motivate and inspire others, to foster positive attitudes at work, and to create a sense of contribution and importance with and among employees. (Palmer et al., 2001, p. 5)

Thus, while it may be difficult to distinctly define leadership, Bolden (2004) proposed that every person has their own intuitive understanding of what leadership is and that the way in which leadership is defined is strongly influenced by one's theoretical stance. Just as the styles of leadership within sport are differentiated, theories are often associated with organizational outcomes and influenced by leader behaviors. For example, "transformational leaders are responsive to the individual needs of followers; inspire followers; and align the goals of the

organization, leader, group, and individuals” (Burton et al., 2019, p. 21-22). While transformational leaders recognize individualized needs of subordinates, transactional leaders tend to focus on rules and procedures in order to reach organizational outcomes and exceptional performance from followers. Yet, aside from transactional or transformational leaders, behaviors established by ethical leaders are context dependent in that their behavior will be reproduced (Burton & Peachey, 2014). Lastly, the behavior associated within the leader member exchange theory may result in a dyadic relationship between leader and follower. “According to the leader member exchange theory, the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader a follower is predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational level of analysis” (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p. 827). Therefore, the theories of leadership must be analyzed individually to promote success among sport programs and organizations.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory is one of many theories applied to sport management practice and organizational success. “Research has shown that leaders who demonstrate transformational leadership are considered by followers to more effective compared with leaders using transactional or laissez-faire leadership behavior” (Burton et al., 2019). This theory often boasts a higher number of quality relationships among employees, greater levels of engagement, and surpassing performance improvement when compared to leaders and subordinates engaged in a transactional relationship. Concerning the objectives, the aim of transformational leadership would be to “transform” people and organizations in a literal sense, to alter them in the mind and heart, enlarge vision and understanding, clarify reasons to make behavior congruent with values and concepts, and to bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014).

In a sport setting, transformational leadership is valuable in establishing positive outcomes for organizations and employees. Concerning sports performance, “early indications suggest that transformational leadership affects performance indirectly via several mediating mechanisms” (Kelloway et al., 2006, p. 1522). This speculation of established positive outcomes from transformational leadership values employee development and teamwork within a sports setting. In observing the transformational leadership theory within the NCAA, it was determined that “transformational leaders, as demonstrated by athletic directors, were also found to impact the athletic administrators’ commitment to their athletic departments, but the culture of the athletic department (i.e., values, norms, ways of doing) had an impact on this influence” (Burton et al., 2019, p. 27). While transformational leaders within sport tend to successfully lead organizations in sport and retain employees, the culture that values teamwork remains vital to employee commitment as well.

Transactional Leadership

While a transformational leader seeks to inspire, motivate, and retain employees, transactional leaders seek to provide rewards for good performance (Varol & Varol, 2012). The transactional leader is often contingent upon reward, manages by exception (both passive and active), and could be classified in a laissez-faire category (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Regarding the contingent reward, transactional leaders recognize accomplishments in their exchange of rewards for effort. They often utilize rules and procedures in order to actively take corrective measures. Additionally, the passive management system revolves around the notion that the leader will intervene only if standards have not been met. Finally, the laissez-faire leader is simply the absence of a leader as decisions are not being made and actions are not taken (Burton et al., 2019).

Within the sport industry, it could be inferred that the transformational leadership theory remains prominent to the transactional leadership theory. In a study mentioned in the article by Peachey et al. (2014), transformational and transactional leadership theories were assessed within Canadian intercollegiate athletic associations and the findings revealed that athletic administrators exhibited more transformational than transactional leadership profiles. It was also determined that the leadership theories associated with the coaches' leader effectiveness remained synonymous to the transformational theory rather than the transactional theory. Thus, researchers have concluded that, overall, transformational leadership is associated with more positive outcomes for sport organizations (Burton et al., 2019).

Ethical Leadership

As the former leadership theories involve a transformational or a transactional relationship, scholars have recently begun to delve into the ethical aspects of management and leadership. Specifically, intercollegiate sport organizations have argued the importance of ethical leadership within the sport context (Peachey et al., 2015). While the significance of ethical leadership is rather apparent, the conditions and behaviors surrounding the theory are also notable. Concerning these specified behaviors, explicit ethics-based communication with employees as well as reinforcement of ethically appropriate behavior demonstrated by the leader as well as the subordinates exemplify this form of leadership (Burton & Peachey, 2014). Additionally, the perceptions of leadership effectiveness and personal traits influence the overall theory application. For example, "survey research has linked perceived leader effectiveness with perceptions of the leader's honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness" (Brown & Treviño, 2006, p. 2). These perceptions, combined with cognitive trust, are associated with the ethical leadership theory among leaders and sport professionals alike.

As previously stated, ethical leadership among intercollegiate sport organizations has gained recognition in recent years. While the sports landscape is tarnished with ethical dilemmas and scandals, organizational climates that foster unethical behavior among leaders, administrators, and coaches seem to be more the norm than the exception in sport programs (Burton et al., 2017). Within this atmosphere, abusive coaching behavior has surfaced as an area of sport management seeking revision and evaluation. This abusive supervision contains many negative influences on athletes such as reduced self-efficacy, anxiety, and levels of depression (Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al., 2015). This moral dimension of sport has sparked the revolution and revision of previous leadership tactic and theories. Now, the ethical climate of sport organizations and programs often depends on a deliberate decision by coaches and leaders to act within an appropriate moral compass and within established guidelines.

Leader Member Exchange Theory

In addition to ethical influences and applications, researchers have discovered the role of exchange processes among programs and practices. In order to more fully understand the implications surrounding the framework, the two forms of social exchanges must be defined. Exchanges between an employee and employing organization are called perceived organizational support, while exchanges between the employee and his or her leader are defined as leader-member exchange (Wayne et al., 1997). Regardless of the specified exchange relationship, the leader member exchange is a relatively new interest for scholars and leaders within the sport management industry. This theory has captured sport management leadership researchers' attentions as the relationship tenets of focus include mutual trust, respect, and obligation (Peachey et al., 2015). While these relationships are founded in trust, the exchange between leader and follower often extends beyond the employment scope. Therefore, research would

suggest that athletes' leader-member exchanges with coaches are associated with subsequent communication and relationships with coaches and teammates, as athletes with in-group relationships experience more prosocial outcomes than athletes without these relationships (Cranmer, 2016). Thus, a similar conclusion could be hypothesized for those within the employer-employee relationships among sport programs and organizations.

There is an established correlation between efficient sport organizations and leadership behaviors and theories (Aoyagi et al., 2008). As a field, sport management seeks to engage a variety of leadership theories both within professional realms and among smaller systems. Concerning leadership theory research as it relates to the sport management industry, the recognition of theories is rather preliminary as researchers seek to find the answer to the specified qualities exhibited in an efficient leader. Among the theory variations, scholars have recognized the significance of leadership on sport management through the decades. "A number of clear themes in sport management leadership research and conceptual thinking have emerged, with the proposed conceptual model advancing several antecedents and processes unique to sport" (Burton et al., 2015, p. 570).

Leadership Effectiveness and Performance

While leadership research has often focused less on the role of personality, the relationship between a leader's behavior and leadership is imperceptible. Leadership is the unique ability to build and maintain a group that performs well, but it also involves persuading people to set aside their selfish interests and work in support of a common interest (Kaiser & Hogan, 2011). Leadership effectiveness is crucial to success in any organization as efficient leaders have the ability to engage their followers in organizational strategies (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). In a research study conducted by Kaiser and Hogan (2011), the results indicate that leader

behavior is related to a wide range of personality dimensions as it shows how both high and low scores on personality dimensions can compromise performance through an association with excessive behavior. For example, Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) examined the leadership of inter-university athletics administrators using Bass's (1995) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), Davis (2001) conducted a study on perceived leadership styles and levels of satisfaction of selected junior college athletic directors and head coaches, while Weese (1995) conducted a study on leadership, organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction in Canadian YMCA organizations. Not only have these research findings indicated a correlation between leader behavior and effectiveness, but they have demonstrated the associations between personality dimensions and relationship establishment.

Along with these correlations include an additional sector of leadership research in sport organizations (that seems to be overlooked by sport management researchers) on succession and performance (Gammelsaeter, 2013). A variety of researchers have hypothesized leadership scales (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980), and types of leadership (Hausenblas & Carron, 1998). While these behavioral relationships are necessary to examine within a sport setting, it is also paramount to explore the nature of sport leader performance. The specificity of sport as an industry should not be overlooked in the analyzation of leader performance. According to research by Gammelsaeter (2013),

leader succession research has been underpinned by assumptions that leadership is generalizable across industries, that it is basically unitary, and that team sport in particular lend itself to measuring succession effects on performance because in sport there are objective measures of performance and reasonable measures of leader succession. (p. 15)

Former research has assessed the manners in which male leadership differs from female leadership in terms of approach. Likewise, studies have analyzed these differences as they pertain to alternative factors such as demographic characteristics, management style, ability to cope in a crisis, and overall effectiveness as leaders (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, to progress leadership in both knowledge and effectiveness, furthered research should analyze and assess leader practice, intentions, and associated behaviors.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Innately, qualitative research is valuable in that it produces findings not arrived at by statistical measures or other means of quantification (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). “It can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings, as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations” (p. 11). This would insinuate that qualitative research incorporates many realities as it seeks to understand human attitudes while incorporating the personal human experience. Thus, as qualitative research analyzes the subject subjectively, it aims to provide understanding as it observes these human perceptions and values (Morse, 2015). While qualitative research recognizes the significance of these perspectives and perceptions, this research is especially valuable for generating new data along with paths of analysis. As such, “qualitative research is exhilarating, providing a source of well-grounded rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts” (Pugsley, 2010, p. 2).

Historically, qualitative research has been utilized among leadership theory work, as well as within the sport leadership context. For example, to identify effective leadership behaviors in cricket, a qualitative analysis was utilized for the purpose of examining perceptions of transformational leadership (Smith et al., 2017). Additionally, Lovelin and Hanold (2014) explored female sport leaders’ perceptions of leadership and management (including skills and attitudes for success) in their qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the articulation of variances within experience as well as the ability to provide interviewee thoughts on leadership and management in sport. Lastly, pertaining to role incongruity, Massengale (2009) utilizes a qualitative method to examine the underrepresentation of women in

interscholastic sport. His work provides both perspectives and perceptions from interviewees examined through semi-structured interviews as his findings were based on the lived experiences of participants.

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide the insights and experiences of female athletic directors in intercollegiate sport. Therefore, it is critical to understand participants' career perceptions and experiences. This is valuable in terms of leadership research in that the findings will provide furthered knowledge pertaining to female's roles within sport. Additionally, there is a need to develop an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of female athletic directors pertaining to career advancement and barriers within the industry. This knowledge will be best obtained through the utilization of qualitative research. The methodological approach that was used included semi-structured interviews. While the interviewer pre-determined the questions, semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to explain and explore issues that they felt are important (Longhurst, 2003). Thus, Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the research and contains the following sections: (a) research design, (b) research questions, (c) data collection, (d) interviews, (e) interviewees, (f) coding, (g) theory, and (h) interview questions.

Research Design

This study aligns within the realm of qualitative research. Not only is qualitative research concerned with the development of the meaning and experience of human's lives and social worlds, but it is useful for gaining the knowledge of poorly understood or complex areas (Fossey et al., 2002). Effective qualitative research is categorized by congruence between the paradigm that informs the research questions and the research methods used.

This qualitative approach was chosen for the study for three main reasons. First, the qualitative method was necessary for the study as it was not responsible for quantifying any data,

methodological approaching, or relationships regarding the leadership experiences of female athletic directors within the NCAA divisions I, II, and III. Qualitative methods, which allow for a more thorough interpretation of values and perceptions, provided a more suitable fit for the research questions in this study because this study sought to understand the leadership experience, leadership styles, and variance over time of these leadership styles. Second, a qualitative approach provided an in-depth understanding of these experiences and perspectives, along with the underrepresentation and potential barriers faced. Third, a qualitative approach strived to fill a gap in the current literature on this subject. While a great deal of the research has been quantitative, qualitative studies that explore the leadership style in sport, leadership experiences, *and* leadership style as it changes over time are nonexistent. With a qualitative approach, collegiate realm, and focus of female leadership style and variance, this research was constructed as a helpful addition to other sport leadership studies. Lastly, this study offers potential insights for females who aspire to hold the rank of athletic director.

Additionally, triangulation (or data triangulation) utilized several different methods and sources of data. While triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to establish validity, it is also used to measure a single concept or phenomena (Berg, 2004; Guion, 2002). Additionally, triangulation also has been used as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the “convergence of information” from different sources. Thus, to justify this triangulation in the research study, the following three data groups were compared:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews
2. The representation of females in leadership roles within the NCAA
3. Leadership Theories (Transformational and Transactional)

Semi-structured interviews were used for the purpose of retrieving data from the female athletic directors. These participants provided perceptions and opinions concerning the posed research questions and investigation. Moreover, leadership theories were used to examine the traits and behaviors demonstrated by these participants. These theories searched for common themes within the “new leadership era” including transformational tendencies and transactional leadership patterns (Seters & Field, 1990). The research also compared data to demonstrations of ethical leadership, servant leadership, and the leader-member exchange theory. Thus, the following research process was conducted as follows:

Idea → Theory → Design → Data Collection → Analysis → Findings (Berg, 2004; Pursglove, 2015).

The idea for this study was initiated from the researcher’s examination of female leadership in the industry and in research. The lack of female representation within sport leadership roles is apparent (Massengale & Lough, 2010). The TIDES report of 2019 (which examines race and gender disparities through the NCAA and their member institutions) shows a F+ grade for gender hiring practices (Lapchick, 2019). However, the grades show insignificant progress in 2020. Upon reviewing gender hiring practices across three divisions, the overall grade remained a F+ (Lapchick, 2020). Additionally, there is a gap in the literature concerning the shift in this female sport leadership style over time. A relational leadership theory provides an “overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order), and change (new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 1). As formerly mentioned, the qualitative design of this study was chosen to further delve into the concepts, opinions, and perceptions of the participants. With the incorporation of three forms of

data, unobtrusive analysis, and semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to observe females' roles in the collegiate scope, existing and changing leadership behaviors, and perceptions concerning underrepresentation as well as steps for progression. Lastly, in the data analysis, common themes emerged within the qualitative findings (Bazeley, 2009). The combination of data and qualitative nature minimized researcher bias.

Research Questions

The main research questions are:

1. What style of leadership do female athletic directors within the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III use?
2. What are the barriers and challenges (if any?) faced by female athletic directors?
3. What are the leadership experiences and perceptions of female athletic directors within the NCAA divisions I, II, and III?

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2002), qualitative data collection approaches include observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. Data collection consisted of leadership theory, interviews via Zoom, and an unobtrusive analysis to provide insight into the females of the NCAA and their leadership experiences as they pertain to effectiveness and performance. The three data sets determined the factors that were analyzed within the triangulation process.

Additionally, this data collection consisted of information obtained by interviews of females in athletic director roles within NCAA institutions. The interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to lead the responses as the interview conversations were then transcribed in real-time by "Otter Life" via Zoom. Before the interview, all participants were sent an

introductory email (see Appendix A). Each interviewee consented to participate by replying to the introductory email as the email was used as a consent letter. This informed consent letter/mail not only ensures confidentiality and anonymity in the research and publication process, but it explained the nature of the study, the purpose of the study for future sport management research, interview procedure, and nature of the questions. On the day of the scheduled Zoom interview, the researcher reviewed the letter with the participant as they were reminded that interviews would be recorded, transcribed, and archived.

Upon data collection and analysis, the researcher drew conclusions related to the other components of the design. After transcription, emerging themes were coded, sorted, and categorized. Using a grounded theory approach, additional themes were added to the framework as they emerged. With this approach, categories within the data analysis provided concepts of leadership behavior, actions, effectiveness, etc. These categories also initiated structures that offered theoretical explanations by which data collection and comparison continued with furthered investigation to achieve theoretical saturation (Morse, 2015). The core of grounded theory is the procedural rigor and process that informs all aspects of the research effort (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews which followed a general interview guide. The interview questions correlated to the research questions as well as the main literature review points. The interview questions covered six main areas: career path, leadership styles, leadership effectiveness, gender and underrepresentation, forward thinking, and demographic details. While interviewing is an invaluable tool for the qualitative researcher (Kvale, 1994), it has a distinct advantage in eliciting unique information and opinions (Hannabuss, 1996). This

study used interviews that were scheduled in advance in order to ensure that the participants had ample time to complete the interview. Each interview participant answered pre-formatted and formerly established questions. These questions were designed to provide answers that supported the research questions. The interviews were one-on-one and took place virtually due to geographical constraints.

An interview of this kind [semi-structured] will typically be guided by a schedule of topics or questions, although their order in the interview may vary and interviewers are likely to depart from the schedule and use a variety of follow-up questions (or comments, responses, or other contributions). (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, p. 2)

Judgment sampling was used by the researcher to select participants for the study. The judgment sampling method, also known as purposive sampling, aided in the identification and establishment of information-rich cases (or participants) related to the topic of interest. These selected participants represented the opinions and perspectives found within the sport leadership industry. Furthermore, the females selected were chosen based on the interviewee's knowledge of the topic (Pursglove, 2015). According to Portney and Watkins (2009), the interviews that use subjects as the sample groups will result in first-person narrative data that the researcher can later interpret meaning from the responses (phenomenology).

Interviewees

The study participants included female athletic directors within the NCAA divisions I, II, and III. This selection represented a broad spectrum of leaders from across the United States, identified through web searches and through networks of academic and professional colleagues. Yet, the sample size of interview participants was small to reduce homogeneity. The sample sizes used in qualitative research methods are often smaller than those found in quantitative

methods as this form of research are focused on heterogeneities in meaning which are often centered on “the how and why of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene, or set of social interactions” (Dworkin, 2012, p.1). For this study, the interviewees had similar backgrounds as well as prior career experience within the sport industry. This ensured that the researcher would be able to identify common themes for the results, findings, and discussion.

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, female athletic directors who fulfilled the initial sampling criteria were approached via email to participate in the study. Prior to interviews, participants were provided with a written explanation of the study and were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. Additionally, participants were ensured that all shared information would remain confidential. The researcher requested a confidential 30-min audio and video recorded interview about the interviewees’ leadership perceptions and experiences. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews were utilized via Zoom to examine the process of leadership development and the variances in experiences of female sport directors. As previously stated, the questions were designed to determine leaders’ career path, motivation, characteristics, definition of success, and demographics.

Following the conduction of interviews, the researcher obtained the recorded sessions via the Zoom platform. Zoom is currently (as of 2021) partnering with a transcription service, Otter.ai. The researcher utilized Otter Live Notes via Zoom, which record each session while transcribing each interview in real time. This ensured accuracy as well as reduce the time needed within the data collection phase of research. After the transcription process was achieved, the researcher reviewed each recorded interview and transcription several times. The researcher then searched for common themes among the qualitative data before coding them. It may also be important to note that interviewees were able to request (verbally or written) to receive a copy of

the final manuscript. Lastly, interviewees were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they would be able to withdraw from the interview or the study, at any time.

Coding

Primarily, the text data was manually observed and examined as the researcher read and re-read the transcripts several times to gain a general understanding of the information and concepts. The data was explored in detail before the researcher sought to code and create preliminary groupings. Coding or categorizing the data has a significant part in data analysis as it allows the researcher to organize and make sense of the data (Basit, 2003). While coding helps to make data ready for analysis, it also enhances the quality of the findings. “The core operation of coding involves examining a coherent portion of your empirical material – a word, paragraph, a page – and labeling it with a word or short phrase that summarizes its content” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 3).

Responses for this research study were coded using the Atlasti Software (2021 version). After the researcher coded the interview questions and established these preliminary groupings, Atlasti helped to provide the researcher with the building of descriptions and themes. Upon the elimination of redundancies, these preliminary groupings were condensed down to major themes and sub-themes. In order to ensure validity and credibility, the researcher primarily recorded all interviews via Zoom before transcribing for accurate and precise records.

Theory

The themes that emerged from the qualitative techniques were compared to leadership theories including the transformational leadership theory and the transactional leadership theory. The theory of transformational leadership was initially created by James Burns in 1978 (Burns, 2012). The transformational leadership theory proposes a form of leadership in which leaders

meet higher goals by inspiring their followers to provide innovative solutions while establishing a ‘better’ workplace (Chandrashekar, 2002; Ghasabeh et al., 2015; Marturano & Gosling, 2008).

Through the tedious process of coding and data reduction and analysis, 10 dominant themes were established. The themes for RQ1 included *leadership style variance* and *the importance of collaboration*. The themes for RQ2 included *underrepresentation*, *gender-based stereotypes*, and *work-life applications*. The themes for R3 included: *career viability* and *leadership support*. An additional theme emerged from R2 and R3: *positive female qualities* and *traits*. Lastly, a theme from R1 and R3 was also established: *collaborative support*.

Additionally, several other forms of leadership including ethical leadership, servant leadership, and the leader member exchange theory were also discussed. Relating the information to these leadership theories granted the researcher with the ability to correlate similarities, distinguish personality traits and styles, and establish necessary connections between the literature and future implications.

Interview Questions

To understand the experiences of female athletic directors regarding leadership perceptions and styles, leadership experiences, and leadership changes over time as they pertain to effectiveness, the researcher utilized the interview questions. These questions were utilized to address the specific research questions of the study.

Interview questions:

Demographics

What is your age?

(RQ, 1)

What is your educational background?

(RQ, 1)

What is your ethnicity?

(RQ, 1)

What number of years have you been employed in sport?

(RQ, 1)

What is your marital status?

(RQ, 1)

Divisional level of interviewee:

(RQ, 1)

Region of the country of interviewee:

(RQ, 1)

Career Path

How long have you been employed as an athletic director within the NCAA?

(RQ, 4)

What is your sporting background?

(RQ, 4)

Please tell me about your career path to obtain your current role as athletic director specifically your professional experience, previous roles?

(RQ, 4)

What do you like and dislike about your current role?

(RQ, 3,4)

Ideally, where would you like to see your career in the next several years?

(RQ, 4)

Leadership Effectiveness

Define effectiveness as it pertains to this study.

How would you define *effectiveness* as a female leader in an athletic director role?

(RQ, 2, 4)

What personality traits do you possess that encourage leadership effectiveness?

(RQ, 2,4)

Leadership Styles

How would you describe your leadership style?

(RQ, 2)

Follow up: It sounds like your style is _____, which is _____, would you agree or disagree?

Describe a leadership challenge you have faced in your role as athletic director and how you handled it.

(RQ, 2, 4)

In your current leadership role, what would you say has been your largest contribution?

(RQ, 2, 4)

How do you believe your leadership style has changed since you were first hired on as an athletic director? In different athletic director roles?

(RQ, 2, 4)

What shifts have you seen in your leadership abilities from the start of your career to your current position?

(RQ, 2,4)

To what do you attribute this change or shift?

(RQ, 2,4)

Gender and Underrepresentation

How does being a female affect your current role as athletic director?

(RQ, 3,4)

How do you as a female athletic director view the current state of underrepresentation of females in this field?

(RQ, 3, 4)

Tell me about a time that you have experienced any of these barriers, stereotypes etc. because of being a woman in an athletic director position.

(RQ, 3, 4)

How often would you say that you encounter a gender-based barrier as a female athletic director?

(RQ, 3, 4)

What strategies have you used to overcome these barriers?

(RQ, 2, 3, 4)

Forward Thinking

What advice would you give to aspiring female athletic directors?

Where do you see advances for females pursuing a career in athletic administration?

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The main focus of this research was to examine the leadership practices of female athletic directors within NCAA divisions I, II, and III. In addition to determining the necessary actions and behaviors that lead to leader effectiveness, this research desired to understand career advancement for female, NCAA athletic directors.

In this section, the leadership experiences of female, NCAA athletic directors are discussed as the challenges and opportunities faced by these participants are revealed. First, responses were analyzed to understand the participants' thoughts and opinions toward a career as an athletic director within a male-dominated field. Next, opportunities and constraints were addressed as they pertain to gender equity, leadership experiences, and potential shifts within the NCAA. While external factors such as gender constraints and social acceptance are also addressed, culture creation and leadership styles were also analyzed.

Within the scope and span of intercollegiate athletics, female presence and representation within athletic director positions are limited. External factors such as social constraints as well as gender limitations have presented challenges for these participants in their roles as athletic directors. Yet, gender leader assets and projected career advancements encourage forward thinking and the potential for increased opportunity.

Eight female head athletic directors through NCAA institutions were interviewed. While demographic information such as location and division were recorded, no other identifying information on the interviewees are disclosed in order to protect confidentiality. Interviewees for this research included a range of ages from early 30s to late 50s. The interviewees worked for a variety of divisions (I, II, and III) in multiple states across the country. All interviewees held a

background in sports, while several had coaching backgrounds as well. Lastly, all interviewees have previously worked for at least one other university as a head athletic director prior to their current role. The subsequent sections outline the findings:

Research Question 1

What Style of Leadership Do Female Athletic Directors Within the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III Use?

Data were collected and analyzed to reveal themes pertaining to the insights, perceptions, and experiences of interviewees within NCAA head athletic director careers. Themes were identified via a code map to provide transparency for analysis. See Table 1 for the coding system created to identify themes. Following analysis, three themes emerged that examined the styles of leadership possessed by female athletic directors within the NCAA divisions I, II, and III. These themes included: *collaborative leadership*, *culture creation*, and *leadership characteristics*. Subthemes included forward thinking and adaptability. Each theme is presented with supporting quotes.

Theme 1: Collaborative Leadership

Interviewees in this study conveyed similar perceptions about leadership styles and the nature of leadership within intercollegiate sport. For many of these interviewees, the importance of collaboration coincides with a transformative style of leadership. Furthermore, many participants saw the value of collaboration alongside the importance of establishing and creating a culture. Additionally, all interviewees discussed the significance of relationships with both internal and external constituents, as well as student-athletes and coaches. Regarding leadership style and variance, participant 3 recalled, “There’s the practical sense and there’s the textbook version of this question. I strive to be that transformative, not transactional leader.” Similarly,

participant 8 states, “You win with people. That’s my mantra. If you treat people the right way and if you take care of people, then all of the other pieces fall into play.” While transformative leaders possess a variety of strength and positive characteristics, the value of collaboration and the establishment of relationships was expressed in in the interviews. In conjunction with transformational leadership style, participant 2 reflects on her leadership as being collaborative:

I hope it's collaborative for sure. I don't think I have all the answers, so I certainly try to seek feedback and input from, you know, the coaches, my staff and student athletes too. Student athlete voices become very important. I know I talk a lot, but people are surprised that they realize how much I listened to not only what they say, but sometimes what's not said.

Similarly, participant 4 recalled, “I think those I work with would say that I come from a really collaborative and transparent approach that focuses as much as we can on thinking strategically.” While strategy is discussed later in the results, transparency was also a reoccurring code. Thus, in order to effectively remain transparent, it is necessary to first establish connections and develop relationships within one’s leadership style. In accordance with participants 2 and 3, participant 1 speaks of collaboration and emphasizes the significance of creating and maintaining healthy relationships:

I try to be very collaborative and very open. I have an open-door policy. Sometimes that drives me bananas. I want to have a relationship with everyone because it’s a lot easier for me to correct, guide, and challenge you if I have a relationship with you.

Lastly, participant 8 highlights the value of open and transparent communication when she states:

I have always said that I am a very flexible leader and I am a very collaborative leader. Sometimes I overcommunicate in the hopes that everyone understands what's going on. I try my very hardest to be transparent with things so that I am always on the same page as my team. I think that situationally, you know, situations call for different leadership techniques. I think that when you're holding to those values of open communication, transparency, and meeting people where they are, they can integrate with a whole bunch of different labels.

Theme 2: Culture Creation

When asked about leadership style, the shift in leadership, and leadership challenges, all female interviewees touched on the fact that teamwork plays a major role and responsibility in an athletic director's career. Moreover, the conversation and topic of culture was repeated by many of the participants who recognize the value of a solid team. Participant 7 recognizes the need for her team to possess certain personality traits in order to build and establish this culture. She states:

I like to be surrounded with people who have a very high emotional intelligence. I think that folks will talk about needing to be a good communicator, organized, and have a good work ethic. I think that all of those things are certainly important. But I also think that they all go out the window if your emotional intelligence is low.

Concerning team collaboration and culture, participant 2 describes how she prefers for her team to feel comfortable providing their insights and their input while focusing ultimately on serving the institution:

I like to have a team that's going to have robust spirited conversation even if we don't all agree, I think it's going to get us to the same approach. I think it needs to have a tone of,

we're here to serve others to serve each other to serve the institution, the institution's mission. And while you want to be able to lay down strategy, I think you've got to empower people to go and execute whatever steps you have in place.

Likewise, understanding the purpose and administering the *why* behind the role, is something highly valued by participant 5 who believes: “You have to give people a purpose of what they’re driving towards. And you have to create a culture that people really want to be a part of, despite whether it’s low pay, long hours or under-staffed, you have to create that culture.” While she highlights some of the leadership challenges faced by females who hold this career title, the significance and value of teamwork and collaboration remains prominent. Participant 3 reflects these beliefs as she says, “I have to have really effective people working with me and that includes coaches.” Similarly, participant 4 emphasizes the value of environment and the role that a leader plays in affecting the temperature of the environment:

I’m really big into culture. I think if we don’t have a healthy culture, then we can’t produce. If we don’t feel like we can rely on each other if we don’t feel like we can ask questions without getting our hands slapped. I’ve worked in a lot of different environments and it’s funny to me how much the leader matters and the temperature that the leader sets matters.

Along these lines of culture with regard to leadership style, participant 7 states that within the context of an athletic director career, “it’s a student-facing, people first profession requires you to navigate personalities and build a culture that feels genuine.” While these participants recognized that there may be personality traits that enhance or encourage leadership effectiveness, the *why* behind the role often involves this culture creation.

Theme 3: Leadership Characteristics

A frequent topic when discussing leadership style and variance was personality traits of those the athletic director supervises. Interviewees identified the significance of recognizing how personality traits pertain to leadership style and effectiveness alike.

Well, I think everybody has characteristics that make them a good leader, but you have to be willing to learn about your own strengths. So, I'm a big believer that your biggest strength is also the biggest cross that you bear. And so, if you're coming out of the balcony with your strength, you're probably a really great leader, whatever that strength is. And when you come out of the basement with it, it's terrible. I'm a Clifton's strength person. I kind of geek out over the strengths and the personality profiles because I think they're pretty accurate and they help me understand and work with people. (Participant 6)

Strategic

Regarding forward thinking and coinciding with collaboration, a frequently referenced topic when discussing leadership characteristics and strengths was the value of strategy in athletic director roles and tasks. Participant 2 recalls that “having the right mix of teammates around you that can help you implement your strategy and approach... while you want to be able to lay down strategy, I think you've got to empower people then to go and execute whatever steps you have in place.”

Participant 4 states, “I’m very visionary as well and very, very strategic. I don’t do anything without a lot of thought, but I try to be very transparent about the decisions that I make.” Similarly, participant 3 speaks of strategy as it pertains to collaboration and the establishment of relationships when she recalls:

We have a strategic plan, so you have to have guardrails to be effective or you can be a mile wide and an inch deep and really not accomplish anything... And then the other part of being an effective leader is surrounding yourself with really good people because no athletic director can do everything by themselves.

When asked about personality traits necessary to become a great leader:

I think it's probably a combination... Management skills, culture building skills, then you have some of the more operational sides of business knowledge and those types of things at the Division one level. There is a lot of finance and fundraising and strategic components to navigating all those things. (Participant 3)

Adaptability

When asked if certain personality traits aid a leader, female athletic directors indicated both adaptability and connection with their students and constituents. Participant 4 describes:

I do think that you must have the ability to really be nimble from a personality perspective... And then just that ability to connect with a wide range of constituents... So, from a personality standpoint, you're going to have to be comfortable in lots of different settings. Whether that's connecting with, you know, the 16-year-old and their parents who might be in on a recruiting visit, your 21-year students you have here and alumni that you're engaged with and then the high money donors. You've kind of got all those groups that you've got to navigate as well.

While under the general umbrella of transformative and collaborative leadership, the ability to adapt and remain nimble is of great importance to the interviewees. Participant 2 gives the following advice to athletic directors:

You have to be willing to change. You know I've been in the business a long time and trust me even what we did five years ago you can't do now... So I think being adaptable, being forward thinking, and trying to be a lifelong learner is something a leader must be. When you think you know it all, that's about the time you should be tired because you're not going to be very successful.

Table 1*Code Map for Research Question 1*

Iteration	Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
3			Collaborative Leadership Culture Creation Leader Characteristics
2		Strategic Adaptability	
1	Personality traits/strengths Relationships Effective Teamwork Transformational leadership Business Knowledge Transparency Purpose Vision Forward Thinking Connecting with constituents Leader impact on work environment Execution of steps Finance and Fundraising Empower Followers Relationships with student-athletes Service Strategy Adaptability Lifelong Learning		

Research Question 2

What Are the Barriers and Challenges (If Any?) Faced By Female Athletic Directors?

The second research question focused on the barriers and challenges faced by female athletic directors within the NCAA. To assess this, interviewees were asked gender-related questions pertaining to underrepresentation and barriers, as well as strategies for overcoming these barriers. While many of the interviewees acknowledged or addressed Title IX as benefitting women's participation in sport, interviewees also recognized the status of underrepresentation. Furthermore, nearly every interviewee spoke of their experience with gender stereotyping in a male-dominated career field. As a result of the analysis, three themes emerged describing challenges faced by female athletic directors in the NCAA. The themes included: *underrepresentation*, *gender-based stereotypes*, and *societal perceptions*. Below, each theme is presented with supportive quotes.

Theme 1: Underrepresentation

Regarding underrepresentation among female leaders in sport, Richard Lapchick (the director of TIDES) observes that "the lack of representation of women and people of color has been a consistent issue within the arena of college sport...The grade for gender [hiring] was an F, the same as the 2018 grade" (Lapchick, 2019, p. 1). Many of the interviewees relate underrepresentation to a lack of opportunities, barriers, and work/life application. Participant 2 says:

I think we have to go back and once again educate females at an early age that there are some viable careers in college athletics... We need more opportunities out there... I can tell you right now that if I post a job for a women's head coach, if I have 100 applicants, probably 75-80 will be male. You really have to work harder at getting women to apply

for the jobs. I think that some of this underrepresentation exists because athletic directors get hired by college presidents. Because a large percentage of college presidents are men, it's taken a while. We are now moving the needle back in the other direction, but we are certainly not where we need to be.

Similarly, in a hiring conversation in order to address underrepresentation, participant 6 states:

I will go out in the field and try to hire a woman. I'll get a pool of candidates and let's say I get 100 applicants. 93 of them will be men who apply. The majority of those men will be highly under qualified, but they believe they're ready. They believe they're qualified and they're like, 'hell with it! I'm going to try it.'

Yet, to balance the playing field and increase female representation, several of the interviewees expressed their passion for female presence in sports and sport leadership. Several participants emphasized the need for opportunities and equal options for females in sport. For example, participant 3 recalls her early passion for sports and her desire for increased presence for females when she quotes:

I've always had this passion that women deserve to play sports. I have brothers and I always thought 'well if they can go play baseball or they play football, why can't I?' So, I've always been passionate that if you have little girls that want to play sports and if you have women who want to coach and women who want to play professionally, we should have opportunities and have them on a level playing field.

Participant 5 highlights how the shift from underrepresentation to opportunity will require a collaborative effort as she expresses "it's going to take all of us coming together and providing those opportunities to women and minorities who want to get into this space and don't quite know how to do it."

Theme 2: Gender-Based Stereotypes

Concerning barriers and challenges faced as a female athletic director, many of the female interviewees emphasized that they do experience stereotyping. Several of these women explained how the stereotypes result more from external sources than internal teams and constituents.

Football

As seen in Figure 1, nearly every interviewee who currently leads a football team through their university has experienced or currently experiences gender-based stereotypes. These stereotypes surround the general perception that because women do not commonly play football, they do not know or understand the sport. When asked if she has experienced any barriers or stereotypes as a female in this role, participant 5 states:

For sure. I think it's being a female and part of it is just personality that, you don't know football. You don't know athletics. You don't know how to fundraise. It's interesting because it's more of the external constituents and not the internal constituents. I don't think it's as much of our coaches and our student athletes [who feel this way]. I don't know what's different with them about being led by a female, but I think the outside constituents are where more of the stereotypes come in.

Similarly, participant 6 recalls how she was/is recognized by male coworkers and counterparts:

I think that in, in a lot of ways, I used to notice that I was received a little bit differently by my male counterparts at events or upon a first meeting. I think they're a little guarded meeting female athletic directors. They think we all have a chip on our shoulder. They're a little bit careful with us.

Pertaining specifically to football, Participant 6 continues:

There's a perception that athletic directors are men. You know, I'll roll up to a football game at a visiting institution and every institution gives, you know, such a warm welcome to the visiting team. And you usually have a suite and a car to pick you up and they're always looking for a man. I can't tell you how many times I've rolled up and they're asking me where the athletic director is. I say 'well, you're looking at him.' So, it's kind of funny.

Participant 4 aligned with several of the same comments regarding external sources of stereotyping, specifically within the football realm. She recalls:

I have experienced some resistance with alumni when we hired a football coach. I've hired almost every head coach since I've been here, which is weird. With football in particular, people have a real resistance to the female voice in that space. They assume that I don't know anything about football. But I do. I had some alumni who were very upset with me about the coaching decision that I made for football... Internally, it's not much of an issue. It's mostly outside of here.

Participant 7 discusses a similar assumption within the space. When asked about stereotypes experienced in her role, she states:

Oh God, yes. I would say within athletics I have experienced the most with football and ice hockey. In this role, I have definitely felt like I have had to prove my worth, especially on the men's side. People just automatically assume that I have no idea about football or no idea about ice hockey. I have had to defend my position time and time again. I think a guy can walk into the space and the assumption is that they know what they're doing and talking about.

When asked about the frequency of these stereotype comments and discrimination, participant 5 also states, “Oh gosh! At least once a month, if not more.”

Fundraising

As shown in Figure 1, several of the interviewees have also noticed a gender-related shift with fundraising and financial negotiating. Participant 6 continues to express:

I also noticed that until I really developed a strong network of athletic directors, it was really hard to schedule football games. It was really hard to negotiate money. I felt like I was always getting a low ball. I know you paid this university \$800,000 to play and you're offering me five. So, I really became aware of having all of the information to negotiate always from a position of knowledge and strength. I would hate for my male counterparts to know that I think this way but I don't ever think you can ever just go into a negotiation with grace or assume good intentions on anyone's part.

Participant 8 also recognized stereotyping among external constituents and outside donors. She recalls:

Most of the stereotyping comes from donors or other community members. I see it there a lot. I believe that there are many different reasons for that. I think there is a bit of a surprise from people who haven't interacted with me face to face. If they know me as ___, that can come off as a masculine name if they haven't actually spoken to me. So, I've had my time of signing things or signing my name in an email. Then, I will get off the phone with someone and they say, 'oh, you're a girl.' And I'm like, yeah. I have been the whole time.

Theme 3: Societal Perceptions

Male Dominance

In accordance to male presidents, interviewees expressed just how male-dominant the industry truly is. Participant 8 says, “Sport is not inherently male, but it is still predominantly male as is a fight for women to earn their chance.” Participant 4 describes:

There’s a lack of balance in athletics because the power is always tipped in the male direction and most athletic departments are very male. You have more male student athletes, you have more male coaches, you just have more males in general.

Participant 7 discusses the male dominance she faces in meetings on a weekly basis in her role:

In meetings, we will have old fashioned roll call and I will be one of the only women out of say 74 white men. They will do roll call and every head will turn and I know they are thinking, ‘how did a woman get in here?’

Work/Family Balance

Interviewees also recognized that the intercollegiate sport industry can be a difficult environment for work/family balance as participant 5 stated:

I think the challenges also come with being a mother, which as you know has a connection to being a female. I think there’s stereotypes about spending too much time with your kids or not enough time with your kids. One day I had posted a picture with my child at a school event, and someone reposted, ‘get back to work and get back to selling tickets.’

Participant 6 expresses frustration with the desire to increase and improve representation for females in the field. She believes that one major factor and cause for the current underrepresentation status has to do with family structure and work/life balance.

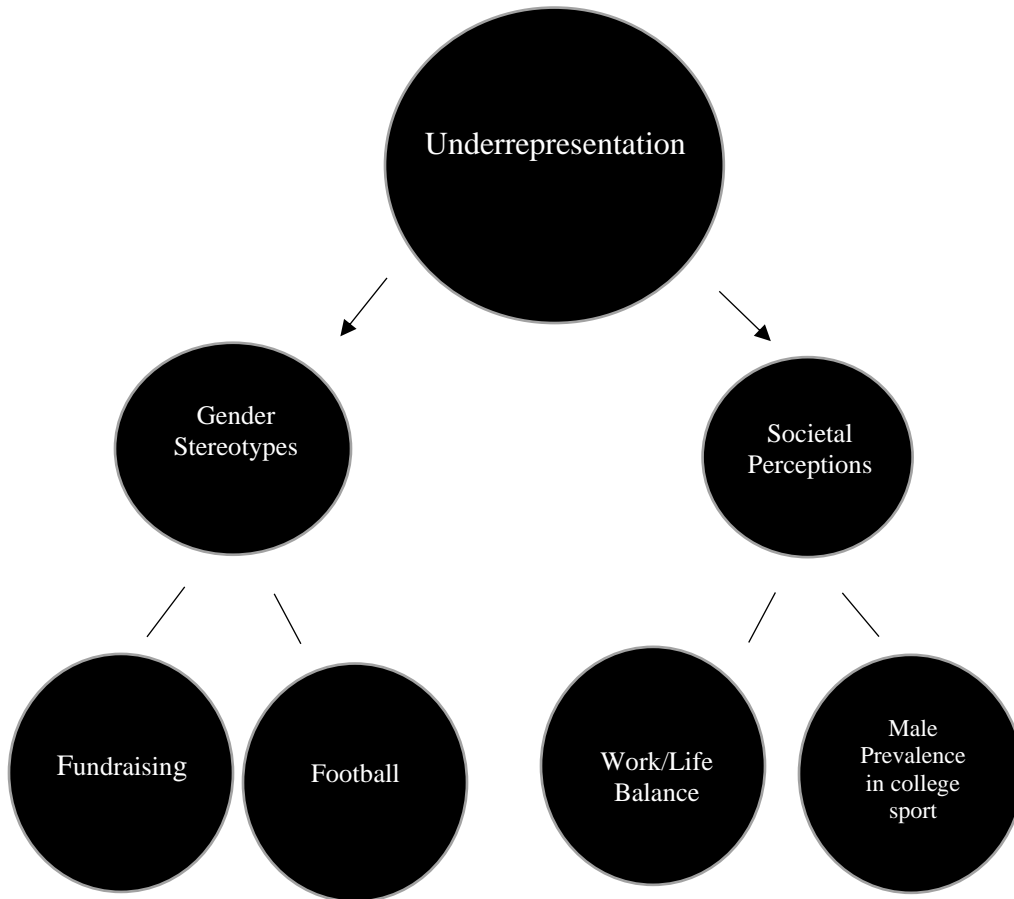
It's very hard to get women to move or to be mobile. So it might be that women are still in that place on their own, they're the secondary factor in whether or not they move. It's the husband first. It's the children first. I'm not saying that that's wrong. I don't think it's wrong. But I do think it is a part of the reason there aren't more women in these positions. It's really hard to get them. The last three hires that I've made, I tried like hell to hire women and I just couldn't for reasons like family.

Lastly participant 7 speaks on the importance of support for women who are attempting to maintain this career role as well as a family:

I think we have to figure out a way to support people at different phases of their life. I think we are seeing a lot of women who get out of athletic directing or take a reduced role because of family obligations. It's certainly a focus in our department to create a culture that supports women who are also trying to raise a family. Having flexibility in this approach is also important in that it's not a one size fits all.

Figure 1

Details for Research Question 2



Research Question 3

What Are the Leadership Experiences and Perceptions of Female Athletic Directors

Within the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III?

The third research question focused primarily on the overall leadership experiences within the NCAA. Every research question contributed to understanding the perceptions of female athletic directors as themes for R3 included: *female value in role* and *leadership support*.

Theme 1: Value of Female in AD Roles

While the athletics field is certainly male-dominated, females are beginning to express their views on female athletic directors within the NCAA. Interviewees in this study first expressed the value of females within athletic director roles. Participant 8 discusses how she believes that females bring unique perspectives to the space:

I think there is something special about having a female perspective in a leadership role where they get to have their hands on that big picture projection of the future. I think it is really important. In this same breath, I would also advocate for more non-binary or transgender individuals in the same leadership spaces. Regarding this career, it's a climb for women and I think that groups like women leaders do a really phenomenal job of making sure that we have community and connectivity with other like-minded people.

Participant 4 elaborates:

I think there are people that are beginning to understand the unique value that a female brings to a very male field because there's a lack of balance in athletics because the power is always tipped in the male direction and most athletic departments are very male... I think that there is a balance and an understanding that a female brings to a workplace... Women tend to do it all at the same time. We never leave work behind. We

never leave husbands behind... Females have this really great ability to see things as a whole.

Similarly, when asked how being a female affects her current role as an athletic director, participant 5 expresses:

Oh, for sure! I think it affects it in a really positive way actually. I think women lead differently and I think having perspective of being a mother and having the different roles that you have as a female help you in your leadership. I also think being a female impacts how I interact with others and how I lead the department. So, I think that definitely in positive ways, yes.

Theme 2: Leadership Support

Interviewees in this study elaborated on their belief in a support system and the supportive nature of mentorship within the NCAA. Participant 4 gives the following advice concerning leadership support:

Look for the people who are in your corner... Look for the support and forget about the ones that don't support you because you're not going to win them anyways.

Participant 3 states, "I have been really fortunate that a lot of great champions, both men and women, have been supportive throughout my career."

Regarding career trajectory and leadership support in the field, participant 3 expresses:

Who you work with is probably the most important decision you'll make. Yes, you might want this offer to go to a certain school, and you're thinking 'well I've always watched them on TV and now they're in the Power Five and oh man.' That's just fine and dandy.

But if the person you're working with or under is not going to allow you to grow and get

better, you're not going to be very happy. The shiny toy is tempting, but you are going to spend more time with these people than your husband.

Finally, participant 7 gives the following advice to aspiring female athletic directors:

Network, network, network. I think women are really bad at it honestly. I think men do it all the time. Women are very hesitant to pick up the phone and ask for things. We tend to not ask people to do things on our behalf and I find it interesting. The level of confidence that guys have assumes that they can do the job, whereas women already say no to ourselves before anyone else has. Establishing the network and support is huge and will benefit all of us.

Mentorship

Within the conversation of support, mentorship was a common and reoccurring theme. Many acknowledged that this support system and mentorship may shift and change. Yet, all participants mentioned some form of connectivity with others in the field. Participant 2 says:

Find a group of mentors and your mentors will change because some mentors are great for the time that you're in. I think realizing you need different mentors along the way and then some lifelong mentors who will tell you what you need to hear and not what you want to hear has helped me.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to interview female athletic directors within the NCAA in order to learn their perceptions and experiences with leadership and how leadership has shifted over the course of their career. This chapter provides a discussion on the connection between leadership style and perceptions of this role. Overall, female athletic directors perceived leadership to be strategic with forward thinking for women. Furthermore, interviewees' leadership experiences and perceptions in this study can be divided into two main categories. The categories support findings of previous studies which explore the female leader stereotypes within sport (Evans & Pfister, 2021), the female leader advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003), and the underrepresentation of females within sport leadership (Burton, 2015).

Nearly all interviewed participants reported some form of stereotype or barrier. The disparity between male and female leaders has been a reoccurring point of research in all career fields. Johnson et al. (2008) conducted a study based on the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders in which they examined participant sex-type finding that feminine individuals expect that leaders are more sensitive than masculine leaders, whereas masculinity and strength were more strongly associated with male leadership. Additionally, Brescoll (2016) analyzed the gender stereotypes as they pertain specifically to emotion. In this research, Brescoll suggests that "gender emotion stereotypes create two complex minefields that female, but not male, leaders have to navigate in order to be successful: (1) identifying how much emotion should be displayed and (2) identifying what kind of emotions should be displayed" (p. 415).

In this research, the interviewees expressed gender-related stereotypes that included external constituents' opinions of their capabilities solely based on the fact that they were

female. Societal perceptions also played a key role in establishing gender stereotypes for these individuals as underrepresentation was examined. Resistance with alumni was also a reoccurring theme as football seemed to exist as a common generator of stereotyping for those in charge of a football program. Lastly, according to the research which supports that males are usually depicted as strength and dominance, female interviewees struggled to access fair treatment regarding financial implications, negotiating, and fundraising.

While these stereotypes and gender-based discrimination were evident, all female interviewees spoke up on the value of the female leader. Eagly and Carli (2003) conducted research in which they discovered that women are more likely to lead in a style that is effective. They also found that women have some advantages in typical leadership style. In research conducted in 2007, Eagly found that women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and that women manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders. In an effort to examine this further, Offermann and Foley (2020) conducted a study in which they discovered that “female leaders bring a unique constellation of leadership-related traits, attributes, and behaviors to the workplace that may provide advantages to their organizations.”

The value emphasized by interviewees was highlighted in each interview when asked about leadership effectiveness in their role as a female. While answers remained analogous across each interview, values slightly varied among participant. For example, one interviewee emphasized the value that women have as leaders as they are capable of wearing many hats. Another interviewee highlighted the ability for women to carry unique perspectives on a variety of subjects. Finally, multiple interviewees discussed women’s multiple roles including household roles as being a positive trait for leaders, especially within athletic director applications.

Lastly, and most heavily discussed, exists the underrepresentation of females within athletic director roles and leadership roles among sport as a whole. Burton (2015) developed a review that provided a multilevel examination of women's expectations in leadership roles, career turnover, and the influence of "symbolic interactionism" on female's advancement. Research by Walker and Bopp (2011) developed an article which found results suggesting that "the perception of gendered opportunities, male-exclusive social networks, and pressures to overcompensate for being female were all strong, negative influences on the perceived opportunity of women to sustain and pursue careers in male-dominated workplaces such as that of men's college basketball." While these pressures and societal influences appeared prevalent in this research, current interviewees highlighted similar viewpoints in their interviews as well.

Several of the interviewees spoke to the hiring process within their role as female athletic director. Within multiple interviewees, the athletic directors were adamant about wanting a heavily female staff. They spoke of wanting to hire female coaches, yet the applicant pools are so heavily dominated by males. This begins with the application process. According to most interviewees, the struggle is getting females to apply to begin with. Furthermore, with regard to athletic director representation status, several interviewees think that some of this underrepresentation exists because athletic directors are hired by college presidents. Interviewees also expressed that this could be part of why the underrepresentation has existed for so long. Yet all interviewees agreed that there should be increased opportunities for females in this space. The interviewees who participated in this research were all passionate about furthering career advancement for women in the NCAA.

Regarding professional and personal development, interviewees placed an emphasis on communication and networking. Several of the interviewees suggested that males do not struggle

with networking as much as females. Moving forward in an effort to provide advice, these women suggested utilizing their resources and mentors to aid in career development personally and professionally. In addition to seeking support, interviewees suggested the significance of finding a program and university that supports one's goals as well.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study has the following delimitations:

- 1) Only female athletic directors in NCAA division I, II, and III intercollegiate athletics were included in the population.
- 2) Participants for this study were chosen via purposive sampling. Therefore, the women interviewed for this study currently held the title of athletic director at a NCAA division I, II, or III member institution.
- 3) This study only contains information regarding leadership perspectives and experiences to the final date of data collection.

This study has the following limitation:

- 1) It analyzes a relatively small number of women at several universities.

This study is limited to women employed as senior-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics at NCAA institutions and who are members of National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA).

Conclusions and Implications

Leadership for women has been challenged through the decades and has seen numerous shifts throughout sport for professional development within the role of athletic director. The findings in this study perceive leadership as an evolving, but critical component to career effectiveness in a female athletic director's career. The leadership experiences of female athletic

directors who participated in this study confirmed that leadership not only changes and evolves over time, but it is heavily influenced by the environment, internal and external support, and barriers alike. Additionally, the role and value of the female advantage was a prominent resulting theme within this study.

This female advantage, according to interviewees in this study, referred to a female's innate ability to communicate. Furthermore, this advantage implies the female's preference for inspiring others in a way that reflects more of a transformational pattern, as well as highlights the female's comfort level with a diverse range of individuals. Interviewees in this study confirmed that women are able to make decisive and thought-out plans of action, in addition to culminating a family-like atmosphere. This is significant in sport as teamwork and culture are highlighted as top priorities within athletic departments. Lastly, interviewees pointed out female's soft skills essential to leadership capabilities including: collaboration, professionalism, and critical thinking. In a sport setting, each one of these components is necessary for directing and leading and these qualities serve as nothing less than paramount for an athletic director role.

Future Research

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for future research and literature exploration are suggested. As this study utilized a limited number of female athletic directors, it is recommended that future research continues to analyze additional female athletic directors in the NCAA to shed more light onto leadership roles and effectiveness within these positions. In addition, since this study was focused only on the NCAA, it would be interesting to include female athletic directors from other male-dominated sectors to determine whether the same findings are relevant. It may also be significant to interview male athletic directors in order

to explore their perceptions of female leadership roles, specifically athletic director roles within the NCAA.

Additionally, it may be noteworthy to investigate what the NCAA's goals are concerning gender hiring practices. While a quantitative format may be useful for this form of research, future research could potentially use this information to continually identify factors that positively or negatively affect leadership. As this study explored the perceptions of upper-level directors, the continual study of transition over time as it pertains to leadership style and variance may open the door to understanding leadership at a broader scale. Exploring this transition over longer durations of time, may help to create new recommendations or future research on how to approach or improve leadership effectiveness. Lastly, future research could compare upper athletic director's leadership experiences with female athletic director experiences in other countries to examine the impact on a global scale.

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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Hello,

My name is Rachel Elms, a Ph.D. Candidate at Texas Woman's University. I am conducting a study entitled Leadership Development and Effectiveness among Female Athletic Directors. As you may be aware, the number of female athletic directors within the NCAA Division I, II, and III is rather limited. Despite the impact of Title IX, the authority of women remains marginalized in sport. Current reports by Lapchick (2021) indicate that women now hold only 36.3 percent of upper management positions in sport.

The purpose of my research will be to:

1. Dive deeper into perceptions and experiences of female athletic directors while examining the shift of leadership style and traits over time.
2. Contribute to the potential advancement of female leaders within intercollegiate athletics while influencing initiatives for greater access to leadership opportunities for females in sport.

Participation will Include: completing a consent form and participating in an interview via Zoom with an approximate time of 30 minutes.

Benefits of Participation: Contribute to the research on the advancement of females within the intercollegiate sport industry.

You may receive a copy of the findings if requested at the end of the study. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your name and information will be kept confidential and anonymous. If you are interested in participating, respond to this email with days/times that would be most convenient for you. I will also send further instructions on interview days/time slots.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Rachel (researcher) at: rcinquepalmi@twu.edu; (254) 977-3899.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated participation.

Sincerely,

Rachel Elms, Ph. D. Candidate

Please Note: There is the potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all emails, downloading, and internet transactions. There is also a risk of Zoom bombing and virtual meeting disruption.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

TEXAS WOMAN’S UNIVERSITY (TWU) CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Leadership Development and Effectiveness Among Female Athletic Directors
Principal Investigator: Rachel Elmsrcinquepalmi@twu.edu 254/977- 3899
Faculty Advisor: Kimberly Miloch, PhD.....kmiloch@twu.edu 940/898-2852

Summary and Key Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Rachel Elms, a student at Texas Woman’s University, as a part of her dissertation. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions and experiences of female athletic directors while exploring any shifts of leadership style and traits over time. This research will aim to contribute to the potential advancement of female leaders within intercollegiate athletics. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a senior-level female Associate/Assistant Athletic Director within the National Collegiate Athletic Association. As a participant you will be asked to take part in a virtual Zoom interview regarding your experiences as a female athletic director including the following: (a) career path (b) leadership styles (c) leadership effectiveness (d) gender and underrepresentation (e) forward thinking and (f) demographic details.

This interview will be recorded (both audio and video), and we will use a code name to protect your confidentiality. The total time commitment for this study will be 35 minutes. Benefits for this study include contributing to the knowledge of female sport leadership as well as contributing to the potential advancement of females within the sport leadership industry.

The risks of this study include virtual meeting disruption, loss of confidentiality, and emotional discomfort. We will discuss these risks and the rest of the study procedures in greater detail below. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. As a participant, you will be able to skip questions in the interview. There are no items that force an answer.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you have about the study at any time.

Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to spend 35 minutes of your time in a virtual, zoom interview with the researcher. No additional offsite tasks will be necessary. The researcher will ask you questions about your experiences as female, collegiate athletic director. These questions will include the following areas: (a) career path (b) leadership styles (c) leadership effectiveness (d) gender and underrepresentation (e) forward thinking and (f) demographic details. You and the researcher will decide together when the interview will happen. You and the

researcher will decide on a code name for you to use during the interview. The interview will be audio and video recorded and then transcribed in real-time through Rev.com. These interview notes and recordings will be saved and downloaded to the researcher's personal computer post meeting. To be a participant in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age or older and be a senior-level female Associate or Assistant Athletic director within the NCAA divisions I, II or III.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about barriers and discrimination. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset, you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview. If you feel you need to talk to a professional about your discomfort, the researcher has provided you with a list of resources.

Resources:

American Psychological Association Psychologist Locator – <http://locator.apa.org/> National Register of Health Service Psychologists – <http://www.findapsychologist.org/> Mental Health of America Referrals – <http://www.nmha.org/go/searchMHA> Psychology Today Find a Therapist – <http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/> National Board for Certified Counselors – <http://www.nbcc.org/CounselorFind>

The researcher will ask you questions regarding your leadership experiences and perceptions as a female athletic director. A possible risk in this study includes virtual meeting disruption. To minimize these risks, the researcher will create and send each Zoom link individually. The researcher will also use and provide you with a meeting passcode and will utilize the “waiting room” function for each interview. Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. The use of a personal computer to record the interviews increases the risk of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held privately and a code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. Furthermore, the researcher will remove personal identifiers from your transcripts. Proper nouns will be replaced with non-descript nouns. The name of your employer will be replaced with “employer.” Lastly, the researcher will modify participant answer to question so that a reader could not “deduce” who you are as a participant. The interview recordings (audio and video) and transcriptions will be stored safely in a password protected file on the researcher’s private computer. Only the researcher will have access to recordings and transcriptions. The recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed upon transcription. The signed consent form will be stored separately from all collected information in a separate, password protected file and will be destroyed three years after the study is closed. The results of the study may be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings and internet transactions. As previously mentioned, the researcher will remove all of your personal or identifiable information (e.g. your name, date of birth, contact information) from the audio recordings and/or any study information. After all identifiable information is removed, your audio recordings and/or any personal information

collected for this study may be used for future research or be given to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent. If you would like to participate in the current study but not allow your de-identified data to be used for future research, please initial here _____.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study we will email or mail them to you.*
Questions Regarding the Study You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their contact information is at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the TWU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.
Signature of Participant Date *If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent: Email: or Address