

ABSTRACT

Undervalued and Unseen: A Multiple Case Study Exploring the Underrepresentation of African American Women in Division I Athletic Director Positions

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African American women represent an overwhelmingly low percentage of Division I athletic directors compared to White men, Black men, and White women. White men hold the majority, 64%, of Division I athletic director positions, while African American women only hold 3% of these positions. African American athletic directors do not accurately represent the increase in African American student-athletes, coaches, and women entering the sports industry. This disproportion is discouraging to the advancement and success of their careers (Bower et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American women. I used a qualitative multiple case study to understand the experiences of the participants in alignment with five categories of social role theory: (a) society, (b) culture, (c) biology, (d) situation, and (e) gender. At the time of this study, the participants were Division I athletic directors at a university or college for at least two years and identified as African American women. The findings of this study provided an

outlook on the experiences the participants endured to become successful in their careers while also shedding light on the disparities between the success of their White male, African American male, and White female counterparts. The participants cited, along with the categories of social role theory, networking, and mentorship influenced the trajectory of their careers. The findings of this research provided implications and recommendations for policy and practice changes and organizational restructure that will impact the success of African American Division I athletic directors.

The implications and impact of this study provided five stakeholder groups with the knowledge to make a change and created an avenue for future research. The stakeholders included the NCAA, athletic departments, university administration, African American women on their journey toward becoming being a Division I athletic director, and future researchers. The implications and recommendations support the need for a reverse study on how African American women's increased social capital and networks impacts White men's advancement as Division I athletic directors.

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Undervalued and Unseen: A Multiple Case Study Exploring the Underrepresentation of
African American Women in Division I Athletic Director Positions

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	x
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
DEDICATION	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
Background and Needs Assessment	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Literature Review.....	5
History of Women’s Leadership.....	6
Scholarship on Women’s Leadership Experiences in Sport Compared to Men	7
Political Influence on Sports Leadership	12
Disparities of the Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Sports Leadership	17
Need for African American Women in Sports Leadership to Serve as Mentors to Other African American Women	22
Synthesis of Literature	26
Theoretical Framework.....	29
Conclusion: Purpose of the Study and Research Questions	33
CHAPTER TWO	34
Methodology.....	34
Introduction: Research Questions.....	34
Researcher Perspective and Positionality	35
Theoretical Framework Application	36
Research Design and Rationale	38
Population Selection and Participant Sampling.....	39
Population	40
Participants.....	42
Data Collection Procedures and Protocols.....	43
Precollection Data Procedures	44

Individual Interviews	44
Open-ended Reflection	45
Focus Group Interview	46
Timeline for Data Collection	47
Data Analysis Procedures	48
Trustworthiness and Authenticity	50
Ethical Considerations	51
Limitations and Delimitations	53
Conclusion	55
CHAPTER THREE	56
Results and Implications	56
Introduction	56
Case Profiles	57
Case A: Amber	57
Case B: Samantha	64
Case C: Miranda	68
Case D: Martina	74
Cross-Case Analysis	79
Other Emerging Themes	85
Discussion	88
Society	89
Culture	90
Biology	91
Situation	92
Gender	93
Networks	93
Mentorship	94
Summary	95
Implications and Recommendations	95
The NCAA President	96
Athletic Departments Senior-Level Administrators	97
University Administration	97
African American Women on Their Journey Toward Being a Division I Athletic Director	98
Conclusion	99

CHAPTER FOUR.....	100
Executive Summary and Distribution of Findings	100
Executive Summary	100
Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures.....	102
Summary of Key Findings	102
Implications and Recommendations	105
Findings Distribution Proposal	107
Target Audience with Proposed Distribution Method and Venue	107
Conclusion	109
APPENDIX A	112
Inquiry Email to Potential Participants	112
APPENDIX B	113
Individual Interview Questions and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework	113
APPENDIX C	114
Open-ended Reflection Prompts and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework ...	114
APPENDIX D.....	115
Focus Group Interview Questions and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework.	115
APPENDIX E	116
Consent Form For Research	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY	120

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.</i> Overview of TIDES racial and gender hiring grading report for Division I athletic directors.....	2
<i>Figure 2.</i> Social role theory	29
<i>Figure 3.</i> NCAA leadership demographics by gender and race	40
<i>Figure 4.</i> Map of Division I schools with African American women ADs.....	41

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Qualitative Research Design</i>	39
Table 2 <i>Participant Demographics</i>	43
Table 3 <i>Theoretical Framework Alignment with Individual Interview Questions</i>	45
Table 4 <i>Theoretical Framework Alignment with Reflection Prompts</i>	46
Table 5 <i>Theoretical Framework Alignment with Focus Group Interview Questions</i>	47
Table 6 <i>Timeline for Data Collection</i>	48
Table 7 <i>Data Analysis Steps</i>	48
Table 8 <i>Cross-Case Analysis Themes</i>	80

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABA:	Applied Behavior Analysis
ACC:	Atlantic Coast Conference
ADA:	Americans with Disabilities Act
AD:	Athletic Director
AP:	Advanced Placement
BOE:	Board of Education
FBS:	Football Bowl Subdivision
FCS:	Football Championship Subdivision
HBCU:	Historically Black College and University
NCAA:	National Collegiate Athletics Association
PWI:	Predominantly White Institution
SEC:	Southeastern Conference
SWA:	Senior Woman Administrator

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DEDICATION

To the future female African American Division I athletic directors,
my aim of this research is to give you the tools to be successful by understanding the
experiences of four participants.

CHAPTER ONE

Background and Needs Assessment

Introduction

White men, Black men, and White women hold significantly more positions as Division I athletic directors than African American women (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). Based on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Demographics data report (2022), out of the 350 Division I athletic directors, only 11 are African American women, which accounts for only 3% of Division I athletic directors nationwide. In comparison, 35 White women are Division I athletic directors, accounting for only 10% (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). Black men represent 58, or 17%, of athletic directors, while White men represent 224, or 64%, of these leadership roles (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022).

Each year, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) grades the NCAA's hiring practices for race and gender. In 2021, the NCAA received an F for gender and a B for racial hiring (TIDES, 2021). Figure 1 provides a snapshot of Division I athletic directors' racial and gender hiring grades and the percentage increase in people hired based on gender and race from the 2020–21 athletic year to the fall of 2022. Within one academic year, racial hiring grades dropped, and the percentage of women in athletic director roles decreased.



Figure 1. Overview of TIDES racial and gender hiring grading report for Division I athletic directors.

Historically, women hold more non-administrative roles in the sports industry, usually directly working with student-athletes and not coaches (Hancock et al., 2018). Those in athletic director positions do not accurately represent the race and gender of the student-athletes and coaches in the programs where they work (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Hancock et al., 2018). The NCAA demographics data report (2022) showed African American male and female student-athletes comprise 21% of the NCAA’s total athletes, whereas African American leaders only represent 7% of the demographic. As for African American coaches, 11 individuals represent 4,978 coaches (NCAA Demographic Database, 2022). Chester and Mondello (2012) stated that African American student-athletes, coaches, and African American women aspiring to be athletic directors are affected by the underrepresentation because these groups need to see representation in leadership to feel seen and heard.

In this multiple case study, I sought to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors

for four African American women. The study's findings provide a new perspective on the intersectionality of race and gender in intercollegiate athletics and its impact on African American women's journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as athletic directors. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion of access discrimination faced by African American women and social role barriers to entering the sports industry, especially when compared to the prototypical sports leader, White men (Hancock et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

In 1971, the Division for Girls and Women in Sports established the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) to increase collegiate athletic opportunities for women (Bell, 2007). At that time, the AIAW was the exclusive governing body for women's collegiate sports, while the NCAA governed men's sports. The exclusivity of the AIAW allowed greater access for women student-athletes, coaches, and administrators for universities and colleges competing in the AIAW (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Higgins, 2021).

With the passage of Title IX in 1972, the AIAW received equal federal funding for their intercollegiate athletics and secured sponsorship from commercial television to showcase their athletics, posing a threat to the popularity of the NCAA and the consumption of men's sports (Higgins, 2021). In 1982, the NCAA won a legal battle concerning a merger with the AIAW, financially sinking the AIAW. The merger caused most women to lose their administrative and coaching roles (Higgins, 2021; Parnter et al., 2014). In almost four decades, the merger has yet to result in more positions for women in sports and sports leadership, specifically African American women.

At the core of this study, the issue is that too few African American women are athletic directors at Division 1 universities. African American women account for and represent less than 10% of the NCAA's athletic directors (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). In 2022, African American women represented only 3% of athletic directors. An increased number of African American women in athletic director positions has the potential to impact the culture of athletics, specifically student-athletes of color and other aspiring African American female Division I athletic directors.

If the underrepresentation of African American women as athletic directors goes unaddressed, the future of African American women as athletic directors at Division I institutions will continue to be limited (Chester & Mondello, 2012). It is critical to address this issue because more African American female representation has the potential to increase the ratio of athletic directors to African American student-athletes and increase the number of mentors for women entering the field and decrease the number of men making uninformed decisions for women's programs (Hancock & Hums, 2016). Scholars have acknowledged the underrepresentation of African American women as athletic directors and stated an increase in representation or visibility to other African American women is beneficial to expanding the number of women in athletic director positions (Hancock et al., 2018). If the problem remains unaddressed, the underrepresentation of African American women will continue in sports, especially in Division 1 higher education institutions (Chester & Modello, 2012; Hancock & Hums, 2016). Further, the White men in these athletic director positions do not represent the growing rate of African American female student-athletes participating in sports (Chester & Mondello, 2012).

Out of 350 colleges and universities, there are only 11 African American women Division I athletic directors (NCAA, 2022). These 11 African American women work at five HBCUs and six PWIs across the East and West coast. Their senior administration staff ranges from 3–12 individuals at each school. Specifically, two athletic directors for the PWIs serve as the only African American woman on the senior administration staff. At two of the HBCUs, there are other African American men and women on staff. One of the HBCUs has another African American woman in a senior level position, and the rest of the senior administration is comprised of African American men. Thus, the athletic directors at these 4 universities or colleges serve as the only senior-level representative for African American staff and student-athletes. In total, at the four universities or colleges, the athletic directors represent 2,095 student-athletes and 1,006 women on staff (EADA Report, 2021). To address the national problem of too few African American women in Division I athletic director positions, the NCAA must address the overwhelming low representation of African American Division I athletic directors and senior-level administrators at these institutions.

Literature Review

The underrepresentation of African American women as Division I athletic directors is a growing crisis, as noted throughout this literature review (Bower & Hums, 2013; Hoffman, 2011; Loggins & Schneider, 2015; Rhoden, 2012). The following literature review unfolds in five sections. First, I provide an overview of the history of women's leadership in sports. Second, I detail scholarship on women's leadership experiences in sports compared to men's to demonstrate the gender disparities in sports leadership. Third, political influence on sports leadership. Fourth, I present scholarship to

demonstrate the disparities of the intersectionality of race and gender in sports leadership. Lastly, I address the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors and representation to other African American women.

History of Women's Leadership

Title IX, passed in 1972, banned overt forms of discrimination based on gender in federally funded higher education institutions (Hextrum & Sethi, 2022). Title IX and its enforcement chipped away at hegemonic masculinity in the classroom and on the playing field but became more entrenched in upper management positions in sports (Whisenant et al., 2002). Since Title IX's passage and the AIAW and NCAA merger, women have held fewer athletic director positions than men (Hoffman, 2011; Hextrum & Sethi, 2022; Whisenant et al., 2002). In the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), women governed women's sports, allowing more women as athletic directors for participating institutions, and men governed men's sports (Higgins, 2021; Hoffman, 2011). The AIAW included 1000 member universities and colleges, 90% led by women in administrative roles and earned 41 national championships (Whisenant et al., 2002). The merger in 1983 demoted women athletic directors to associate and assistant positions, while men assumed the athletic director role of the department (Hoffman, 2010, 2011; Loggins & Schneider, 2015). Athletic officials referred to women as the silent partner of their male counterparts (Loggins & Schneider, 2015).

In 1983, Mary Hill became the first Division I NCAA athletic director to oversee any university's athletic programs, including football. It was rare to see women given this opportunity during this time and women remained underrepresented in similar roles (Hoffman, 2011). In 2021, of the 351 Division I athletic director positions, 50 were held

by women (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). The passage of Title IX gave all women more access based on gender equity but with only considering gender, race equity was limited for women in sports (Rhoden, 2012). Although all women were given more access, White women benefitted more from the passage of Title IX than African American women, as only 11 of athletic director positions are currently held by African American women (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022; Rhoden, 2012). To shed light on the general scholarship on women's leadership experiences in sport compared to men, in the next section I compare women with men in sports leadership and the implementation of the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA).

Scholarship on Women's Leadership Experiences in Sport Compared to Men

In this section, the literature shows the roles and attributes of women compared to men in sports leadership and explains the implementation of the SWA position. The literature suggests women as lesser than men causing less career mobility and challenges in the workplace. Thus, the SWA was implemented to bridge the gap between responsibilities and senior-level leadership.

Roles and attributes of women compared to men in sports leadership. According to several global studies, women are underrepresented in sports leadership across all regions of the United States due to their lower social status (Bower et al., 2015; Evans & Pfister, 2021; Whisenant et al., 2002). According to Taylor and Hardin (2016), women holding leadership positions in sports, a male-dominated industry, face less career mobility than men because of gender norms. Women often serve as the assistant to the athletic director because traditional standards presume men are the providers and women take more of a secondary role (Smith et al., 2016; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Whisenant et

al., 2002;). Bower et al. (2015) studied the greatest challenges of women working in intercollegiate athletic administration. The participants argued that the societal stereotypes associated with women were not qualities that were attributed to success in athletic director positions. In sum, women expressed that gender norms placed them in a sector of nurturing and assisting men versus being their leaders (Bower et al., 2015).

According to Burton et al.'s (2011) study about the perceptions of gender in athletic administration, women are generally affectionate, helpful, kind, sensitive, and gentle, while men are more aggressive, dominant, self-confident, and self-sufficient. The societal norms attributed to leadership are more masculine behaviors (Burton, 2015) and Galloway (2012) found effective leadership rewards masculine behaviors. When these norms are accepted, women are often placed in roles to experience less responsibility than men, lessening their career mobility and opening them to public scrutiny for overseeing high-profile sports and organizations (Harris et al., 2015; Parnter et al., 2014; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Taylor and Hardin (2016) conducted a study to discover what experiences and challenges female Division I athletic directors face. Women, unlike men, had to convince the athletic department staff, university presidents, higher administrative officials, and the community that they could be Division I athletic directors (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). The media emphasizes women athletic directors' domestic matters, sexuality, or gender instead of their leadership experience (Taylor & Hardin, 2016).

The public's perception of women and the implementation of societal norms in athletic director positions sometimes discourage women from seeking these roles. In contrast to society's perception of women in the media, most women remain calm when engaging in public politics (Harris et al., 2015; Schull et al., 2013). In contrast, men in

these positions are often considered irrational and emotional (Schull et al., 2013). Unlike men, some women are too afraid to be vocal out of fear of backlash and association with societal norms that result in discriminatory views from the community (Schull et al. 2013). Taylor and Wells (2017) argued these norms contradict reality and is unwelcoming to women. Bower et al. (2015) found that women believed that determining boundaries or being confident caused them to appear challenging or pushy. Thus, the argument from Harris et al. (2015) explaining discrimination and disparities discourages women from working in male-dominated industries like sports. As a result, women are more likely than men to leave the profession of athletic director or not enter it at all (Hoffman, 2011).

Implementation of the senior woman administrator in Division I athletics leadership. To combat women's lack of authoritative positions, the NCAA created the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) as the highest-ranking leadership role for women in collegiate athletics. The role oversees women's athletics at NCAA institutions (Hoffman, 2010; Katz et al., 2018; Whisenant et al., 2002). The purpose was to increase the visibility of women and integrate them into the governance of women's athletics, a sport historically governed by men (Hoffman, 2010). Unfortunately, the addition of the SWA position did not adequately provide women the same access to decision-making responsibilities as their male counterparts (Hoffman, 2010; Katz et al., 2018). To date, men dominate over 90% of Division I athletic directors' roles (NCAA Database, 2022).

Contrary to the belief that Senior Woman Administrators (SWAs) are the tool to success for all women desiring to be athletic directors, Bower et al. (2015) found that Queen Bee Syndrome can be more detrimental for women than discrimination from men.

The Queen Bee Syndrome exists when females are unwilling to help other women be successful in male-dominated occupations (Bower et al., 2015). As expressed in the literature, the Queen Bee Syndrome makes it even more challenging to create a mentor-mentee relationship out of fear of the mentee being more successful than the mentee (Bower et al., 2015).

Athletic directors are the highest position in an athletic department and must possess specific skills to fulfill numerous responsibilities. The natural progression for someone who works in sports is to increase responsibilities over the years in sports oversight, fiscal responsibilities, relationships with administration and donors, and decision-making (Whisenant et al., 2002). Wells and Kerwin (2017) studied women's intentions to become Athletic Directors. In this study, several SWAs expressed that even in the highest position as women, they could not assume the roles because they did not have experience with football oversight, the most integral part of career mobility. White men, as leaders, continue to dominate the significant revenue-generating sports, football and basketball (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). The SWA is overlooked during the hiring process because men have specific skills, like overseeing athletic departments with football programs, making them more qualified for athletic director positions (Schull et al., 2013). Despite the creation of the SWA position, women still do not get the opportunity to oversee men's programs, like basketball and football, causing them to be disadvantaged for athletic director positions. (Schull et al., 2013).

The literature reveals that the creation of this position was, in fact, less beneficial than sports governance believed (Hoffman, 2010). Even with the addition of the SWA as a direct pipeline to the role of an athletic director, women continue to face societal

obstacles that place them in holding patterns (Katz et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2010). If a new athletic director is hired, that person has the authority to replace the SWA and other members of the previous administration (Hoffman, 2010). New athletic directors typically hire their SWA and other senior-level administrators from their previous institution because they share workplace values (Hoffman, 2010). Burton (2015) highlighted male leaders' recognition of gender passivity and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions furthers the discrepancies between the number of men and women serving as athletic directors. Even though male athletic directors understand the discrepancies women face in these positions, they do little to improve policies associated with equitable hiring when they have the authority (Hoffman, 2010).

In Bower et al.'s (2015) study, one White female Division I athletic director expressed the feeling of being used as a woman for optics by the NCAA, specifically feeling like an assistant rather than an administrator. Several participants in the same study suggested they suffered access discrimination to social networks like the good ole' boys network and were treated poorly. Hoffman (2011) observed that their male counterparts created positions and tasks more favorable to men with higher pay and status in the institution. Katz et al. (2018) and Hoffman (2011) suggested women still experience a lack of social capital and power despite the creation of the SWA position compared to men in the industry. As a group, women have less success compared to men, but women of color face even more challenges and societal scrutiny in sports and collegiate athletic leadership positions (Hoffman, 2011).

Political Influence on Sports Leadership

This section discusses the political influence on sports leadership. Specifically, how hegemonic masculinity and informal networks plague women's advancement in leadership and athletic director positions. Hegemonic masculinity enforces heteronormative attributes and benefits White men. The good ole' boys' network is a formal group that assists other men and makes it hard for women to infiltrate the male-dominated industry.

Hegemonic masculinity. There are different definitions of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) definition of hegemonic masculinity "refers to the pattern of practice that allows men's dominance over women to continue and marginalize other genders" (p. 832). In contrast, Whisenant et al.'s (2002) early definition of hegemonic masculinity initially focused on direct political and economic control versus the involvement of cultural factors. Comeaux and Martin (2018) emphasized that exploring hegemonic masculinity provides an opportunity to explore the cultural and societal context of gendered issues (p. 133). Messerschmidt (2019) stated, "Gender hegemony functions to obscure unequal gender relations while effectively permeating public and private life, encouraging all to endorse, unite around, and embody such unequal gender relations" (p. 90). Similarly, all the concepts of hegemonic masculinity presented create a barrier for women due to their race and culture.

The sports and entertainment industry is a microcosm of society that encapsulates the enforcement of male domination, masculinity, and unequal representation in NCAA sports leadership (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Messerschmidt (2019) expanded Walker & Sartore-Baldwin' (2013) findings of the sport and entertainment industry as a

microcosm to explain that “hegemonic masculinities are expansively distributed as culturally ascendant prototypes of gender relations throughout local, regional, and global levels, making them part of normal life” (p. 90). Culturally, society has placed importance on developing men as leaders to sustain the idea of hegemonic masculinity. Brake (2016) found that even in sports, the act of being overly masculine is performative because men are seen as “too womany” (p. 293), which can result in men attempting to make women or more feminine men feel inferior.

Hegemonic masculinity has hindered the advancement of women. Hegemonic masculinity enforces societal gendered stereotypes, and because of this commonality, gender inequality is accepted and unquestioned (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 89). According to Comeaux and Martin (2018), “the masculine image is viewed as toughness, emotional restraint, dominance over women and subordinate groups, as well as competitiveness” (p. 133). Within athletic administration, hegemonic masculinity explains and identifies how gender constructs affect women working in a male-dominated field. Specifically, Comeaux and Martin (2018) stated, “looking deeper through hegemonic masculinity, we see the social significance of gender and how it affects the perception of women in athletic director roles” (p. 137). Comeaux and Martin conducted a study using photos of male and female athletic directors to understand the implicit bias of effective leadership for athletic directors. The researchers found that hegemonic notions of masculinity failed to view women in positions of strength or leadership. Thus, others’ assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs continue to exclude women from high-ranking positions within athletics. Expanding these roles and perceptions offers hope in changing the discourse

associated with how men and women are viewed in positions of leadership (Friedman, 2015).

Friedman (2015) researched the extinction of hegemonic masculinity and the movement toward gender equality, or the stalled revolution. Friedman (2015) found that many women with children began working in male-dominated fields. However, few men crossed into female-dominated professions or roles, causing a stall in the revolution of gendered roles. With this, “as it stands, women are often marginalized and afforded far fewer opportunities in the workplace than their male counterparts” (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 303). Men faced scrutiny moving into more feminine roles because of the language used to describe men who did not participate in masculine activities.

Although women were infiltrating male-dominated industries, the stalled revolution enforced women’s lack of mobility within the fields. Friedman (2015) found, “For a truly equitable society, it is not enough for women to enter masculine fields, but men must also enter feminine fields. The focus on femininity and women’s choices largely ignores the deeper-rooted issue of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 147). The literature suggests to debunk the idea of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace, men and women, equally, need to cross into what are considered feminine and masculine roles (Friedman, 2015).

Societal expectations create “gender norms that influence men’s expectations and experiences with work and family roles” (Friedman, 2015, p. 147). Societal expectations tell men to act like men and refrain from acting in stereotypically feminine roles.

Hegemonic masculinity leads to men needing to prove their masculinity by participating in certain activities (Brake, 2016). According to Friedman (2015), many believe a man’s success as a husband, father, and worker is associated with being a provider and leader.

The expectation is for men to not balance work and family. Friedman (2015) stated, “without a redefinition of masculinity to include stereotypically feminine pursuits, the gender revolution toward equality will stall” (p. 148). Thus, there is no expectation for women to assume these masculine roles of providing and leading because women are supposed to care for their families.

In comparison to Friedman’s (2015) study, Messerschmidt (2019) found that although today’s hegemonic masculinity is more diverse, many practices and discursive meanings legitimate unequal gender relations between masculinity and femininity to constitute a social structure. These meanings shape what is and are not acceptable gendered behavior by specific scenarios (Friedman, 2015; Messerschmidt, 2019; Whisenant et al., 2002). Friedman (2015) and Messerschmidt (2019) offered similar definitions and ideas of hegemonic masculinity to Connell’s (1987) original definition stating that hegemonic masculinity legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women.

Hegemonic masculinity has allowed society to form barriers and obstacles for women in many professional fields that have historically been considered masculine fields. This structure ultimately limits the mobility of women and their success. The concept of hegemonic masculinity furthers the idea that men should hold leadership positions, like athletic director, and dominance over women.

Networks in sport. The good old boys’ network, an informal organizational barrier with significant power due to hegemonic masculinity and presence in the public eye, is one catalyst that oppresses women’s careers (Katz et al., 2018; Schull et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2011). The gendered and racialized dimensions of organizational structures,

such as White hegemonic masculinity and the old boys' network in hiring, promotion, and retention of leadership roles among predominantly White institutions, are essential to recognize the complexity of organizational barriers. (Hoffman, 2011; Loggins & Schneider, 2015). It is beneficial for women to advance in building a social network with their peers in the industry or utilize a connection in the old boys' network to develop status within the sports leadership industry (Bower et al., 2015).

Hoffman (2011) studied how women get "inside the huddle" (p. 255), defying gender stereotypes in athletic administration and becoming part of the network. The reason for the huddle was the existence of hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant et al., 2002). Whisenant et al. (2002) shared, "In a society of hegemonic masculinity, women are off limits in certain areas, sports being one of the most obvious" (p. 486). Women breaking the huddle would allow them to permeate the male-dominated industry.

Some male athletic directors use their public presence to assist with pushing their organizational agenda, while some women use theirs to influence and improve student-athletes experiences (Schull et al., 2013). Most participants in Schull et al.'s (2013) study, which analyzed the gendered political process for hiring an athletic director, suggested that using their network and external factors was beneficial. However, Taylor and Wells (2017) argued that social and human capital is imperative for women's advancement in the sports industry.

Burton (2015) argued that women's networks do not impact men's ability to obtain leadership positions. However, men's networks often directly influence women's ability to obtain leadership positions. In Schull et al.'s (2013) study, some male candidates used their capital with the media to employ scare tactics that deter female

external candidates from continuing the pursuit of an athletic director position. One tactic included making the woman candidate's current institution aware of her interest in the position to cause friction with her current employer and deter the woman from continuing in the hiring process (Schull et al., 2013). Participants also shared that men used their influence to create the perfect internal male candidate favoring them over women candidates for the athletic director position (Schull, et al., 2013). Practices favoring men and the old boys' network allow men to retain their grip on athletics and minimize women's systemic intrusion (Hoffman, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002).

Disparities of the Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Sports Leadership

In this section, I focus on how the intersectionality of gender and race has influenced the underrepresentation of African American women in sports leadership. Past studies indicate it is hard for White women to enter the field, but it is even more difficult for women of a different cultural background to attain similar leadership positions (Bower & Hums, 2013; Rhoden, 2012). Modern-day racism and generalizations based on race and gender drive occupational segregation (McDowell et al., 2009). Intercollegiate athletics is dominated not only by social constructions of gender but also by ethnicity and cultural background (Hoffman, 2011). Loggins and Schneider (2015) argued that breaking the barriers of gender, ethnicity, and cultural background diversifies the athletic department and introduces other staff to new personal experiences and ways of thinking. To further discuss the disparities of the intersectionality of race and gender in sports leadership, in the next section I address the occupational segregation in intercollegiate sport and the experiences of African American athletic directors at Historically Black

Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) compared with Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

Occupational segregation in intercollegiate sport. African Americans experience access discrimination and “evidence of occupational segregation” (Cunningham, 2012, p. 166). Steward and Cunningham (2015) conducted a study “to examine how White Americans evaluated African Americans with a strong racial identity” (p. 245) and sought to uncover how this identity impacted job applicants. They observed that White Americans respond “more negatively to racial minorities believed to hold a solid racial identity” (Steward & Cunningham, 2015, p. 245). White participants discriminated against African Americans because the participants thought high racial identity would challenge the status quo and social structures that privileged Whites (Steward & Cunningham, 2015). The sports industry is a microcosm of society. This research indicates that “sport, as one of the major institutions in the United States, has not escaped racism’s grasp” (Cunningham, 2012, p. 168). Whiteness and leadership ability are closely linked, while African Americans are associated with lesser roles that are not as heavily involved in decision-making (Cunningham, 2012).

Some African American women choose not to assume leadership positions out of fear of conflict between their social identity and leadership abilities (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) focused on the intersectionality of African American women in athletic director positions and their personal experiences across all divisions. Based on conversations and the participants’ treatment, 90% reported they knew that their intersectionality made them an anomaly for their position as athletic directors (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Wells and

Kerwin (2017) stated that the labor of White men is skewed and affirms the occupational segregation hindering the advancement of African American women.

At some universities, African American men and women have only been offered positions in athletic departments because of their previous roles as student-athletes (Hoffman, 2011; McDowell et al., 2009). Hoffman (2011) stated, “ethnicity is acknowledged in intercollegiate athletics in the context of Black men, thus, leaving out Black women from the processes of organizational life” (p. 260). As African American women progress in athletic leadership, the literature about their experiences in collegiate athletics lessens (Harris et al., 2015). Literature pinpoints that many African American women are marginalized in athletic administration positions, especially those in Division I institutions (Loggins & Schneider, 2015; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Experiences of African American athletic directors at HBCUs when compared with PWIs. Much of the literature available focuses on the experiences of African American women athletic directors in Historically Black Colleges and Universities rather than on Predominantly White Institutions (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price et al., 2017). The intersectionality of race and gender increased the percentage of stereotypes in the workplace (McDowell & Francique, 2017, p. 396). Several participants in McDowell and Francique’s study indicated they needed to monitor their actions to avoid the angry African American female stereotype and alter their communications with male colleagues to be more fathomable to men (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Two participants from HBCUs indicated they lowered the pitch of their voices or silenced themselves in meetings to avoid looking like “know-it-alls” (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017, p. 399). In contrast, one participant at a PWI said she played the

meeek and mild role (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). The language used about African Americans in their position of authority as angry, aggressive, or loud, which specifically described men in one study, contradicted the potential success of African American women (Burton et al., 2011).

Price et al. (2017) further examined the difference in how the stereotypes of White women versus African American women are detrimental. Price et al. (2017) shared that one African American participant is chastised for being too loud and seen as brash. Whereas, in the same study, White participants are considered direct and forceful, which have different connotations of leadership attributes (Price et al., 2017). In the workplace, African American women, working at PWIs, are called tough and aggressive even though they indicate they are not angry or aggressive (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). The downside of hoping not to look like a know-it-all or silence oneself is the inability to show actual knowledge of leadership and the realm of athletics to appear competent in the workplace.

In another study, African American women felt they had to maintain and not bring negative attention to themselves (Price et al., 2017). This specific example demonstrated how society has often caused African American women to feel unaccepted based on race and culture (Price et al., 2017; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). In the same study, African American women reported that work environments often do not favor them as racial minorities, and they are often considered “other” because they do not share the similarities of the majority (Wells & Kerwin, 2017; Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2012). These ideologies are harmful and reinforce stereotypes, and often cause African American women to feel powerless and alone (Price et al., 2017).

African American women are often allowed to serve in leadership positions as a media ploy for good publicity rather than merit (Price et al., 2017). Many African American women in leadership positions report that they help meet a quota and are tokens within a department staff (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). One female participant from a PWI shared that the former athletic director of her institution told her “he promoted her to an assistant athletic director because he needed a woman in a leadership position” (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017, p. 399). Unfortunately, the participant still felt that way as she assumed the role of an athletic director. Administrative stakeholders insinuating women receive their position because of a quota or specific need causes doubt for women and lowers their self-confidence as they assume leadership roles (Cook & Glass, 2013; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

The lack of self confidence and the public’s opinion on women in leadership often hinders women’s success as athletic directors and their ability to perform their jobs well because they are seen as less competent (Cook & Glass, 2013; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). In McDowell and Carter-Francique’s (2017) study, one participant expressed how she sold herself short and did not trust her capabilities because others told her she was only in the position because of her intersectionality. One study found that African American women working at HBCUs reported not feeling the need to meet a quota or preferential political hiring. However, African American women, at PWIs, felt they had been hired to fulfill a quota. McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) suggest that researchers must first understand the issues surrounding African American women and their identities in athletics. Once understood, scholars can better research the factors

that contribute to their low percentage of athletic directors and roles in leadership positions.

In this section, I highlighted the experiences of African American women athletic directors at HBCUs when compared with PWIs. This section of the literature review demonstrated how African American women in these positions were expected to maintain a physical image and communicate in ways that did not reflect their personality or a strong racial identity (Burton et al., 2011; Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2015; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price et al., 2017; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). The literature I presented revealed that many universities used women to fulfill quotas and media agendas based on their intersectionality of race and gender (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Need for African American Women in Sports Leadership to Serve as Mentors to Other African American Women

Based on the 10-year trend offered by the NCAA Demographic Database (2022), the future of African American women as athletic directors is ill-fated. In this section, I present the literature on the future benefits to all stakeholders from hiring more African American women in athletic director positions. Baranik et al. (2010), Smith et al. (2016), Harris et al. (2015), and several other researchers have pinpointed that female leaders, and even student-athletes, could benefit from seeing more women like themselves in such critical leadership. To discuss further the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors to other African American women, I will address mentorship and mentorship in sports.

Mentorship. Mentorship strengthens the development of women and future leaders. Turner-Moffatt (2019) stated, “It is important to empower and encourage women as they often face unique challenges in the workplace without the necessary tools to overcome them. Participation in mentoring relationships and programs are brilliant ways for women to acquire these tools” (p. 17). Mentorship from other African American female athletic directors holds the potential to aid the success of other African American women aspiring to be athletic director positions (Parnter et al., 2014). The literature I share in this section reveals that African American women benefit from having mentors because of the positive impact a role model provides to people who look like them (Turner-Moffatt, 2019).

Turner-Moffatt (2019) studied the power of mentorship to provide resources for women in leadership roles. Turner-Moffatt (2019) reported that developing a mentoring culture “can motivate and encourage employees’ career development” (p. 18). Smith et al. (2017) and Turner-Moffatt (2019) agreed that mentorship is grounded in interpersonal communication and positive exchange. However, the mentor potentially holds power and influence due to personal and professional experiences. Coupled with these findings, Loggins and Schneider (2015) also suggested that a viable strategy would be to create mentor programs for minorities and women because being part of a mentor group would increase support and allow participants to gain knowledge.

It is important to note that the mentoring process is formal and informal (Smith et al., 2017). Smith et al. (2017) stated, “Established problems guide proper mentoring, and informal mentoring is unstructured and not recognized by organizations” (p. 347). Baranik et al. (2009) and Smith et al. (2017, p. 349) found that “mentoring is an essential

aspect of career development for the mentor and mentee, and the key to the relationship was openness and the accessibility to engage one-on-one.” The mentor acts as the opinion leader to share vital information (Smith et al., 2017).

Mentorship in sports. Mentorship in sports leadership has the potential to encourage more women to continue in their careers and give them more abundant opportunities to learn. Smith et al. (2017) stated, “more emphasis should be placed on developing mentor and mentee relationships in collegiate athletic departments” (p. 360). Smith (2017) also shared, “mentors aid in the growth of an individual’s sense of competence,” which is especially important for women working in male-dominated industries such as intercollegiate athletics (p. 360). Harris et al. (2015) conducted a study with female sports management students to understand better their perceptions of barriers to a future career in sports. The findings emphasized perceived barriers, which included the lack of representation in the industry for other women entering the field and the underrepresentation of student-athletes who need a role model as perceived barriers (Harris et al., 2015; Price et al., 2017). The lack of representation is a barrier to the advancement of women. It decreases the number of women in the field because few women of color often take the time to inspire or encourage them in their journey (Harris et al., 2015; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor & Wells, 2017). Smith et al. (2017) shared, “having someone to aid in navigating career growth is important for early-career professionals.” Thus, representation matters and is imperative to increase the number of women in athletic leadership positions. Smith et al. (2017) suggested creating professional development opportunities for all senior-level administrators that speaking to all women in the department, including graduate assistants, would be beneficial. Senior

administrators also stated they wanted industry role models to continue developing as leaders (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

In Wells and Kerwin's (2017) study, one participant stated there were only a handful of successful racial minorities within the athletic director role, which she found discouraging and seen as a setback for other racial minorities with intentions of being an athletic director. Intercollegiate athletics' lack of mentorship programs creates a barrier between athletic directors and mentees (Smith et al., 2017). Many female athletic directors are willing to mentor young women who aspire to enter the industry. Still, there needs to be a stronger push toward increasing the amount of employed female athletic directors to help increase the growing rate of women entering sports leadership (Smith et al., 2017; Taylor & Hardin, 2016).

One fear of many women who enter the sports administration field is job discrimination based on societal and gender stereotypes (Harris et al., 2015). Women report feeling they must work twice as hard as their male counterparts to convince university administrations they are capable and possess the ability to lead (Harris et al., 2016; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). This deters many women from entering the field because they must prove themselves capable of obtaining or maintaining an athletic director position (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Although there are several barriers to women entering the sports administration field, many young women report feeling excited about the opportunity to work in sports management. Most young women from the study understood consideration for an athletic director position does not come without discrimination, personal life adjustments, long hours, and a meager salary (Harris et al., 2015).

Summary. In this section of the literature review, first I shared the scholarship (Harris et al., 2015; Parnther et al., 2014; Price et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Wells & Kerwin, 2017) on the differences between men and women in sports leadership. Second, the disparities of the intersectionality of race and gender in sports leadership. Third, the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors and representation to other African American women. I provided literature to present participants' stories to explain their experiences as African American women who worked in sports leadership positions in Division I athletics. In the next section, I synthesize the significant findings of the major sections of the literature review.

Synthesis of Literature

In the literature review, I covered five topics: history of women's leadership, scholarship on women's leadership experiences in sport compared to men, disparities of intersectionality of race and gender in sports leadership, political influence on sports leadership, and the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors to other African American women. The synthesis summarizes critical information from each section of the literature review. The review of extant literature illustrates that African American women are underrepresented in Division I athletic director positions. Lastly, the synthesis acknowledges the lack of research on this topic.

In the first section, history of women's leadership, the literature focuses on Title IX and the rise and fall of the AIAW (Hextrum & Sethi, 2022; Higgins, 2021). Hoffman (2011) and Higgins (2021) provided information on the merger of the AIAW and NCAA as one of the many reasons women lost their roles as athletic administrators to men.

Loggins & Schneider (2015) and Rhoden (2012) indicated women became silent partners to men after the merger.

In the second section, scholarship on women's leadership experiences in sport compared to men, the literature focused on the disparities between women and men in collegiate athletics administration and the advancement of women's careers. Bower et al. (2015) and Taylor and Hardin (2016) found that women's most significant challenges are not just men but also societal gender stereotypes that perpetuate the workplace. Schull et al. (2013) and Bower et al. (2015) stated women's confidence has a negative societal reaction versus men who are considered leaders. To increase leadership positions for women, the Senior Woman Administrator position (SWA) was created to appease women (Hoffman, 2010; Katz, 2018; Whisenant, 2002). Wells and Kerwin (2017) found this position did not satisfy the women occupying these positions.

In the third section, disparities of intersectionality of race and gender in sports leadership, the literature highlighted occupational segregation and the experiential differences between African American women athletic directors working at HBCUs versus PWIs. Steward and Cunningham (2015) found that the more an individual identified as a minority, the less desirable they were for a position. The literature review highlighted McDowell and Carter-Francique's (2017) study of African American women athletic directors working at HBCUs versus PWIs to affirm how African Americans alter their identity for acceptance by others. The study found that African American women needed to change their language conventions, physical appearance, and expressions to avoid association with societal stereotypes of African American women.

In the fourth section, political influence on sports leadership, the literature focused on the acceptance of the stereotypes and exclusion of women in athletic director role positions. Political influences allowed men to create an informal network, sometimes referred to as a good ole boys' network, for White male athletic director's success (Bower et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2011; Katz et al., 2018; Loggins & Schneider, 2015; Schull et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2011). The network preserves the hegemonic masculinity of the athletic director position, making it harder for women to advance in the athletic director role (Brake, 2016; Comeaux & Martin, 2018). The political influence permeated the media and encouraged further scrutiny of women (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

In the final section of the literature review, the literature focuses on the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors to other African American women. Baranik et al. Eby (2009), Smith et al. (2017), and Turner-Moffatt (2019) found that mentorships benefit interpersonal communication and organizational growth. Wells and Kerwin's (2017) study found that women entering the field want to see representation to understand women's experiences in athletic director positions. Taylor and Hardin (2016) and Smith et al. (2017) found that athletic directors want to serve as mentors and develop proteges to be the future of women athletic directors.

As seen in the literature, societal stereotypes based on race and gender affect the advancement of women in leadership positions within the spaces of athletic departments in higher education. There is a need for further research on the shared lived experiences of African American women as Division I athletic directors. To best understand the underrepresentation of African American women as athletic directors, I used the social

role theory to shed light on the experiences of African American females in leadership roles in DI institutions.

Theoretical Framework

I selected the social role theory theoretical framework (Eagly & Wood, 2012) to frame this study (see Figure 2). Social role theory suggests that traditions specific to men and women create stereotypical social norms (Bower et al., 2015; Burton et al., 2011; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). These norms evolve as individuals observe male and female behaviors and then associate these behaviors with qualities of either men or women (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

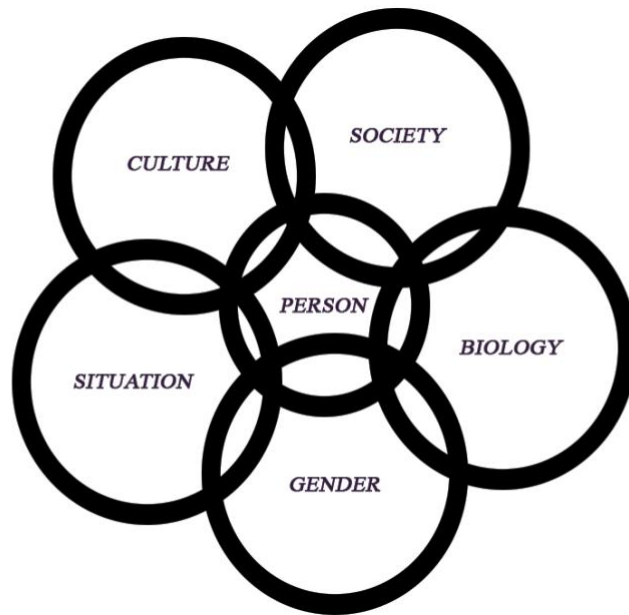


Figure 2. Social role theory.

Social role theory has five components. One component of the theory is society. In this theory, society is generalized ideas of men and women in everyday life. These societal stereotypes follow men and women in all aspects of their lives, including the

workplace (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Koenig and Eagly (2014) explained that “such stereotypes provide quick and easy assumptions that affect behavior toward members of social groups” (p. 371). Comeaux and Martin (2018) expressed that “shared assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs by a dominant group are a cause for women being excluded as insiders” (p. 137). Thus, excluding women based on stereotypes or shared beliefs impacts their mobility within spaces like athletic leadership.

The second component of social role theory is culture. Schneider and Bos (2019) agreed that culture is the intersectionality of race and gender, contributing to broader stereotypical identities. Eagly and Koenig (2014) found that racial stereotypes shape similar sex-segregated roles. Schneider and Bos (2019) stated, “Social roles are segregated by race, ethnicity, and other identities in addition to sex; these group distinctions are sure to influence stereotypes and behavior as they interact with sex roles” (p. 178). Both scholars agreed that culture is a barrier to the advancement of African American women in positions of power (Eagly & Koenig, 2014; Schneider & Boss, 2019).

The third component of this theory is biology. Schneider and Bos (2019) indicated that biology focuses on the strength of men versus women. Eagly and Wood (2012) agreed with Schneider and Bos. They stated that biological stereotypes of men often focus on physical ability and manual labor, which often alludes to men having more positions of power than women. On the other hand, stereotypes of women often associate them with childbearing and tasks more associated with chores in the home. The stereotypes of men compared to women have led to an increase in their societal power in leadership.

The fourth component of this theory is situation. The situational differences are often found in environmental factors such as work-life balance, life circumstances, or a promotion because of race rather than merit (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Koenig and Eagly (2014) affirmed the idea by expressing that occupational roles do not represent social groups equally due to gender and race. Koenig and Eagly (2014) stated that gender and race can have a trans-situational influence on the impact of specific status characteristics. For example, women should work in more nurturing or motherly roles and are often given fewer responsibilities in the workplace because they have a family to care for. Koenig and Eagly (2014) offered the example that “men’s typical role is business professionals and women’s typical roles were secretaries or office workers” (p. 371). In comparison, Eagly and Wood (2012) affirmed that there is a division of labor because of men and women’s demands of the social and economic environment, specifically, the inability to give women tasks like men because of the need to nurse, care for a child, or be away from home for an extended period.

The final component of this theory is gender. Social role theory presents “expectations of roles desirable for each sex” (Burton et al., 2011, p. 37). Gender roles are solely based on men versus women and are split into agentic and communal dimensions (Burton et al., 2011; Eagly & Wood, 2012). The first dimension, agentic, is associated with males and assumes that men, more than women, are masterful, assertive, competitive, and dominant (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The second dimension, communal, is associated with women. According to the communal dimension, women are communal, “friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive” (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 462). Based on these “stereotypes, women would be asked to help with an

emotional relationship, and men would be asked to confront an obnoxious employer” (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, p. 371). Men were considered dominant and the go-to leader for collegiate athletics. Although these generalizations may not be accurate for either gender, society assumes behaviors to be normative according to gender (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In this research, I sought to uncover how African American women have experienced and debunked the gender roles in most settings to be more agentic rather than communal.

Other researchers have used social role theory to understand how women and men differ in society but focused heavily on gender and society. For example, Schneider and Bos (2019) used social role theory to study how “gender influences judgment of political leaders by elite and voters” (p. 173). Schneider and Bos used gender and social stereotypes to understand the occupational differences between women’s and men’s success in political leadership positions. Schneider and Bos (2019) and Lanaj and Hollenbeck (2015) explored agentic and communal traits to explore further how social role theory impacted the presidential campaign in 2016. Kimbrough et al. (2013) used social role theory to study how women connect more than men through mediated communication. These researchers focused on how gender affects communication between men and women in social networking roles.

Through extensive research, there are no scholars who have disagreed with the use of this theory. Many scholars agree that using social role theory explains disparities between women and men in leadership roles. Schneider and Bos (2019), Kimbrough et al. (2013), and Lanaj and Hollenbeck (2015) found that social role theory helps to understand associated bias toward women in agentic roles. Understanding how the social role impacts women in leadership is expansive enough to uncover what stereotypes have

impacted their journeys toward and positions in their leadership roles as Division I athletic directors.

In sum, social role theory helped me uncover how the five components of the social theory influenced the participants' journey toward positions as Division I athletic directors. I used these three components to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender has altered the trajectory of women's careers based on the perceptions, behaviors, and environmental factors women face compared to men.

Conclusion: Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this multiple case study was to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward and being Division I athletic directors for four African American women. As a result of this research, I hope to share the lived experiences of four African American females to understand their perspectives on the search process for Division I athletic directors. The study centered around one research question: In what ways did social role theory influence the participants' journey toward and positions as Division I athletic directors?

The findings of this study are essential to understand the lived experiences of African American women in leadership roles within college and university athletics administration settings. The study findings can help the NCAA, athletic departments, and university administration implement positive change and increase the number of African American women as Division I athletic directors. In the following chapter, I detail the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Introduction: Research Questions

In light of research indicating too few African American women serve as athletic directors in Division I athletics (Cunningham, 2012; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price et al., 2017; Wells & Kerwin, 2017), for this study, I aimed to uncover how social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) influenced the participants' journey toward and positions as Division I athletic directors. In the previous chapter, I reviewed literature that supports the underrepresentation of African American women as Division I athletic directors. Based on their intersectionality of gender and race, the experiences of African American women differ from men and White women in sports leadership (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). The current Problem of Practice focuses on the uncovering the impact of social role theory on Division I African American women athletic directors.

I used a qualitative research design to shed light on one research question for this study: In what ways did social role theory influence the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as a Division I athletic director? I used a multiple case study to explore the research question. I collected data through individual interviews, a ten question open-ended reflection prompt, and one focus group interview. The research question and design helped me focus on each participant's experiences.

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

As a young African American woman beginning my career in athletics, finding mentors to help navigate the industry has been challenging. I have worked in sports entertainment, specifically sports marketing, for seven and a half years. My passion for working in sports began in high school after I was injured playing sports and unable to play continually. During my senior year of high school, I took a sports marketing course, where my passion for the topic and journey into the profession began.

Entering my first year at a large, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, I knew I wanted to continue in sports marketing. I enlisted the help of the athletic director of the local university in my hometown to assist with opening the right doors for me. I began my internship with the sports marketing department during my first year and worked in the department for the entirety of my undergraduate degree. Once I graduated, I worked as a sports marketing graduate assistant for two years at another PWI in the Pacific Northwest. I was hired full-time as a marketing assistant at a large PWI university in the South after graduating with my master's degree. After working at that institution for a year, I accepted a promotion as an assistant director of marketing at another large Division I PWI university in the South. I aspire to become an athletic director at a Division I institution as prestigious as the ones I have attended and worked.

My career aspiration caused me to be hypervigilant about the lack of African American women in Division I athletic director positions. My experience with this phenomenon guided my research question, data collection, and participant sampling because I sought to understand the shared experiences of African American women in their positions to help me and other African American leaders navigate this career path. I

hope that uncovering their stories will assist future research and change the outlook of African American women and their opportunities to earn positions as athletic directors.

My aspiration and the lack of research supporting why too few African American women serve as Division I athletic directors influenced this study. A multiple case study allowed me to share the participants' lived experiences and understand how social role theory impacted their successes and failures in this professional field. The knowledge and experiences of the four participants allow me to learn from them and build a network of African American women mentors.

My worldview for this research is transformative, which aligns with a qualitative research approach. The transformative worldview focuses on achieving equality for marginalized people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This work can be a catalyst for changing the trajectory of equity for African American women in Division I athletic director positions.

Theoretical Framework Application

I used the five components of social role theory to frame this study. Eagly and Wood (2012) explained that women and men often assume different roles based on their gender. The theory provided five areas to help me understand how African American women in Division I athletic director positions are affected by roles and expectations based on their intersectionality of gender and race. These concepts helped further my exploration of the intersectionality of race and gender as it pertains to the participants of this study.

The theoretical framework guided my research question and helped me understand the perceptions of four African American women in Division I athletic

director positions to specifically uncover how social role theory influenced the participants' journey toward and positions as athletic directors. I used social role theory to shape my research question to understand how participants' journey's toward and as Division I athletic directors. The research question encompasses the five components of the theoretical framework, each focusing on a different aspect of the individual or the person.

The theoretical framework also shaped the data collection process because the individual interviews, reflection prompts, and focus group interview questions related to at least one of five specific components of social role theory. The social role theory distinguishes differences between how males and females are impacted by their social behaviors (Eagly & Wood, 2012). I aligned each question I included in the individual interviews, reflection prompts, and focus group interview to the specific components of the framework.

The theoretical framework also informed my approach to data analysis because the five components provided a priori codes for the data. Specifically, I used the concepts to guide how the data were associated with the information given by the participants into categories and themes. The data I collected aligned with each of the five categories of the framework.

Social role theory shaped this study's research question, data collection, and data analysis. The five components of the framework helped me specifically achieve the purpose of my study, which was to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward and being Division I athletic directors for four African American women. In the next section, I describe my research design and the rationale for selecting it.

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted a multiple case qualitative research study because my purpose was to uncover how social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American women. I chose a qualitative design because Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest gathering up-close information by talking to participants directly within the research context. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that a qualitative design allows researchers to uncover and understand a large-scale problem through perceptions. Qualitative case studies use the researcher as the key instrument to collect data through documents, interviews, and observing behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested using multiple data sources to make sense of experiences and code into themes across all sources.

I selected a case study because this research design allowed me to collect data about the participants' experiences from individual interviews, reflection prompts, and a focus group interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that interviews are helpful because the researcher can control the questioning and participants can provide historical information. The collected data revealed "real-time findings at multiple sites for comparison" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 97). Open-ended questions and conversations allowed me to identify specific connections of the participants to the theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study can develop an in-depth analysis of a case or multiple cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I selected a multiple case study to understand better the lived experiences and underrepresentation of African American women in Division I athletic director positions.

A multiple case study was appropriate for this study because Yin (2018) suggests a multiple case study involves replicating single case studies in their context analyzed together. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Yin (2018) explained that a multiple case study allows a researcher to investigate real-life issues using various data collection methods from multiple sources to compare and contrast findings. Multiple case studies provided context to each participant’s experiences and exposed social role theory’s impact on African American women in DI leadership positions.

Table 1 outlines a qualitative research design. The overview reflects the type of design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. Each phase of the process includes the procedure used for this study.

Table 1

Qualitative Research Design

Process	Procedure
Research Design	Multiple case study
Data Collection	Individual interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and Focus group interview
Data Analysis	Otter.ai Transcription and NVivo coding
Data Interpretation	Cross-case analysis

Population Selection and Participant Sampling

In this section, I describe the related population and the participant sampling for this study. I selected four participants, all African American women who served in athletic director roles in Division I institutions at the time of this study. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of NCAA Division I leadership demographics by gender and race.

Figure 3 reflects color-coded representation of the breakdown of Division I athletic directors. The red represents the percentage of White males in athletic director

positions annually. The dark green represents Black men, and the light blue represents men who identify as other. The yellow represents White females holding athletic director positions. The light green represents Black women, and the dark blue represents females who identify as other. Thus, the 11 women who served as Division I athletic directors made up the participant population (NCAA, 2022).

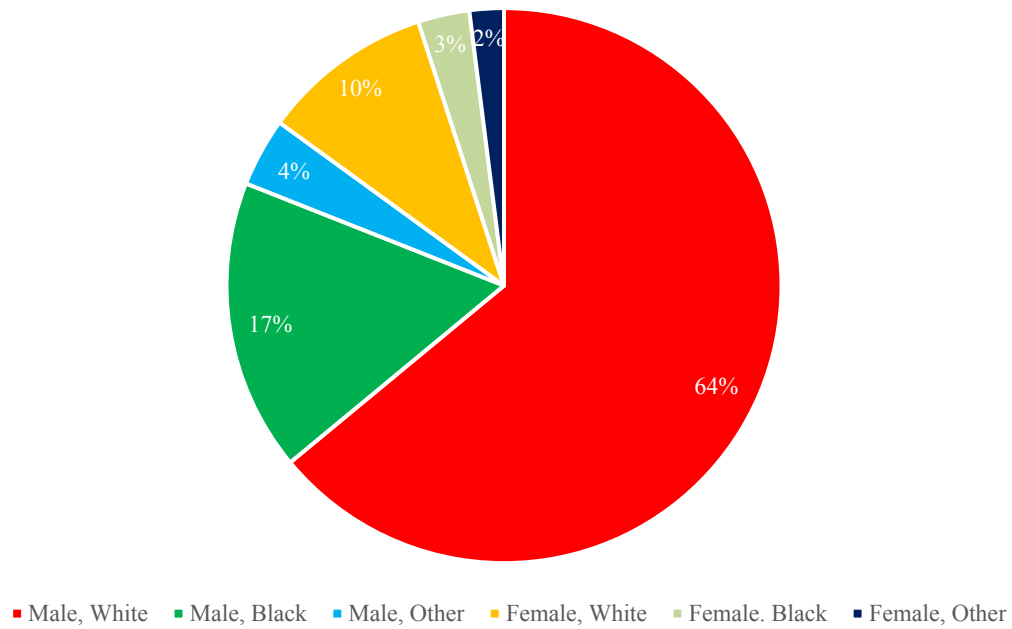


Figure 3. NCAA leadership demographics by gender and race.

Population

At the time of the study, 11 of the 350 Division I schools were sites for potential participants because they met the criteria of the participants needed. Figure 4 illustrates the Division I institutions, indicated by a gold star, with African American women as Division I athletic directors. The figure also shows the distribution of the participants across the nation.



Figure 4. Map of Division I Schools with African American women athletic directors.

The targeted population for this research design was not one specific location but all Division I universities across the United States with Black females as athletic directors (see Figure 4). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the research should use participants from multiple sites to show different perspectives and the phenomenon's scope. There were 350 higher education institutions in Division I athletics. Of these schools, 130 were Football Bowl Subdivision schools (FBS), 123 were Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) schools, and 97 schools did not offer a football program (NCAA, 2022). FBS schools sponsor a minimum of 16 sports, attend postseason bowl games, and are eligible to compete for a national championship. FCS and nonfootball schools sponsor at least 14 sports competing in a bracketed postseason tournament sponsored by the NCAA (NCAA, 2022). All 350 Division I schools had 6,700 athletic teams and more than 187,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2022). In 2021,

there were 351 schools; nine (Figure 3) schools reported having an African American woman as athletic director (NCAA Demographics Database, 2021).

The universities and colleges were primarily located on the East coast of the United States, as seen in Figure 4. Of the 11 institutions with African American women as athletic directors, six worked at HBCUs, and the other five worked at PWIs. Ten of the 11 universities were on the east coast, and one other was on the west coast. The limited number of FBS and FCS sites created a small sample of potential participants.

There are many facets to athletic directors' roles. The responsibilities include but are not limited to overseeing the process of hiring and firing coaches, increasing revenue, devising strategic plans, and overseeing the budget. I chose to research African American women in this position because this position holds the most power in the athletic departments.

Participants

The participants for this multiple case study were four Division I African American female athletic directors within the United States. Miles et al. (2020) and Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended four to five participants for sampling adequacy. To begin the sampling process, I emailed the small sample of potential participants, 11 African American female athletic directors, to identify who might be interested in participating in this study (see Appendix B). I used a purposeful homogenous sampling strategy to select African American women in athletic director positions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of a homogenous sample was to simplify the results and reduce the possibility of any outliers. Four participants responded to my participation interest email. The four participants I selected were African American women with at least two

years of experience as athletic directors at Division I institutions. Table 2 illustrates the demographics of the four participants.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Years Employed at their Institution	Years of Experience as an Athletic Director	Age
Amber	7	2	52
Samantha	5	4	44
Miranda	2	2	45
Martina	9	2	45

Data Collection Procedures and Protocols

The data collection process consisted of specific collection procedures and protocols. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that researchers should use multiple inquiry data collection methods. Each participant in this study completed one individual interview, one reflection prompt, and one focus group interview that included all four participants.

Following the structure of a qualitative design, I wanted to ensure I triangulated my data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) believed semi-structured interviews yield a more conversational tactic to gather information from participants, and open-ended reflection prompts provide a quick picture of the environment and experiences of the participant. Creswell and Creswell (2018) believed that focus group interviews elicit views and opinions from participants through open-ended questions to develop shared or conflicting opinions for discussion (p. 263). These three collection methods allowed me to uncover details about African American women’s experiences in leadership positions in higher education athletic departments. In the following sections, I describe the

precollection data procedures, the timeline for the data collection, and each data collection source in more detail.

Precollection Data Procedures

Before selecting participants, I created a list of all African American female Division I athletic directors. Once I found their contact information, I emailed all 11 potential participants to describe the study and probe the possibility of their participation (see Appendix A). Four of the 11 potential participants responded to my initial email and agreed to be part of the study. Then, I sent the consent form that described all study aspects in Qualtrics to each of the four potential participants (see Appendix E). Once each had committed to participate, I began working with them to schedule the data collection.

Individual Interviews

After selecting the four participants for this multiple case study, I scheduled a 60-minute individual interview with each participant. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) explained that a qualitative interview “is an attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (p. 3). I informed the four participants that their names, universities, and conferences would be kept confidential by using pseudonyms to eliminate any risk to themselves or their universities. Miles et al. (2020) suggested that participant interviews should be recorded through NVivo to accurately dictate the information presented in the data collection process. I chose to use Zoom as the online platform to conduct the interviews. During each interview, I asked each participant the same seven questions

listed in Appendix B. I completed the interviews, then informed the participants that I would email them a transcription of their responses within one week after the interview.

Table 3 reflects the specific interview questions and how each aligned with the three components of the theoretical framework I used for this study (see Appendix B). The first interview question for each participant was the research study question, followed by six other questions I designed to elicit more specific information. Yin (2018) suggested one strength of an interview is the ability to target the specifics of a case study. With this knowledge, the questions focused on the five components of social role theory.

Table 3

Theoretical Framework Alignment with Individual Interview Questions

Theoretical Framework Category	Interview Protocol Questions
Society	1, 3, 5, 6, 6a, 7
Culture	1, 4, 4a
Biology	1, 2, 7
Situation	1, 4, 4a, 6, 6a, 7
Gender	1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 7

Open-ended Reflection

Next, I sent each participant 10 open-ended reflection questions at one point during the study to complete and return to me through email (see Appendix C). Each of the four participants had seven days to complete the prompts in the questionnaire and email them back to me. I scheduled a ten-minute phone call for clarification if the participants had questions. When participants returned their responses, I added them to their folders with the previously transcribed interviews for coding.

Table 4 shows the theoretical framework alignment with the open-ended reflection prompts (see Appendix C). I utilized this protocol method to allow the

participants to reflect on their experiences using open-ended statements and further the conversation about the participants’ encounters in the workplace that was not discussed in the initial interview. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that open-ended questions are advantageous because they are “intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 263). These ten prompts aligned with the five constructs of the theoretical framework and are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Theoretical Framework Alignment with Open-Ended Reflection Prompts

Theoretical Framework Category	Reflection Prompt Protocol
Society	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10
Culture	1, 2, 4, 9
Biology	1, 7
Situation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
Gender	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10

Focus Group Interview

For the third phase of the data collection, I conducted one focus group interview. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that focus group interviews are “advantageous when the interaction among interviewees is similar and cooperative with one another” (p. 164). After determining the best time for the interview, I emailed each participant to schedule the focus group interview in Zoom. Once scheduled, I sent the participants a Zoom link to join. Before the focus group interview, I informed the participants that the focus group would include three other African American women who were current athletic directors at Division I institutions for all four participants. I encouraged participants to share their experiences and responses to ten open-ended questions (see Appendix D). I transcribed the Zoom meeting through Otter.ai and gave the data to the participants one week after

the focus group interview to approve the content. If the participants wanted to add information or clarify their perspectives, I scheduled a 30-minute follow-up conversation.

Table 5 represents the theoretical framework alignment with the focus group interview questions (see Appendix D). The five focus group questions allowed the participants to converse about their shared experiences and allowed me to revisit any topics that needed clarification from their individual interviews. Appendix D shows the specific questions and their alignment with the framework.

Table 5

Theoretical Framework Alignment with Focus Group Interview Questions

Theoretical Framework Category	Focus Group Protocol Questions
Society	2, 4, 5
Culture	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Biology	2, 5
Situation	2, 4
Gender	1, 2, 3

I analyzed the data once the individual interviews, reflection prompts, and focus group interview were completed. In the next section, I describe this analysis in detail.

Timeline for Data Collection

Table 6 reflects the timeline in which I collected data for this study. After receiving the IRB determination, I emailed the 11 prospective participants who met the criteria for this study. Of which, four confirmed their participation and completed the consent form. The data collection process then began at the end of March and concluded in the middle of April. The data was then analyzed for further findings and themes to answer the research question.

Table 6

Timeline for Data Collection

Date	Activity
Middle of March 2023	Sought an IRB determination
Middle of March 2023	Emailed and confirmed four participants
End of March 2023	Completed the individual interviews
Beginning of April 2023	Emailed participants to complete the open-ended reflection prompts
Middle of April 2023	Scheduled Zoom focus group interview
April 2023	Analyzed the data

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of organizing for analysis and then reducing the collected data into coded themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There were four steps to my data analysis for this research (see Table 7). Those steps included transcribing and organizing the data, coding the data with a priori codes, analyzing and coding into themes, and interpreting the data to bring light to the shared experiences of the four participants.

Table 7

Data Analysis Steps

Data Analysis Step	Data Analysis Procedure
Transcribe and organize the data	Transcribed interview notes and converted them digitally using Otter.ai and filed them with each participant’s pseudonym.
Code with a priori codes	Made connections from the coded themes to the research question and social role theory.
Analyze and code the data	Collapsed codes into categories and uncovered themes as part of the cross-case analysis.
Interpret the data	Interpret the findings of the data.

First, I transcribed and organized the interview notes using Otter.ai. Otter.ai is a real-time notetaker transcription software to ensure correct data interpretation. During each step of data collection, I took notes to align topics with each concept of the social role theory from each participant's perspective. I scanned my notes from the reflection prompts into each participant's digital file. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated research should be recorded via handwritten notes, audiotaping, and videotaping, even if the interview is videotaped. I organized the participant responses by the participant's number within the software to code for individual emergent themes. I sent each participant the transcribed responses and my handwritten notes to cross-check for authenticity and communicated via email or in the focus group interview for any changes or updates.

Second, I coded all the responses using a priori codes. I used NVivo to analyze and code the responses, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). To begin the coding process, I looked for data from the four participants' interviews, open-ended reflection prompts, and focus group interview responses that uncovered how society, culture, biology, situation, and gender impacted their journeys toward being a Division I athletic director. These a priori codes created the foundation for the data analysis. The coding process winnowed the data to discard unneeded information (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). The themes not associated with the theoretical framework were noted and categorized as emerging.

Third, I analyzed and organized the codes into categories and uncovered the themes using social role theory's five components. Using the NVivo coding service, I sorted the data transcription into each category to contextualize the findings. After

analyzing each participant's data, I complete a cross-case analysis to uncover the participants' experiences and find other emerging themes (Yin, 2018).

Fourth, I interpreted the data. Once analyzed and coded, the themes assisted me in answering the research question. The interpretation focused on the more extensive views of the data and how it links to literature developed by others (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195). As I assessed the interpretations, it required that I critically and carefully judged meaningful patterns and themes into more significant abstract codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195). I developed visuals of these abstract themes to find commonalities and help me represent the data patterns. The interpretation of the data facilitated the final step of reporting the data findings.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Trustworthiness and authenticity are paramount for qualitative research. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), the four main strategies I used to build trustworthiness and authenticity were rich, thick description, member checking, data triangulation, and researcher reflexivity. The first strategy I employed was to provide rich, thick descriptions that allowed me the opportunity to use as much information as the participant provided to make readers of the study feel connected to the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "the idea would be to paint the picture for the reader with distinct details such as the atmosphere or any feelings or physical descriptions" (p. 263). I gathered specific information using several data collection forms to depict the participants' perceptions accurately. I reported the participants' stories accurately and candidly using rich, thick descriptions.

To ensure the quality of the conclusions that I drew from my research, I used member checking and sought participant feedback to verify my transcripts. Member checking allowed participants to judge the credibility and accuracy of the findings by looking at the transcripts after each interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used triangulation to bring the data sources together (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also utilized triangulation by including three data collection methods to ensure the evidence's credibility and convergence of sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Member checking and triangulation ensured the ability to replicate the study through reliability, dependability, and audibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I used researcher reflexivity as another strategy to authenticate the findings because of my positionality with the research topic. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "To validate the research, the researcher disclosed their biases and perspective of the research to provide an understanding with the participant" (p. 261). I was careful to realize that my perspective on this topic could negatively influence others to make participants agree with my opinion, so I communicated my positionality.

In sum, the strategies used to authenticate the research of this study were essential to sharing the findings. My transparency as the researcher built credibility with the participants, as I acted as the vessel to share their lived experiences. These four strategies helped ensure trustworthiness and authenticity throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

I employed ethical considerations at every juncture of this study. First, I submitted this research to the Baylor University Office of Research Compliance for review and received a nonhuman subject research determination (NHSR). Following this

determination, I proceeded with gathering data. I informed participants of the study's purpose, and they signed a consent form. I informed the participants of the data collection process and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The purpose of informing the participants was to be transparent throughout the study.

The participants' confidentiality was the most important ethical consideration during this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). It is essential to consider ethical considerations when researching to protect the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The opinions and statements of the participants could jeopardize their careers without using confidentiality to protect them. As such, I used pseudonyms for the participants' real identities and the universities where they were employed. Data could not be traced to specific individuals or their universities because of the pseudonyms. Another way to ensure confidentiality and my participants' protection was to store the data in a secured, password-protected folder.

I used member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I gave each participant their transcript to review for accuracy. The process included emailing the transcripts and findings to the four participants to confirm or amend their comments.

Finally, I clarified my bias as the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that this is important to the study because "self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with the readers" (p. 274). My background in sports leadership and as an African American woman aided the interpretation of the findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

Every qualitative study has limitations and delimitations. This section outlines three limitations of this study; researcher bias and subjectivity, access to participants, and inability to draw causal conclusions, although that is not a central focus of qualitative research. The two delimitations of this study were participant exclusion and the geographical location of the participants.

Limitations in research are conditions that influence the study beyond the researcher's control (Simon & Goes , 2018). The first limitation was researcher bias and subjectivity. My direct relationship to the study was a limitation because of my potential bias and influence on the findings. This limitation could have skewed the analysis based on my own beliefs. To avoid this, I consistently practiced reflexivity by sharing my personal experiences.

Access to participants was the second limitation of this study. Only 11 African American women served as athletic directors at Division I institutions at the time of this study. The population size of the participants limited the number of African American women available for my study. The smaller sample size made it difficult to find four participants willing to participate due to time constraints and to fit the study's criteria.

The third limitation of this study was the inability to draw causal conclusions. Although not a central focus of the qualitative design, it is worth mentioning that the findings did not draw causal conclusions for the study. The experiences of the four participants only spoke for part of the population of African American women athletic directors in Division I athletics. Though this is the case, it brought attention to African American women's shared experiences in these roles.

Delimitations in research are boundaries intentionally set by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2018). The first delimitation for the central research question was participant exclusion. The research focused on the underrepresentation of African American women, so I set the parameter of only allowing African American women to be part of the study. I controlled the participant criteria by excluding White men and women and other people of color who did not identify as African American women from the study. I focused on the intersectionality of race and gender, specifically African American women. I excluded the different races and genders from the participant pool because, as the majority, their experiences would not lend the same results in alignment with the research question.

The second delimitation of this study was the geographical location of the participants. Ten of the 11 African American women athletic directors worked on the East coast, but I included the one athletic director on the West coast. The purpose of not excluding the athletic director on the West coast was to uncover any differences between the experiences of the participants based on geographical location.

The third delimitation of this study was the theoretical framework. I chose social role theory because of the a priori framework. The framework included five categories that were applicable to the research question and study.

The limitations of this study created barriers to conducting research based on circumstance, and the delimitations created barriers based on my desires as the researcher. The inability to access more than 11 participants showed how too few African American women serve as athletic directors compared to the other racial groups. Although participant access was a limitation, it was necessary to exclude all different

races and genders to hear the lived experiences of African American women as athletic directors at Division I institutions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to uncover how social role theory influenced journey toward and being Division I athletic directors for four African American women. In this study, I selected four African American women to share their lived experiences about how social role theory impacted the underrepresentation of athletic directors in collegiate athletics. I triangulated data collection through individual interviews, a reflection prompt, and a focus group interview.

The implication of the results from this study has the potential to bring awareness to future changes for African American women in Division I athletic director positions and African American women pursuing these positions. The findings can inform the NCAA, university administration, and the public about the underrepresentation of African American women as Division I athletic directors. To that end, in the following chapter, I examine the results and discuss the implications of the research findings.

CHAPTER THREE

Results and Implications

Introduction

All participants provided firsthand experiences in the data collection for this multiple case study. The data I collected from the four participants' individual interviews, open-ended reflection prompts, and focus group interview uncovered their perceptions on the successes and failures in their journeys to become Division I athletic directors. In this chapter, I focus on the findings of the research question: In what ways did social role theory influence the journey and success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?

In this chapter, I identify the five components of social role theory that influenced participants' journeys in their quest to become Division I athletic directors. The findings also revealed two other emerging themes, networks and mentorship, influenced the journey of the four participants. The findings of this study provide implications and recommendations for future research, organizational change, and policy or practice implementation.

The presentation of the findings unfolds in five steps. First, I provide an overview of the participants and highlight their backgrounds. Second, I summarize the findings in a case profile for each participant using the five concepts of social role theory. Third, I present a cross-case analysis of the themes related to the research question and theoretical framework. Fourth, I discuss the findings and key themes. Lastly, due to the data analysis, I share the implications and recommendations related to the stakeholders.

Case Profiles

In this section, I report the findings of the data I collected from the four participants' responses to the research question. At the time of this study, all four participants were Division I athletic directors. All were Black women working at institutions on the East coast of the United States lived in the Northeast at the time of this study.

Amber (pseudonym) was the first participant in this study. Amber was employed at her institution for seven years including two as the athletic director. Samantha (pseudonym) was the second participant in this study. Samantha served as the athletic director for four years at her institution and worked in another role for one year prior. Miranda (pseudonym) was the third participant in this study. Miranda worked at her institution for two years and was the athletic director for the entirety of those two years. The fourth participant of this study was Martina. Martina was employed at her institution for nine years, including two as the athletic director. The participants' case profiles provide further detail about the participants and their experiences in their role.

Case A: Amber

At the time of this study, Amber (pseudonym) was 52 years old and worked at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) on the east coast. When I conducted this study, Amber worked at the institution for seven years and was the athletic director for two years. She was a mother of two older children and had a husband who also worked in the sports industry.

Amber's response to the research question. The research question in this study was: In what ways did social role theory influence the journey or success of African

American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors? To answer this research question, I collected an individual interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and focus group interview with the other participants. Using the five components of social role theory, I uncovered her opinion on how her journey to being a Division I athletic director was impacted.

Society. When asked about society's initial impact on Amber's journey, she expressed in her interview, "There is still the belief of the female sitting almost like you would with your family. So, there's a husband and wife." Amber reiterated the societal expectation and idea that men and women each have their roles within athletics as they do in families. During her interview, she shared, "We have to understand still that athletics is no different and is a small microcosm of society." Amber's response highlighted that societal norms permeated the sports industry and are reflected in leadership positions as it is in everyday life.

A less progressive society and the stereotypes imposed on African American women created a barrier for Amber. Amber shared that she did not get hired for an athletic director role she was qualified for because "society would not survive it." At the time, both served as associate athletic directors. Amber's male colleague was hired for the position over her. Amber provided more context during her interview, stating,

I was at one place where the AD was retiring. He called me and a male counterpart in. We were both associate ADs. He sat us down like little children in front of his desk. He positioned toward me and said you won't be the next AD here. As heartbreaking as that was, I just listened, and then he turned to my counterpart and said you're going to be the AD but listen to everything Amber tells you. Then he looks back at me to say we're not ready for a female AD. The culture won't let you, you won't survive it.

Amber shared that this conversation was the catalyst to understanding society was not accepting of women in leadership positions. Still, she also felt it was unfair not to be considered because of the intersection of her gender.

Amber proclaimed that society believes “if Black women are to be in these positions, then maybe they should work harder.” As a result of not being placed in the athletic director position, she shared, “I think a lot of times with women, and particularly Black women, because there’s all already a stereotype or a social norm of what roles we are expected to be in, that’s where we are looked at to stay.” Those roles and expectations are more nurturing roles. On the open-ended reflection prompt Amber completed, she wrote that she “felt misunderstood because/when it appeared as though I didn’t have empathy for employees that did not meet my expectations for their work performance.” She considered herself a firm leader with standards, but because of societal stereotypes of women, and African American women, she did not fit the prototype of a leader. Along with not fitting the expectations of women in leadership roles, she felt society also imposed ideas of what her image as a leader should be. During the focus group interview, Amber shared that working at an HBCU holds its own stereotypes. Some of those stereotypes included such as physical appearance or working in an unsafe area. Amber felt her experiences about how society has impacted her are detrimental to the progression of African American women in Division I athletic director positions because it is not built for them based on stereotypes and expectations.

Culture. Amber shared how her culture impacted her journey toward being an athletic director. Amber initially stated in her interview, “I think when we talk about culturally, some people have been blessed to sit in their little world, and that’s how they

view the whole world. In their ignorance, they believe that everything is okay, we're providing opportunities." The idea she shared centered around the discrepancy between providing women, in general, opportunities and African American women because the ignorance is that because women are progressing, it is just for all women. She spoke to the hierarchy of valued importance in leadership, giving White men and women the most power and opportunity. She stated, "Personally, I think if we look at the hierarchy, it's White males, White females, Black males, and then Black females." She further explained, "White women become the picture of women and the fairness of provided opportunities, while African American women are oppressed in society and athletic leadership." Society has placed importance on Whiteness by providing more opportunities for career advancement than African Americans.

During this study, Amber worked at an HBCU and spoke about her experience of White men and women being the underrepresented racial group in the workplace. Amber shared that the NCAA is considering adding a Chief Minority Officer, which would check to make sure schools are compliant and hiring minorities at their college or universities. At HBCUs, that would require White men and women to be hired, and at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), African American men and women. Amber believed this change still created a pipeline for White men and women to be hired because they serve as the majority at most institutions and will then infiltrate HBCUs. Specifically, she noted,

Well, you know, facetiously, I'll say, at an HBCU, where the majority may still be Black, for me to be within compliance, do I have to hire a White person? So, many times, there is a belief that there's already an opportunity, and there are already pipelines for certain people of different races that don't have the same opportunity.

Although the implementation of this position would be used to increase diversity, in Amber's individual interview, she stated,

When you think about it, are you now saying that you get to check a box to say you have this lone token Black person that's working on your staff? Or imagine now, as we say, minority, it still didn't increase an opportunity for a Black person because your version of what minority is at your institution did not create what you thought it was intended to do.

Thus, culturally African American women are still facing cultural barriers entering the field of athletic leadership.

Biology. During her interview, Amber talked in great detail about the impact biology has on African American women becoming Division I athletic directors. Amber had to strategically plan when to have her two children because the sports industry does not accommodate working mothers. She reiterated this by stating,

We agreed on this five-year gap; luckily, God said the same. I was able to have my daughter, and then five years later, to have my son. I would never have kids all in college simultaneously, but my daughter was now old enough to function a little more independently. Now with my son, she could also help a little with things.

She shared the story of her and her husband sacrificing time and life's moments to be successful in their respects. Her background is in coaching, and she stated, "Imagine me having my daughter, and I'm the head coach, that I still had to breastfeed. So, I still had to make provisions that my male counterparts did not." She continued by sharing the story of an interaction she had with a male coach,

I remember being on one particular track meet, and I had my daughter in this little carrier that sat on the front. A male colleague commented, 'oh, I see you're bringing your home into your workplace.' I had to stop and school them and say, 'Well, where's your, you know, you have children? Yeah, there with my wife. Exactly. So, my child is with her mother.'

These interactions, as Amber shared, caused her to think she “had to be very intentional and deliberate about saying, I know where I want to go in this career, and I’m not going to let [being a mother] stop me.” Biology had a significant impact on her career.

Unique to Amber, she felt societal pressures for the woman to adjust her career for a husband and family did not apply to her. She revealed during her interview,

What was unique in my situation was that my husband never demanded that, you know, you think about culturally, most women would get married and be like I have to be where my husband is, and he never did that.

Amber conveyed her husband wanted her to live out her career contrary to her feeling, “We’re in a culture where women are having to make a major sacrifice.” After the data collection process, Amber felt biology had a stronghold on the influence of women’s careers in Division I athletic director positions.

Situation. According to Amber’s interview, situationally, her roles have differed from her male counterparts. She felt men could choose what role they wanted to work in, and women could not. Amber shared,

That has been a dilemma, but I think about your original question. In my own experience, I think there’s an expectation of what role I should serve, and I never really have an open conversation about what role I want to serve or what I want to do.

She was told, “Oh, this will be great for Amber,” even though she had no interest, and it would not propel her to the next role. Amber stated in her open-ended reflection prompt, “To be successful in a male-dominated industry, I must be a ‘student of my craft,’ be authentic and fearless.” She shared this idea to explain further that she is not expected to share roles or have similar roles to men because of her race and gender, and she must go above and beyond. She also explained a hindrance to her journey was not previously

working with a football program. She was questioned by university officials about how she would lead as a woman working for a university with football. She shared,

I was at an institution that did not have football. Imagine applying for jobs where someone would say, “Oh, well, you don’t have experience in football.” I have experience in leadership. I’m not applying for a football position.

In sum, Amber felt, situationally, she was excluded and given different opportunities that did not align with her career choice of being an athletic director because of her gender and race.

Gender. Amber expressed throughout the interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and focus group interview that her gender negatively affected her journey toward becoming an athletic director. During the interview, Amber conveyed, “The expectations are, I walk in already at a disadvantage because there are people that don’t know what my skill set is, already assuming that I’m somehow subpar because they didn’t get a male.” Due to her gender, she shared several stereotypes that impacted her day-to-day journey compared to men. Specifically, her leadership style was said not to be feminine because she was not a hugger, and

The expectation is that I should always speak softly, and it’s tough for those who know me to know that I’m very vocal and opinionated. I’ve learned the diplomacy of that over the years, but it’s the sense that if I’m strong-willed or if I say no, then I’m the “B” word.

The language used toward Amber insinuating she acts aggressively because she was stern differs from what she experienced with men who acted the same way. Those men were considered “great leaders who are taking charge.” These stereotypes based on gender placed importance on male leadership and the connotation of women in leadership roles

being torturous. Amber shared that women being seen as “nurturing and encouraging” creates a barrier to infiltrating a male-dominated industry.

Summary for Amber. Based on the research question and the data collected from Amber Gamble, she expressed the five categories of social role theory impacted her journey and success toward becoming a Division I athletic director. Related to society, Amber suggested stereotypes and norms placed her in roles that she did not agree with or see progressing her career. Concerning culture, as an African American woman, Amber believed African American women face more barriers in career development because they are at the bottom of society’s totem pole. Regarding biology, Amber felt society pressures women in leadership positions to choose a family or a career. Related to situation, Amber discussed that women are disadvantaged compared to men. Amber shared, there is an expectation for women to assume nurturing roles instead of leading institutions with football programs. Finally, Amber shared the stereotypes of gender create a barrier to infiltrating male-dominating industries like sports.

Case B: Samantha

At the time of this study, Samantha (pseudonym) was 44 years old and worked at a PWI on the east coast. Samantha had worked at her current institution for five years and served as the athletic director for a total of four. She had spent more than 15 years as a senior administrator at other PWIs in the northeast region of the United States.

Samantha’s response to the research question. The research question in this study was: “In what ways did social role theory influence the journey or success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?” To answer this

research question, I collected an individual interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and focus group interview with the other participants. Using the concepts of social role theory, Samantha shared her opinion on how her journey toward being a Division I athletic director impacted her. She spoke extensively during the individual interview and shared similar thoughts on the reflection prompt and during the focus group interview.

Society. At the time of this study, Samantha shared little about society's impact on her journey toward her career. In her open-ended reflection prompt, she wrote, "To be successful in a male-dominated industry, I must always be prepared and knowledgeable of my field. You don't want people to question whether you are qualified." Her statement highlighted her overarching idea of society's view on women's need to be knowledgeable and taken seriously as leaders.

Culture. Samantha shared at the beginning of her interview that her parents forewarned her of the disparities she could face during her career due to her race. She explicitly stated,

I feel like culture, gender, skin color, all of those things I've recognized as a reality at an early age, and my parents instilled that in me. I was told that you have to honor and own those things but also recognize that they will make your career more challenging no matter what you do.

The early recognition of the disparities she could face because of her race allowed her to acknowledge that in her career and maneuver accordingly. She shared that culture impacted how she communicated with others in the industry and her comfort with conversations. She explained in her interview,

There are specific conversations that I can have with another Black woman and use certain words, and they know what I'm talking about versus a different group and what words I use or how I deliver things.

Her explanation of communication, based on culture and race, was further detailed in her open-ended reflection prompt about code-switching. Samantha shared,

I had to code switch whenever... This is something I can do a little. I try to be myself all of the time. However, when around those who understand my lived experience, there is more comfort and more ease in conversation.

Samantha's idea of culture and race as a barrier helped her throughout her career to increase social capital and thrive in various environments while working at PWIs.

Biology. At the time of this study, Samantha spoke extensively during her interview about biology as a concept of social role theory. Samantha was one of two participants who did not have children at the time of this study. She shared the impact biology had on her career as a woman in athletics without a family, and the success she believed was a result of that. In her interview, she said she saw gender as an issue, but specifically, she found "being a woman in this profession can be challenging. You know, when do you have time to have a family? What about other obligations?" She expressed during her interview what it was like watching some of her mentors with a family, and what she learned from that was, "I always had the example of I don't have to sacrifice that, I just have to figure out how to prioritize both and have that balance." In her interview, Samantha shared that she does not have the similar crippling stereotype of being a working mom because "I don't have those other challenges that I know other women in this profession have." Thus, the concept of biology helped her journey to success as a Division I athletic director.

Samantha shared her opinion on how biology can hinder success as a witness to other women who have families. During her interview, she shared her thoughts on why she was successful and explained,

That does limit your ability to progress and develop and be present and be seen as someone who's all in on what you need to do for your job. In those critical years of my career that I spent at [school name], I was able to progress because I was always there. I was seen as someone who was super reliable. I was seen as someone who was like, nights, weekends, whatever, there's no question about her commitment. If I had other things, I wonder whether I would have been promoted as often as I was, I don't see that happening as readily.

She continued by saying,

Whether it's sick kids or just having to take time off or maternity leave, I've not had to experience that. I also wonder if I would be where I am today if I had those things. So, is there a sacrifice in that? Yes.

Samantha felt there is a sacrifice to being a woman, but not having a family has aided her success and being readily available to serve when called upon.

Situation. Samantha spoke briefly about the category and situation as an influence on her career. Samantha was asked to recount how roles on the job were distributed based on gender. During her interview, she voiced, "Typically, what you find is, it's in compliance, student-athlete development, or academic services that's where there are more of a concentration of Black women." Black women's roles were working with and nurturing student-athletes versus men in leadership roles.

Gender. Similar to situation, Samantha shared little on gender specifically impacting her career. During her interview, she reiterated that "being a woman in this profession can be challenging." On her open-ended reflection prompt, she also shared "being the 'only' is challenging." She continued by sharing that Black women's personalities influence how they are viewed as leaders. As a leader, she had not received a backlash of the stereotype angry Black woman because of her personality, but she did emphasize,

I think for others who may have a different personality that's more direct, that is a little bit more where they are a little bit harder, a little bit tougher on their staffs, I could see immediately where that would go to, she's just the angry Black woman.

Although she had not been on the receiving end of this stereotype, she could understand how gender and race could impact the journey of someone's career because of it.

Summary for Samantha. Based on Samantha's responses to the individual interview questions, open-reflection prompt, and focus group interview, she was impacted by social role theory. As it relates to society, Samantha felt in a male-dominated industry; women must be prepared at all times. Related to culture, Samantha understood aspects of social role theory would plague her career and worked hard to defy those odds early in her life and career. Biologically, Samantha's journey differed from other participants because she did not face challenges like having children. Related to situation, Samantha shared that Black women, compared to White men, typically act in roles that assist student-athlete success such as academics rather than in leadership positions. As for gender, Samantha shared being a woman in the sports industry is challenging. She felt her career benefitted from not facing the typical challenges of being a woman.

Case C: Miranda

At the time of this study, Miranda (pseudonym) was 45 years old and worked at a PWI on the east coast. Miranda had worked at her current institution for two years and served as the athletic director for the entirety of those two years. She worked for the NCAA and began her journey in collegiate athletics 15 years ago. Miranda identified as a biracial woman, adding another intersectionality to understand throughout this study.

Miranda's response to the research question. The research question in this study was: "In what ways did social role theory influence the journey or success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?" To answer this research question, I collected an individual interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and focus group interview with the other participants. Using the concepts of social role theory, she shared how her journey and success to being a Division I athletic director was impacted. Miranda's opinion on her intersectionality of race and gender posed an exciting perspective on what leadership and identity look like in athletic leadership. Throughout the data collection process, she heavily emphasized being the first Black woman in her position at her institution and being a mother.

Society. Miranda posed an interesting thought about identity and how society viewed her at the time of this study. Early in the data collection process, Miranda shared that she was biracial and identified as a Black woman. During her interview, she explained, "Certainly, there are intersections of knowing that challenges socially and professionally, without question for me, relative to my identity." Relative to how society viewed her, she never made that a focal point of her career. She recounted a story during her individual interview. She reshared during the focus group when she was asked by a colleague, "Oh, how does it feel being the first Black woman who's leading a division one school in this northern state?" She had not thought about it before but shared, "You know, I know how society sees me." She was a trailblazer in her own right and was under society's microscope because she was the first.

Miranda also shared that she saw aspects of societal stereotypes and political influence during her Division I athletic director journey. First, Miranda wrote during her

open-ended reflection prompt, “I felt misunderstood because/when I am direct.” Women in leadership roles are expected to be mild-mannered or emotional, and Miranda’s direct approach was outside of that norm, causing the challenge in her role. Second, regarding society’s influence on politics in the workplace, Miranda shared a story about a colleague’s opinion on a woke society during her interview and open-ended reflection prompt. She wrote, “The first challenge I encountered as an African American woman was dealing with some external constituents and their references to my White male predecessor and speaking to their opposition on ‘woke’ politics.” As a microcosm of society, the sports industry allowed others’ private views and morals to impact the workplace and her journey as a Division I athletic director.

Culture. Miranda first identified she knew people speculated about her race because of how she looked and ultimately assumed her race because of her name. She stated during her interview,

People don’t look at me and say hey, what are you, but I suspect people are looking at me and thinking hmm, she’s something; she’s not all White, and she might not be all Black either. She’s something, and with a name like Miranda, I think it’s almost like, I know some people run the spectrum, but instead, I guess I would have a stereotypical Black name.

Although not asked directly, the speculation and assumptions show how culturally, value is placed on names and what race a person will be because of it.

Miranda’s identity as Black has provided opportunities and a safe space for Black student-athletes. During the focus group interview, she expressed the comfort level of Black student-athletes with her in the athletic director seat. She stated,

I can’t speak for all of them, but I suspect it’s reassuring. Now I’ve had some experiences where it has provided some confidence and competence. Navigating through issues can be different. If a student is dealing with some things relative to

their identity, as the students face or in the athletic space, that it's a lot. It's a much different phone call, a much different interaction, for those parents with that student when the leadership of that department or that area is someone who might resonate with them because of their experience and who they are.

Her experience as a Black woman provided stability for parents and student-athletes because she said,

Representation matters. There is something where it's undoubtedly comforting when you see that you are not only one of the few but one of an individual led by a department of someone who might look like your shares identities as you do.

Culturally, she has been an asset to her university's athletic department and has been able to share more about her career as an athletic director. Her identity has allowed student-athletes to find a potential career in leadership and expand the roles of Black women. She expressed during the focus group,

I think there are tons of student-athletes because I am a Black woman, that have said can you tell me more about your career, how you've gotten there? Just want to understand, and those are good conversations.

As a Black woman, she has used her identity as a strength in her journey to develop herself and those who encounter her through positive representation.

Biology. During Miranda's interview, she spoke about being a woman and mother in Division I athletic leadership. Miranda was one of two mothers in this study and had two children. She disclosed the challenges of being a mother in this industry. First, during her interview, she acknowledged,

Most people spend more time if they're working parents, at your job than you do with your children. You spend more time at your job than you do with your partner.

This early realization in her career helped her to understand there is no balance between being a working mom. She also discussed work-life balance in collegiate athletics during her interview and said,

People talk about work-life balance, but that's so gimmicky. What is work-life balance? The reality is you balance your work by getting it done, no matter what it takes, and sometimes you know what it means long days, long nights, and that's what we do.

There is an understanding that working in athletics is a sacrifice, and that sacrifice, including aspects of biology, was recognized by Miranda when she entered the field. She shared, "I think that my generation was perhaps the cusp of and the starting point for women getting married later, having children later because we are more career oriented and focused." Miranda also acknowledged if this mindset is not adopted, she does think "a deterrent for women coming into our industry is this idea of trying to be a spouse and potentially be a mother." She recognized this is a barrier for women and other needs such as "finances, balancing being a spouse who's available, a partner who's available to their partner." When she was pregnant with her first child, a boss once told her, "You know, your productivity will change now know that you're becoming a mom." During her open-ended reflection prompt, she shared, "After a while, managing being a working mom doesn't get better, it only gets easier." The mindset that women must sacrifice to be successful before and once becoming a mother motivated Miranda throughout her journey, although others saw it as a barrier.

Situation. Miranda was a Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) at a previous institution. Miranda wrote in her open-ended reflection prompt those women expect to be more "buttoned up" when with some external stakeholders or senior executive staff

members. She shared during her interview the SWA position “does create some access, but it also creates a little bit of a marker of a ceiling though, too.” Miranda believed the SWA position “has created this security for leaders, primarily men to say, ‘Okay, well, we’re gender equitable’ So that’s sort of good enough.” Essentially, women are placed in these roles to assuage the idea of having less responsibility than men or a lesser leadership role.

Situationally, Miranda felt the SWA was a ceiling and justification for women, but she also felt she had to show she was far more capable than men in the workplace. She discussed the differences between men’s and women’s roles and the acquisition. Miranda felt she “had to check far more boxes and make her experience more real and credible than White males.” This barrier created a running joke with other women in athletics because “without question, that is how the industry has proceeded.” She shared during her interview how women feel when applying for jobs in comparison to men,

We often joke that males can check three boxes out of the ten that might be in a job description and say, okay, cool, I’m overqualified for this job. Whereas a woman might be like, shoot, I only check seven of these, I don’t have enough experience.

The situational differences in opportunities offered to men start with how men gain access to those positions versus women because of their confidence. These differences create a barrier to women entering the field and having the sureness in themselves to progress.

Gender. Miranda shared how to succeed as a woman in a male-dominated industry. She wrote in her open-ended reflection prompt, “To be successful in a male-dominated industry, I must ensure my skill set and knowledge shine through, be tough-

skinned, and be able to be authentic.” During the focus group interview, she spoke about women needing to prove themselves and demand respect because of their gender.

Summary for Miranda. Miranda shared strong opinions on the influences and barriers toward becoming a Division I athletic director. Miranda shared that society’s political influence on sport determined her workplace interactions with colleagues and constituents. Regarding culture, Miranda’s racial identity created conversations around the advancement of Black women and the visibility it offered for her student-athletes and other Black women. About biology, Miranda shared that her struggles as a mother influenced her trajectory to be an athletic director because of the perceived inability to create the perfect work-life balance. As it relates to situation, Miranda shared the perspective of the SWA and how that influences your career as a leader. Miranda shared women need to prove themselves and demand respect because of their gender.

Case D: Martina

At the time of this study, Martina was 45 years old and worked at an HBCU on the east coast. Martina had worked at her current institution for nine years and served as the athletic director for a total of two. Martina worked at both PWIs and HBCUs throughout her 10+ years in athletics.

Martina’s response to the research question. The research question in this study was: “In what ways did social role theory influence the journey or success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?” To answer this research question, I collected an individual interview, open-ended reflection prompt, and focus group interview with the other participants. Using the concepts of social role theory, she

shared her opinion on how her journey and success to being a Division I athletic director was impacted. During the interview, Martina shared the challenges of crossing over between HBCUs and PWIs and how these expectations hindered her success.

Society. Martina experienced societal stereotypes regarding women's knowledge of and leading men's sports. She often was asked what she knew about hiring men's coaches for male sports. During her interview, she shared her opinion on how she believes women are perceived in an athletic director position,

Do they see women as Can you lead a football program? Can you lead or oversee a strong football coach or a strong men's basketball coach? Like, can you oversee that program? Or do you even understand those two sports? There's the aspect of working with external relations and generating money and generating revenue, but can you oversee facility projects and extensive construction or multi-use facilities and buildings that require which is a male-dominated industry in those areas as well?

She needed help understanding how this would encourage women to enter the field or continue to develop their success. The questioning of ability based on a societal stereotype served as a constant barrier and reminder that women cannot sit in the athletic director's seat.

Culture. As a Black woman, Martina felt she was under a microscope. She referenced culture not only as her race but the stark differences between her HBCU and PWI experiences as barriers or influences on her journey. She shared during her interview that "at PWIs, you specialize in a department, and at an HBCU, you are expected to work in more departments because there is less staff and resources." She felt that once leaving the PWI world and entering the HBCU world, she was expected to know everything previously working for a PWI. Culturally, she noticed Black and White's colleagues were

offered different experiences with different expectations, realistic or not, and those expectations created a divide or barrier when crossing spaces.

Martina shared some of her struggles along her journey because of cultural influences. She wrote on her open-ended reflection prompt that she “had to rationalize her decisions to White counterparts whenever she was intentional about diversity initiatives.” Miranda tried to incorporate the needs of other Black and Brown people at her institution but had to justify why. She strongly felt it was because of race. She also “felt most comfortable working with her current staff, but knew she was also placed in a position to make sure they knew that she was shifting a culture and that she was not the same as her predecessor,” as written in her open-ended reflection prompt. Her goal was to improve the environment for other Black women to provide them with more opportunities.

Biology. Martina was not biologically a mother, but instead, she was a caregiver to family members. She shared her excitement for her family to see her succeed as an athletic director and the sacrifices she has had to make to get to this point. We spoke in-depth and candidly during her interview, and she shared,

Sitting in the seat is stressful. I don't have any children. I don't have a man. I'll tell you a lot of times, my father used to tell me, 'Well, you move around so much. You do so much. You're not going to meet anybody.' Do I want a relationship? Absolutely. People judge, I think, because of my title.

She never felt the pressure to be a mom or have a significant other, although she would have enjoyed it because she dealt with so much to get her career where it is now. Once she became a caregiver, her thoughts of finding someone changed because she had an added responsibility to her day-to-day life.

During the interview, Martina shared she cared for several ill family members while being an athletic director. She faced finding care for them, like a mother would her children while traveling for work and working long hours. She shared during her interview, “Now, I have to plan differently because you have a family. That’s not your immediate family, but in so many ways, I do think I have to figure out what that balance looks like and how I now prioritize.” As a once single woman, she now has several others to care for while balancing a demanding job. She stated, “The added responsibility helped her to understand this position cannot be forever, and she would now want to retire to find her joy again.” This role and the responsibilities of others become more of a deterrent to those staying in the field because of the high demands.

Situation. Martina spoke in depth during her interview about how positions in athletics for men and women differ. First, she shared, “So, one, they expect you to be more nurturing and caring as a female. So, typically, they find females in academic roles and roles like mental health or ones that nurture students.” In comparison, “men were given leadership roles or oversight of women in those positions.” She also shared men are given larger projects within external relations. As a woman who worked in business administration, an external role, she said,

There’s the aspect of working with external relations, generating money, and generating revenue. As a woman, can you oversee facility projects and significant construction or multi-use facilities and buildings expected to be handled by men? She found when having to make these decisions, she had to justify her reasoning. During her interview, she recounted a story of when she told someone no and said, “They weren’t expecting that. They weren’t expecting my position or role to give a hard no and standby to keep it moving. This was not an isolated situation for Martina, she also noted

during her interview that when she has conversations with male coaches, in comparison to men, she thinks, “it differs from male counterparts because it’s like they automatically assume dominance, there are men against men now. So, they thought that they have a man-to-man conversation versus me it’s just considered chatting.” The expectation was, as a woman, she would say yes to internal pressures, but by defying the stereotypes of this situational role, she found more success and respect from her colleagues.

Ultimately, getting to this seat, as Martina shared several times, was not easy, but she felt it was because of who they wanted in this role. This is her first position as an athletic director, but she shared, “When I’ve interviewed for other AD positions before coming here, I think what they’re looking for is a male, it comes across that way.” When she was eventually offered the position of athletic director, she wrote on her open-ended reflection prompt that she “was frustrated when being challenged on the decisions she made and having to justify or explain the strategic direction.” She often asked, “Was my predecessor challenged similarly?” Even working for a female president, she faced the challenge, as stated in her open-ended reflection prompt, “in the seat, the first challenge was working for a female president and trying to prove I was the right hire. Justifying all my reasons or rationale for my actions and trying to bridge the communication gap.” The unconscious bias of this role and those hiring for this position have disadvantaged women, and Martina felt that was a challenge.

Gender. Martina shared her perspective on gender’s influence on her career during the interview and open-ended reflection prompt. She reiterated the gender roles imposed on women versus men. During her interview, she focused on women expected to be “nurturing, more caring, and have a softer side” and how that controls how they are

viewed by their colleagues. Anything other than the norm invited “language with a negative connotation” toward women. She wrote on her open-ended reflection prompt, “To be successful in a male-dominated industry, she must continue to be overprepared, overqualified, well versed in many areas, and continue to have a voice.” Although she felt gender is a barrier, mainly because society prefers men in athletic director roles, she used the challenge to rise to the occasion and be a success story.

Summary for Martina. The data collection process showed she felt social role theory provided barriers to her success and journey but challenged her to defy the odds. Related to society, Martina felt women faced stereotypes when leading men’s sports because the expectation was, they lacked the proper knowledge. Culturally, Martina expressed Black women often must prove themselves and rationalize their decisions. Concerning biology, Martina’s experience as a caregiver provided a different outlook on how women sacrifice because of society’s expectation of familial roles. Miranda shared that the situation impacted her journey because she knew, as a woman, men wanted to be in leadership roles. Regarding gender, Martina said there is preferential treatment toward men. She used her personal and professional challenges to develop her boundaries and the respect she deserved in this industry.

Cross-Case Analysis

To begin the cross-case analysis of this multiple case study, I first read through the data I collected to determine common themes among the participants using the five codes of social role theory. Each participant’s experiences aligned with the categories, as seen in Table 8. In this section, I share similarities and differences between the participant’s responses to the research question: “In what ways did social role theory

influence the journey or success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?”

Table 8

Cross-Case Analysis Themes

Theme	Amber	Samantha	Miranda	Martina
Society	X	X	X	X
Culture	X	X	X	X
Biology	X	X	X	X
Situation	X		X	X
Gender	X			
Networks	X	X	X	X
Mentorship	X	X	X	

Society. The participants in the study expressed society impacted how they were viewed and treated as women working in athletic director positions. Amber indicated in her individual interview that “societal expectations and stereotypes put Black women at a disadvantage because people assume their skillset is subpar compared to men.” All the participants agreed during the focus group interview with this idea. Samantha expressed during her open-ended reflection prompt that she “needed to be prepared at all times and knowledgeable of her field” to be accepted and respected by society in sports leadership. Similarly, Amber shared during the focus group that Black women must be “experts in their areas and speak from a place of expertise” to combat societal stereotypes and expectations. Likewise, Martina shared during her interview the “need to understand how to lead men’s sports because women are expected to not have that understanding.” Miranda shared during her interview that “the knowledge of political influence has changed her access and how she is viewed.” Societal stereotypes directly impacted the participants leadership positions and trajectory.

As a reflection of societal stereotypes and race, Amber shared during her interview that Black women face the stereotype of being angry Black women when they are stern. Much the same, Miranda shared on her open-ended reflection prompt that she felt misunderstood when she was direct. Complementary to what Amber and Miranda shared, Martina also expressed during her interview that she was not expected to say no and was faced with stereotypes as a Black woman.

Culture. The participants in the study expressed their race impacted their early childhood, positions and how their personalities were perceived. Samantha and Miranda shared how race at an early age impacted their journeys. To begin her interview, Samantha said “at an early age my parents instilled that [race and gender] in me honor and acknowledge those factors will make my career more challenging.” made her aware of her race and. While Miranda shared, during her interview, as a biracial woman, Black identifying, she attended an all Black school until seventh grade then transitioned to primarily White schools. She stated she encountered a “White teacher who held her off the honor roll because she was Black” and that was one of the first encounters with culture and society externally impacting her. In their careers, Miranda shared, during her interview, she was “the first Black woman leading a Division I program in her state and was often asked how it felt.” She found ways to not let that being the first and being under a microscope affect her career and prove her skillset. Samantha shared during her open-ended reflection prompt that “being the only one, a Black woman, gets easier, it does not get better” like Miranda.

Amber and Martina did not share stories of their childhood, but both did acknowledge the visibility of race differences later in their careers. Amber shared during

her interview that the workplace has a “hierarchical cultural distinction.” She expressed that “Black women fall at the bottom of the totem pole, and the expectations differ from White men, White women, and Black men.” Similarly, Martina shared in her open-ended reflection prompt that she had to “prove her decisions and rationale as a Black woman compared to her White predecessors who did not.” Both responses showed that African American women have to justify or rationalize their decision-making process.

Culture impacted the communication style and comfort of all participants. Samantha shared during her interview and on her open-ended reflection prompt that she felt when around those who understand her lived experiences, there is more comfort and ease in conversation.” Likewise, Martina also felt comfortable speaking with other Black women or men in the workplace. When asked about code-switching, Amber, Miranda, and Martina wrote on their open-ended reflection prompt that they had to change styles or appear more buttoned up when attending events with White colleagues or constituents. Samantha said “code switching is not something she had to do” which contrasts the other three participants experiences.

Biology. The participants in the study shared how being a caregiver or a mother impacts the trajectory of a woman’s position as an athletic director. During their interviews, Amber and Miranda shared similar experiences about how biology impacted their journeys toward being athletic directors. Amber and Miranda both have two children and a spouse. Amber shared that during her interview, she “brought her baby to work so she could continue breastfeeding and was questioned by her male counterparts.” Similarly, Miranda shared during her interview that her “children come to the office so others can see it is a community environment.” Both shared the sentiment in their

interviews that, as a woman working in athletics, it takes a “village to raise your children.” Amber said, “women often sacrifice instead of the spouse to move or raise the child, but I did not have that experience.” In her interview, Miranda shared that her “want for a family helped her choose a spouse, accepting of her being a working mother.” Amber and Miranda shared during their interviews that being a working mother is a barrier because “you spend more time working than with your family” but both were determined to be parents.

In their interview, Samantha and Martina shared that they did not have children. Samantha had a significant other, and Martina did not. While Samantha’s journey was not impacted by biology, she could understand how “it could be from seeing other working mothers and the commitment needed to progress in the career.” During her interview, Martina said she was a caregiver to ill family members and shared that she “understood what that was like having children in the sports industry.” Samantha said in her interview that “women do not have the time for families.” Similarly, Martina shared that her family member asked her “when she would have time to care for them if she was working.” Like Amber and Miranda, Martina shared during her interview that she, too, needed to find help and a village to assist with the care. Amber, Miranda, and Martina felt the pressures of being a mother or caregiver but found that the help had allowed them to be successful. At the same time, Samantha said during interview that “not having children or family allowed her to progress because she did not have those outside responsibilities.” The participants experiences showed a direct impact of biology on the trajectory of a woman’s career as an athletic director.

Situation. The participants in the study expressed women work in a limited capacity within the sports industry compared to their male counterparts. Amber said in her interview that “women are expected to be placed in roles compared to men” and “not given the opportunity to express genuine interest in internal versus external positions.” Similarly, Samantha said in her interview that “there are specific roles for genders, typically seeing women in compliance, student-athlete development, or academic services and not communications, raising money, or marketing.” Like Amber and Samantha, Martina said “females are typically found in academic roles, roles like mental health, or ones that nurture students and most CFOs or financial people are males.” In her open-ended reflection prompt, Martina also wrote that “women must prove they are the right fit.” Specific to that, during the focus group interview, Amber, Samantha, and Miranda agreed and said, “men have more confidence to go after positions that they check fewer qualification boxes for than women.” Thus, men are more likely to have leadership or administrative positions. To further this point, Miranda expressed, “it is a running joke that men are confident they are the best fit for a position even with no qualifications.” The participants shared that male confidence and women’s lack of confidence impacts the journey of progression to being an athletic director.

Gender. The participants in this study expressed gender impacted their progression because they believed they were always at a disadvantage compared to men. Samantha said in her individual interview that “being a woman is challenging because there are factors like being a mother and having other stereotypical responsibilities that men are not expected to have.” Amber shared those challenges as a woman in her interview stemmed from having a “disadvantaged skillset compared to men.” Like

Amber's disadvantaged skillset, Miranda said during the focus group that "women must continue to show they have a specific skill set for a specific opportunity." In addition to the other statements, Martina said in her interview athletic departments are looking at gender specific roles for key areas and how a woman could potentially oversee one of those areas.

Samantha and Martina shared that there are struggles for Black women specifically. Samantha said during her interview that she "sees Black women struggle because of their perceived personalities." Comparably, Martina said during her interview that "specific language is used toward Black women when they deviate from perception." Like Martina's expressed idea, she said in her interview that "as a woman, you are considered an expletive because of your leadership style or how you assume a position." Amber also shared, she has been told she is "stern or direct" when firm in her decisions.

Other Emerging Themes

During the data collection process, other themes emerged outside the five social role theory categories. Each of the four participants spoke about networks and mentorship impacting their journeys toward being a Division I athletic director. In this section, I share similarities and differences between the participants' viewpoints on networks and mentorship.

Networks. The participants in the study expressed networks and social capital were directly related to the success of an athletic director. Amber said in her interview that collegiate athletics is still the "old frontier or good ole boys' network." Matching what Amber said, Samantha said in her interview that "the good ole boys' network still exists but believed there are entry points for women." Those entry points included

golfing, attending happy hours and dinners with constituents. Miranda also shared her “access to the network has change” because of her new role as athletic director and “financially, now, has a different set of circumstances” that gives her access to a different group of people. Martina shared that, “social interaction, like dinners with people outside of your network,” helped her connect and found that it made a difference because it took her out of her comfort zone.

Data indicated that women’s networks, although present, are not as successful or beneficial as men’s. Amber shared women’s networks need to be by design and include people who will champion for you through informal relationships and friendships.” Samantha shared that during her interview, she “had several women athletic directors within her network” from different universities along her journey. Contrary to Samantha’s experience, Miranda said during her interview that she “has seen women not look out for other women like men do for other men,” but does “have networks across every racial spectrum.” Miranda also said during her interview that she “wishes networks were more readily available and, like men, women with the same experiences and identity must do better across the board.” Miranda stated during her interview that “it was abundantly clear her race and gender were hurdles to building relationships.” Like Miranda, Samantha said in the focus group to “have people in your network with shared experiences.” Still, the opposite of that said, “expanding your network to more than just those with similar experiences and identities is essential because they can impart more wisdom.” Thus, it is important to incorporate like and unlike experiences.

Mentorship. The participants in the study expressed mentorship is beneficial to the advancement of an individual’s career through shared advice and experiences.

Samantha shared in her interview that she has “been fortunate enough to have had women who looked out for her and acted as mentors since being in college, providing access to internships and jobs.” During her interview, she shared that she has “learned from other women in leadership positions at previous institutions about what path to take and education to pursue to be successful.” She also shared that attending conferences allowed her to further those relationships. As a member of the NCAA Pathways Program, Miranda specifically asked for a “female mentor who was an athletic director, woman of color, and had kids because their experiences would be balanced.” Contrary to Samantha’s experience with female mentors, Miranda said during her interview and the focus group that her “experience with the mentorship program was unsuccessful because the woman paired with her only reached out once.” Unlike Samantha and Miranda’s experiences, Amber said in her interview that she “had male mentors and began adopting their philosophies” which made her more rigid in the workplace because she was on the financial side. Amber reflected on the mentors also needing to be sponsors because “they can help further your career rather than just give advice.” Reciprocating the same idea, Martina shared that her career was influenced by her male boss in business and watching and learning from him gave her opportunities.

Another aspect of mentorship that emerged was for Black student-athletes and other Black women with aspirations of being a Division I athletic director. During the focus group, Samantha said “there needs to be a hand that grabs the next generation and pulls them along.” She continued by saying, “leaders need to connect with the next generation so they can learn from our mistakes and sit in the same seat one day.” Similarly, Miranda said during the focus group interview that “representation matters,

and there is a need to grow the pipeline through mentorship, and that continues to grow the representation.” Although Amber agreed with Samantha and Miranda during the focus group interview, she added that “as a mentor to student-athletes, she wants to hold them accountable as their advocate by telling them no and pushing them to be confident in spaces where they do not see Black women in leadership roles.” African American women providing mentorship opportunities creates representation and a voice for the younger generation of leaders.

In conclusion, the data I collected during this research shed light on all four participants’ similar and different experiences. Along with shared experiences of social role theory, the participants found commonalities within networks and mentorship. As Black women, their lived experiences impacted their journeys toward being a Division I athletic director.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss how my study’s findings align with or differ from the existing literature previously presented. The themes were aligned to Eagly and Wood’s (2012) social role theory, the theoretical framework for this study. I use existing literature to support how the categories of social role theory influenced the participants’ journey toward and positions as Division I athletic directors. The findings and existing literature connect with the experiences of the four participants and add validity to the findings of the previous studies conducted. Following the connection of social role theory to existing literature, I discuss the connection of the two other emergent themes, networks and mentorship.

The research question that guided this study was: In what ways did social role theory influence the participants' journey toward and positions as Division I athletic directors? The research question and data collection methods directly aligned with the theoretical framework. The findings from the data collection methods were comparable to and differed from the findings in other studies discussed in the literature review.

Society

The literature and the participants both suggested society impacts women's trajectory because of stereotypes and expectations. Koenig and Eagly (2014) defined society as the generalized ideas of men and women in everyday life, including the workplace. The findings of my study suggested that the sports industry is a microcosm of society. Similarly, Cunningham (2012), Walker and Satore-Baldwin (2013), and Steward and Cunningham (2015) suggest that the sports and entertainment industry encapsulates miniature characteristic qualities or features of something larger and provides insight into the inequities of equal representation in NCAA sports leadership. In Bower et al.'s (2015) study, the participants stated that the societal stereotypes placed on women were not qualities deemed successful in athletic director positions. Like this study, the findings of my study revealed that societal expectations of Black women are detrimental to their progression. Harris et al (2015) presented an argument that discrimination and disparities discourage women from working in male-dominated industries like sports were also found in my study. As the participants stated, it is hard for African American women to enter the male-dominated industry and be successful because of factors such as gender and race.

Other existing literature suggests that societal expectations have placed women in submissive roles. Taylor and Wells (2017) and Schull et al. (2013) argued that male dominance and society's expectation for women to be submissive are unwelcoming and allow men to influence the culture even when societal norms contradict reality. The findings from my study indicated that my participants are direct stereotyped as Black women for being such. In alignment with the findings of being direct and misunderstood, Bower et al.'s (2015) study found that when women determine boundaries or are confident, they appear to be challenging or pushy.

Culture

The literature and participants in my study stated African American women, across HBCUs and PWIs, are more aware of the inequities in leadership and the preferential treatment to White men. Schneider and Bos (2019) defined culture as the intersectionality of race and gender contributing to broader stereotypical identities. The findings of my study showed that Black women are at the bottom of the totem pole for athletic leadership because of their race and gender. Like the findings of my study, Schneider and Bos (2019) and Eagly and Koenig (2014) found that culture is a barrier to the advancement of African American women in positions of power. Additionally, Cunningham (2012) found that Whiteness and leadership ability are closely linked, while African Americans are often associated with lesser roles that are not heavily involved in decision-making. Several participants in my study stated they believed they were not given access to positions of leadership because of their culture.

The participants from my study indicated that culture affected how they communicated and carried themselves in the workplace. McDowell and Carter-Francique

(2017) conducted a study to understand the experiences of HBCU and PWI athletic leaders. The findings showed that African American women needed to monitor their actions and the way they communicated to avoid the angry African American woman stereotype. Like this study, my study, which had athletic directors from HBCUs and PWIs, found that when communicating, they must monitor what they say because of the perception of being an angry Black woman. Contrary to one of the findings, Black women being silent in complacency, from McDowell and Carter-Francique's (2017) study was one participant from my study indicated she tells other staff members no, but then wonders why she needs to rationalize her decisions as a Black woman compared to White men.

Biology

The findings of my study and the literature reflect that being a mother, caregiver, or working in nurturing roles are obstacles to becoming Division I athletic directors. Eagly and Wood (2012) linked biology with male versus female strength, childbearing stereotypes, and chores in the home. Friedman (2015) found that men's success as a husband, father, and workers is associated with being a provider and leader rather than being expected to balance work and family. Aligning with the findings of this study, the participants in my study also suggested, as successful mothers, they experienced men are the leaders while their wives are at home. Specifically, men questioned women about why they brought their children to work while the father was working. The men suggested their wives cared for their children while they work. Messerschmidt (2019) and Brake (2016) found that men often refuse to migrate toward more feminine roles because of gender relations between masculinity and femininity. Similarly, the findings of my

study proved that women work in more nurturing roles, such as academics or assistants, and men work in leadership roles.

Situation

The literature and the findings of my study comparatively state men and women are given different roles and access within athletics based on gender causing inequitable advancement in the field. Eagly and Wood (2012) and Koenig and Eagly (2014) defined situation as the differences in environmental factors like work-life balance, life circumstances, and promotions unequally distributed by race and gender. Like this definition, the findings of my study show that participants were less likely to be promoted or hold leadership positions because of motherhood or caring for a family. Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) found that women are often marginalized and afforded far fewer opportunities in the workplace than their male counterparts. To combat this, Katz et al. (2018) and Hoffman (2010) found that the intention of the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) position was to offer women more positions in collegiate leadership. After further research, their findings concluded that this position did not guarantee the same access as their male counterparts.

Wells and Kerwin (2017) also studied women's intentions to become athletic directors. They found that even in the highest role as a woman, they still lacked the experience working with a football program, limiting their career mobility. Congruent with their findings, my study suggested the SWA position was a ceiling for women. SWAs had fewer responsibilities for career mobility and had more qualifications than their male counterparts.

Gender

The literature and the participants in my study indicated that gender impacted their growth in their career because they constantly had to prove themselves capable compared to men. Burton et al. (2011) defined gender as the expectations of roles desirable for each sex. Taylor and Hardin (2016) found that women, unlike men, had to convince athletic department staff, university presidents, and the community that they could be Division I athletic directors. Additionally, Comeaux and Martin (2018) stated that there is a social significance of gender and how it affects the perception of women in athletic director roles. In alignment with my study, the participants felt that because they were women, they had a disadvantaged skillset compared to men and needed to prove their worth. Loggins and Schneider (2015) found women were referred to as the silent partner of their male counterparts. Similarly, one of the participants in my study stated her colleague would be given the athletic director position, but essentially, she would make the decisions for him while receiving no public recognition. The findings of my study reflected women do not progress as fast as men and work in roles beneath men. Like this finding, Smith et al. (2016), Taylor and Hardin (2016), and Whisenant (2022) found that women holding leadership positions in sports are less likely to face career mobility than men and will hold secondary roles to men because of gender norms.

Networks

The literature and the participants in my study comparatively stated that networks and social capital influence the trajectory of one's career. Katz et al. (2018), Schull et al. (2013), and Wright et al. (2011) found that the old boys' network is an informal organizational barrier with significant power. The findings of my study show the

participants believed collegiate athletics was part of the good ole boys' network.

Hoffman (2011) and Loggins and Schneider (2015) conducted studies about how women can penetrate the old boys' network, seen as an organizational barrier, and found that women are off limits to areas of decision-making because it would decrease men's power. In contrast to Hoffman's (2011) and Loggins and Schneider's (2015) studies, like Burton et al.'s (2015) study, the participants in my study said it was not impossible to penetrate. However, to do so, one must have the proper social capital, often gained from attending happy hours, golfing, or other events that women typically do not attend. Burton (2015) also found that women's networks do not harm the influence of men, but men's networks directly influence women's leadership positions.

Mentorship

The findings in my study aligned with existing literature stating that mentorship, both formal and informal, is beneficial to professional development and advancement. Turner-Moffatt (2019) suggested that mentorship is vital to empower and encourage women as they often face challenges in the workplace without the necessary tools to overcome them. Like Smith et al.'s (2017) finding that mentorship can be informal or formal, the findings of my study suggest mentorship provides a community of support and can be from people in different stages of their careers to teach and learn through progression. Wells and Kerwin (2017) and Smith et al. (2019) found that the limited number of African American women as Division I athletic directors is a barrier to other African American women in collegiate athletic departments looking for a mentor or mentee. The participants from my study had mentors who were White men and women

and few Black women or men, making them want to be more accessible to Black women or student-athletes interested in the sports industry or another male-dominated industry.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings of my study aligned with existing literature. Existing literature and my study's findings uncovered how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American participants. African American women face gender and racial discrimination in the workplace, creating barriers to advancement as Division I athletic directors. The existing literature used to discuss the five categories of social role theory, as well as networks and mentorship, indicated there is still a need to close the racial and gender gap between men and women. The findings of my study and existing literature further the conversation that too few African American women serve as Division I athletic directors. The findings from the literature and my study have implications for five stakeholder groups. Further, I have recommendations for future research on the impact of the formation of African American women's networks on White men.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section I address the implications and recommendations for this study. I provide practical significance to five stakeholder groups: (a) the NCAA President, (b) athletic departments senior-level administration, (c) university administration, (d) African American women on their journey toward being a Division I athletic director, and (e) future researchers. Lastly, in this section, I propose avenues for continuing research.

The NCAA President

The implication inferred from the findings of this research is that the NCAA does not adequately provide opportunities to African American women as Division I athletic directors. My recommendations for the NCAA President would be to create an addendum to the Title IX policy to include equitable leadership representation and adding a Chief Diversity Officer and department to the governing body. First, the addendum to Title IX would expand equity of athletics and student-athlete opportunities to include leadership positions. Title IX has three prongs: (a) proportionality, (b) proof of program expansion, and (c) full accommodation (Simon et al., 2014). A university must pass one of these three to comply with the NCAA. The proposed policy change would be to proportionality to include senior-level positions, not only focusing on gender but race as well. Proportionality provides equal opportunity based on enrollment for males and females. In this case, applying to professional staff, Black men and women would have an opportunity to be equally represented in their organization. The expansion would create more opportunities for mentorship and jobs outside of stereotypical roles and diversify the department's culture and mindset.

Second, the NCAA President could add a Chief Diversity Officer and diversity division to the governing body's organizational chart. This organizational structure change would potentially add positions for people of color and allow them to be part of or oversee the hiring processes for athletic directors and other leadership positions. This department would determine proper hiring practices for other universities and colleges to remove racial and gender profiling.

Athletic Departments Senior-Level Administrators

The implication inferred from this research is that athletic departments need more opportunities for growth within the organization for African American women. My first recommendation for athletic departments senior-level administrators is to ensure more opportunities for women, especially African American women, to advance within leadership roles in their respective departments and organization. Each athletic organization has separate departments, such as marketing, academics, ticketing, and other internal and external operations. Each department could change the organizational structure to create positions for advancement. For example, an assistant athletic director, director, associate director, and assistant director. This allows opportunities to continue to grow in the department and the organization while acquiring more leadership responsibilities.

My second recommendation would be to implement a confidential hiring practice to protect applicants from racial and gender profiling. Most organizations already require confidentiality when reviewing applicants, such as anecdotes on the application website and not using social media to look applicants up. Another practice that could be implemented for more equitable hiring practices is removing the names from the process and the identifier boxes for gender and race. As shown in the findings of my study, one participant's race was assumed because of her name. Implementing this practice could potentially remove all bias and focus on qualifications and skillsets.

University Administration

The implication inferred from the findings of this research is that university administration could influence the mobility of African American women as athletic

directors. I recommend that university administration have Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) representation on athletics hiring committees for athletic director positions to bridge the gap between the university and athletics. Involving the university DEI committee will help align the acting president's and athletics staff's morals and values. The DEI committee could also give insight into proper hiring practices and develop opportunities for inclusivity. Along with insight, the committee and university administration would have oversight to ensure the athletic department is following the established rules and regulations of equitable hiring practices put in place by the university. Thus, athletic departments would be required to adhere to the expectation of equitable hiring practices and to develop opportunities for African American women in leadership roles.

African American Women on Their Journey Toward Being a Division I Athletic Director

The implication inferred from this research is that African American women on their journey toward being a Division I athletic director should build their social capital to infiltrate the male-dominated industry. My recommendation for African American women on their journey toward being a Division I athletic director is to create a network of African American women and develop formalized mentor and mentee relationships. As the creation of this network group expands, further research could be conducted to uncover how African Americans can create a social or professional network without being compared to the good ole' boys' network. A qualitative study could be used to compare and contrast the feelings of White men to African American women about the influence of networks and if it has helped progress or stifled their careers.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three I presented the data about how social role theory influenced the four participants' journey toward positions as Division I athletic directors. I analyzed each of the four participant's interview transcripts, open-ended reflection prompts, and focus group responses. I uncovered seven themes. In this study I found that society, culture, biology, situation, gender, networks, and mentorship influenced the participants' journeys toward being Division I athletic directors. These findings confirmed and contrasted the existing literature provided in chapter one. Furthermore, the findings of chapter three were applied to the five stakeholders of this study: (a) the NCAA President, (b) athletic departments senior-level administrators, (c) university administration, (d) African American women on their journey toward being a Division I athletic director, and (e) future researchers and offered recommendations based on the data collected. In the final chapter of this study, I provide an executive summary and a findings distribution proposal.

CHAPTER FOUR

Executive Summary and Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

In Chapter Four, I provide an overview of chapters one through three. First, I introduce the problem, literature review, restate the purpose of this study and the research question that guided this study. After the executive summary, I offer an overview of the data collection and analysis process. Following the overview, I summarize the key findings of the research. Finally, I discuss the implications and recommendations of this study. Following the executive summary, I offer a findings distribution proposal.

African American women represent an overwhelmingly low percentage of Division I athletic directors. In 2022, African American women athletic directors represented 3% of the 350 Division I universities and colleges in the United States (NCAA, 2022). In comparison, White men represented 64%, Black men represented 17%, and White women represented 10% (NCAA, 2022). Representation matters for the other African American women with aspirations to become a Division I athletic director. The underrepresentation of African American women affects not only other African American women entering the sports industry with an aspiration to be an athletic director but also student-athletes and coaches who share their identity.

The literature review unfolded in five sections. In the first section I discussed the history of women's leadership and how the passage of Title IX and the merger of the AIAW and NCAA did not create more opportunities for women in leadership roles. The merger lessened the positions available to women (Hoffman, 2011; Hextrum & Sethi,

2022; Whisenant et al., 2002). In the second section I discussed scholarship on women's leadership experiences in sports compared to men. Overall, nurturing stereotypes associated with women decreased their roles in leadership positions compared to men. To give women an opportunity to possess leadership skills and responsibilities, the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) position was created, and studies found that most women did not believe it provided them more access to leadership opportunities (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). In the third section, I discussed the political influence on sports leadership. The literature in this section addressed networks created by men to enforce hegemonic masculinity and marginalize women from expanding their social capital. In the fourth section, I discussed the disparities of race and gender in sports leadership. This section demonstrated that African American women were expected to maintain an easy image for White men and women to work with. Finally, the last section of the literature review focused on the need for African American women in sports leadership to serve as mentors to other African American women. The literature focused on representing other African American women as mentors and mentees.

In this study, I aimed to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American women. To better understand their lived experiences, my research centered around one research question: In what ways did social role theory influence the participants' journey toward and positions as Division I athletic directors? The four participants in this study were African American Division I athletic directors.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This research design was a qualitative multiple case study. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Yin (2018) suggested using this design to understand the lived experiences of my participants better. Each participant of this study identified as an African American woman with at least two years of experience as a Division I athletic director. I used three types of data collection methods throughout this study. First, each participant completed a 60-minute individual interview. Second, each participant completed a ten-question open-ended reflection prompt. Lastly, the four participants participated in a focus group interview. I collected and analyzed data using four steps.

First, I transcribed and organized the data. I used Otter.ai transcription service and organized the data in each participant's folder. Once the data transcription was complete, I used NVivo to code the data into the five categories of social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012): (a) society, (b) culture, (c) biology, (d) situation, and (e) gender. Third, I analyzed and coded the data. I collapsed the codes and uncovered themes as part of the cross-case analysis. Fourth, I interpreted the data. I focused on more extensive connections to existing literature and pulled out the key findings of the data.

Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this study revealed that social role theory, networks, and mentorship influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as a Division I athletic director for the four participants. The summary of the key findings unfolds in seven themes: (a) society, (b) culture, (c) biology, (d) situation, (e) gender, (f) networks, and (g) and mentorship. The four participants' experiences constructed the findings.

The participants in the study expressed society impacted how they were viewed and treated as women working in athletic director positions. According to the participants of this study, societal expectations and stereotypes have forced African American women to always be prepared and knowledgeable about their respective field when working in a male-dominated industry. The participants expressed African American women are called angry Black women when showing leadership attributes like being direct or stern.

The participants in the study expressed their race impacted their early childhood, positions and how their personalities were perceived. Culture directly influenced the participants' experiences as African American identifying women. The participants shared they were made aware of their race at an early age to prepare them for the challenges they could face. The culture findings implicated sports leadership as having a hierarchical preference for White men, while most African American women were at the bottom of the totem pole. The participants of this study shared culture influenced their journeys because they had different obstacles than their male counterparts experienced, like altering their communication style and justifying their decision-making rationale.

The participants in the study shared how being a caregiver or a mother impacts the trajectory of a woman's position as an athletic director. The participants of this study were mothers and nonmothers with different experiences in the industry. The mothers found, biologically, they were at a disadvantage compared to men. The expectation was that women would be at home caring for the children, instead of working. Many of their male counterparts criticized them for bringing their children to work and continuing to build their careers. The other two participants were not mothers but did see how the

impact of caregiving and motherhood was a time constraint and negatively impacted a woman's career trajectory.

The participants in the study expressed women work in a limited capacity within the sports industry compared to their male counterparts. Situation directly influenced the participants' journey because the participants stated that many women were placed in more nurturing positions than men. The participants also shared that many women were at a disadvantage to be placed in leadership roles because men were more confident applying for positions they are not qualified for. Women tend to need more confidence, hindering their progression and trajectory.

The participants in this study expressed gender impacted their progression because they believed they were always at a disadvantage compared to men. All four participants suggested that being a woman in a male-dominated industry was complex. Most women have a disadvantaged skillset because of their responsibilities and oversight of football programs. Specifically, the participants stated that being an African American woman was more complex because of society's perception, and any deviation opened them up to scrutiny from the public and colleagues.

The literature and the participants in my study comparatively stated that networks and social capital influence the trajectory of one's career. Participants reported that men's influences through networks often assisted with their increased representation as Division I athletic directors when compared to African American women. The participants shared they needed to expand their network to include people with similar experiences and identities to impart wisdom to each other.

The findings in my study aligned with existing literature stating that mentorship, both formal and informal, is beneficial to professional development and advancement. The participants shared that African American women were more likely to progress in sports leadership if other African American women assisted with their growth. The overall finding from this theme was the need to create better opportunities for mentors and mentees to increase the representation of African American women in Division I athletic director positions.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this multiple case study provide implications and recommendations for five stakeholder groups. The study aimed to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American women. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend organizational and procedural changes for NCAA, their athletic departments, university administration, African American women on their journeys towards becoming a Division I athletic director, and future researchers.

First, the NCAA needs to provide opportunities for African American women adequately. To create a more equitable experience, I recommend an addendum to Title IX and the addition of a Chief Diversity Officer to the governing body. The addendum to the Title IX policy includes proportionality for senior-level administration positions. The expansion to include professional positions creates more opportunities for equal representation of African American women. The Chief Diversity Officer is an organizational structure change to include someone to oversee equitable and proper hiring processes.

Second, athletic departments need to provide more opportunities for growth within the organization for African American women. I provide two recommendations for athletic departments. The first recommendation is to restructure their departments to create opportunities for advancement. The restructure includes different positional levels like assistant, associate, and director to grow within the organization and provide more leadership and oversight opportunities. The second recommendation is to implement confidential hiring practices to protect applicants from racial and gender profiling. While most organizations require confidentiality by not researching an applicant before hiring, an addition to this practice is removing names and the identifier boxes for gender and race.

Third, university administration influences the mobility of African American women in Division I athletic director positions because they work closely with athletic departments. I recommend that the university have Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) representation on the hiring committee for athletic director positions. Including the university in this way will bridge the gap between the university and athletics. The DEI committee member would also provide insight into proper hiring practices and develop opportunities for inclusivity.

The fourth recommendation is for African American women on their journeys toward becoming Division I athletic directors. The implication of the study's findings showed that African American women need to build their social capital to infiltrate the male-dominated industry. This stakeholder group should create a network and develop formalized mentor and mentee relationships.

The final recommendation is for future researchers. The implication the study's findings and limited research on this topic suggests there is more to be done to address the underrepresentation of African American women in Division I athletic director positions. Future researchers should conduct research to compare the feelings of White men to African American women about the influence of networks and the progression of their careers. This research uncovers the benefit of increased social capital for African American women and the direct influence networks and mentorship have on the progression of their careers.

Findings Distribution Proposal

In this section, I outline my distribution proposal plan. The findings distribution proposal indicates the target audiences where I plan to distribute my findings. My main goal for the distribution of my findings is to influence change in higher education spaces so that my target audience is aware of the overwhelmingly low number of African American women in Division I athletic director positions.

Target Audience with Proposed Distribution Method and Venue

The first target audience group is the NCAA. To properly distribute the findings and recommendations to this group, I plan to host a forum at the NCAA Leadership Conference. The forum will take place over two days. On the first day I plan to discuss the findings and themes, the NCAA demographics chart, and create a strategic plan utilizing the recommendations to increase the number of African American women in Division I athletic director positions. Each group will create a presentation of their strategic plan to share and bring back to their specific organization. The NCAA can then use these plans to develop opportunities and understand how to create an environment

conducive to the growth of African American women in leadership positions. The second day of the forum includes a group session to better understand how African American women can progress in leadership at Division I universities and colleges. The best way to further this conversation is to include a panel discussion with African American female Division I athletic directors and the NCAA President to provide feedback and personal experiences.

The second target group is the collegiate athletic departments. I plan to give a one-day professional presentation to senior-level administrators and human resources to properly communicate the need for African American women to have opportunities within the organization. The senior-level administrators include the athletic director, Senior Woman Administrator (SWA), and the deputy athletic directors. This presentation includes the benefits of representation for student-athletes and coaches to continually show the value of African American women in leadership positions. After the presentation, each schools' administrators will be asked to evaluate their organizational chart, including all departments, to determine the feasibility of a restructure.

The third target audience group is university administration. I plan to prepare an academic presentation to present the findings. The ideal time for the presentation is during the summer before the academic year and the athletic season begins., I will present the findings on a slide deck and include the major themes that emerged from the participants' experiences. This professional academic presentation will include videos from other universities about the benefits they have experienced from having African American women in positions of leadership. I also hope to present videos from athletic

directors that specifically addresses how university administrators can work with them to foster an inclusive environment.

The fourth target audience group is African American women who aspire to be Division I athletic directors. I will reach this group through the Black Women in Sports Leadership Conference. I plan to prepare a one-hour panel discussion, one hour networking event, and a one-hour mentorship speed dating activity. First, the panel discussion will include the findings and themes from the study. The panel can expand on these findings and provide more wisdom to this target audience as they continue their growth. Second, following the panel, I hope the networking event will give aspiring athletic directors the chance to meet and continue conversing about advancement opportunities for African American women. After the networking event, each athletic director and conference attendee will have the opportunity to visit with other African American women in an effort to discover a mentor. These conversations and interactions will provide them an ideal opportunity to create a network and find a potential mentor to guide them during their career.

The fifth target audience group is future researchers. I plan to distribute my research findings through professional presentations and scholarly publications. It is my hope that this research can also be expanded to include more participants from other universities.

Conclusion

In this study I aimed to uncover how social role theory influenced the journey toward becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors for four African American women. In the first chapter, I discussed that African American women

are overwhelmingly underrepresented as Division I athletic directors. African American women have held no more than 3% of Division I athletic director positions since 2012 (NCAA, 2022). In this chapter, I offered existing literature that shed light on the experiences of African American women and the shortcomings of advancing their careers compared to White men due to stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity (Brake, 2016; Burton et al., 2011; Comeaux & Martin, 2017; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). In the second chapter, I discussed the data collection and analysis I used for this multiple case study. The collection methods I used allowed me to understand the experiences of four participants. In the third chapter, I revealed my findings and connected them to existing literature. I also provided recommendations and implications. In the fourth chapter, I offered an executive summary of the study. This summary included a distribution plan to appropriately disseminate the findings to various stakeholders, including the NCAA, athletic departments, university administration, African American women on their journeys toward becoming Division I athletic directors, as well as future researchers.

African American women are overwhelmingly underrepresented as Division I athletic directors. The existing literature and the findings from this study indicated social role theory influences the journey of African American women becoming and maintaining positions as Division I athletic directors. As more African American women are given the opportunity to lead in these spaces, with the acknowledgement of the disparities compared to White men, there will be more representation to other African American women on their journey's toward becoming Division I athletic directors.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Inquiry Email to Potential Participants

Good afternoon,

My name is Monique Brown, and I am conducting research on the underrepresentation of African American women as Division I athletic directors. I am interested in gaining your perspective about the impact social role theory has had on your success in this career field. I am currently working on my doctorate from Baylor University, and the purpose of my research study is to uncover how social role theory played a role in your journey towards and position in your leadership role as a Division I athletic director. I hope to collect data from at least four participants who are currently Division I athletic directors and have at least two years of experience in this role. Data collection methods include an individual interview, reflection prompts, and a focus group interview with other participants to better understand shared experiences. I will ensure the confidentiality of your data at all times by using a pseudonym for you and for your university. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please email me so that I can share the consent form and tell you more about the data collection, including a timeline for all data collection.

Thank you,

Monique Brown

Doctoral Candidate

Baylor University

APPENDIX B

Individual Interview Questions and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework

Interview Question	Theoretical Framework of Social Role Theory				
	Situation	Gender	Society	Culture	Biology
Phase 1, Step 1 – First Round of Interviews					
1. In what ways did social role theory influence the journey and success of African American women in their roles as Division I athletic directors?	X	X	X	X	X
2. How does your gender impact you in the workplace?		X			X
3. What social stereotypes have you seen play out in your profession?		X	X		
4. Culturally, how have the roles of your male counterparts differed from yours?	X	X		X	
4a. How do these roles differ from White female counterparts?	X	X		X	
5. What social interactions have you noticed impacted your success as an athletic director?			X		
6. What type of support or resources do you wish you had entering the sports industry?	X		X		
6a. As an athletic director?	X		X		
7. What life adjustments have you made to be an athletic director?	X	X	X		X

APPENDIX C

Open-ended Reflection Prompts and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework

Reflection Prompts	Theoretical Framework of Social Role Theory				
	Situation	Gender	Society	Culture	Biology
Phase 1, Step 2 – Reflection Prompts					
1. After the first day as an athletic director, I felt	X	X	X	X	X
2. The first challenge I encountered as an African American woman was	X	X	X	X	
3. I felt most comfortable working with	X	X	X		
4. I had to code switch whenever	X	X	X	X	
5. I was frustrated when	X	X	X		
6. To be successful in a male-dominated industry, I must	X	X			
7. I felt misunderstood because/when		X	X		X
8. After a while _____ doesn't get better, it only gets easier	X				
9. I had to rationalize my decisions to White counterparts whenever	X	X	X	X	
10. I built a network in the industry by		X	X		

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Interview Questions and Alignment with the Theoretical Framework

Focus Group Interview Questions	Theoretical Framework of Social Role Theory				
	Situation	Gender	Society	Culture	Biology
Phase 1, Step 3 – Focus Group Interview Questions					
1. How can African American women feel more supported as Division I athletic directors?		X		X	
2. How has your day-to-day been impacted because you are an African American woman?	X	X	X	X	X
3. How did the underrepresentation of African American women in this position affect your trajectory to becoming an athletic director?		X		X	
4. What impact does the intersectionality of gender and race have on the ability to build a network for career advancement and mentorship?	X		X	X	
5. What needs to change in society for more African American women to be considered for collegiate athletic director positions?			X	X	X

APPENDIX E

Consent Form For Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Undervalued and Unseen: A Qualitative Case Study Exploring the Underrepresentation of African American Women in Division I Athletic Director Positions

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Monique Brown

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether or not to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

Important Information about this Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to uncover how social role theory played a role in the participants' journey towards and positions in their leadership roles of athletic directors.
- In order to participate, you must be an African American woman working as a Division I Athletic Director.
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an individual interview via Zoom, complete one reflection prompt, and participate in one focus group via Zoom with other African American women in the same role. It will take approximately two months to collect all data from the participants. The individual interview will take approximately 60 minutes, the reflection prompts will be completed after the interview and emailed to me, and the focus group interview will also take approximately 60 minutes.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include feeling emotional or uncomfortable when answering some of the questions or reflection prompts.
- The possible benefits of this study include creating an opportunity to be a change agent for future African American women in Division I athletics leadership and informing stakeholders of potential changes made to the system to remove biases.
- Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

More detailed information may be described later in this form. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research study.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of the study is to uncover how social role theory played a role in the participants' journey towards and positions in their leadership roles of athletic directors.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an individual interview over Zoom, which will consist of 10 questions and last approximately 60 minutes
- Complete one reflection prompt via email that consists of 10 questions
- Participate in one focus group interview over Zoom, which will consist of approximately 5 questions and last approximately 60.

Audio/video recording is optional for this study. If you do not give consent to be recorded, you can still participate in the study. You will indicate your decision at the end of this form.

How long will I be in this study and how many people will be in the study?

Participation in this study will last across approximately two months to collect data from all participants. Four participants will be invited to participate in this research study.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They are the possibility of losing confidentiality. Loss of privacy includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because your shared experiences can provide insight into future change for sports leadership.

How Will You Protect my Information?

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by using participant numbers and proper storage of the documents. We will make every effort to keep your records

confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

- Representatives of Baylor University and the BU Institutional Review Board

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, your identity will be protected by using a code number or pseudonym rather than your name or other identifying information.

Will I be compensated for being part of the study?

You will not be paid for this study.

Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your withdrawal.

If you are a Baylor student or faculty/staff member, you may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your grades or job status at Baylor University. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research study.

Your Consent

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact me using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in the individual interview.

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree for the individual interview to be video and/or audio recorded

_____ Initials of the Participant

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to share my responses to my reflection prompt.

Signature of Participant

Date

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in the focus group interview.

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree for the focus group interview to be video and/or audio recorded

_____ Initials of the Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to her for her records.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Optional Research

Consent to Use Data for Future Research

I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information. *(Note: This separate consent is not necessary if you will only store and share deidentified data.)*

YES _____ NO _____ Initials _____

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

I give the researchers permission to keep my contact information and to contact me for future research projects.

YES _____ NO _____ Initials _____

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